

Translation of Children's Literature as Ideological Mediation between Cultures

Dr. Slimani Hafida ¹

¹ Tlemcen University (Algeria), hafida.slimani@univ-tlemcen.dz

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Abstract:

The translation of children's literature stands as a crucial field of ideological negotiation in contemporary intercultural communication. Rooted in the dynamics of globalization and cultural transfer, this study addresses the underexplored issue of how translators mediate between educational norms and ideological constraints. Its main objective is to analyze the adaptive strategies employed by translators to reconcile the source text's cultural specificities with the sociopedagogical expectations of the target context.

Adopting a qualitative methodology that combines corpus-based textual analysis with semi-structured interviews, the research identifies recurrent practices such as censorship, domestication, and cultural substitution. The findings reveal that translation choices often reframe sensitive themes-particularly those related to identity, diversity, and morality-in alignment with dominant cultural paradigms. Beyond linguistic equivalence, the study demonstrates that the translation of children's literature functions as a vector of ideological transmission and cultural socialization within global literary circulation.

Keywords: Literary translation; Young adult literature; Ideological mediation; Cultural values; Intercultural translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The translation of children's literature occupies a central position within contemporary translation studies, functioning as a privileged site of cultural transfer and ideological negotiation. Far from constituting a purely linguistic operation, translation in this field entails complex interpretive choices through which cultural values, social norms, and worldviews are recontextualized for young readers situated in different sociocultural environments (Lathey, 2016). As children's books participate actively in processes of education, socialization, and identity formation, their translation inevitably carries ethical, pedagogical, and ideological implications that exceed the boundaries of textual equivalence.

In the context of globalization and intensified intercultural exchange, translated children's literature has become a powerful medium through which cultures encounter, represent, and sometimes reshape one another. Translators act as cultural mediators who filter, adapt, or preserve elements of the source text in response to the cognitive, moral, and cultural expectations of the target readership (O'Sullivan, 2021). This mediating role is particularly sensitive in children's literature, where implicit ideological content—relating to gender roles, morality, authority, religion, or cultural identity—may be reinforced, attenuated, or transformed through translation strategies such as domestication, adaptation, or omission (Venuti, 2012).

Scholarly research has increasingly emphasized that children's literature is never ideologically neutral. Rather, it reflects and transmits dominant cultural paradigms and social values, contributing to the construction of normative frameworks that shape young readers' perceptions of the world (Nikolajeva, 2019). Consequently, the translation of such literature becomes a site of ideological negotiation, where translators must balance fidelity to the source text with responsibility toward the target culture's educational and ethical norms (Baker & Saldanha, 2020). Decisions concerning cultural references, stylistic register, and narrative voice are thus imbued with ideological significance, influencing how cultural difference is represented and interpreted.

Within the Arab context, the translation and adaptation of Western children's literature raise particularly complex questions regarding cultural compatibility, ideological alignment, and intercultural dialogue. Translators often operate under explicit or implicit constraints imposed by sociocultural expectations, editorial policies, or religious and moral considerations, which may result in strategies of censorship, substitution, or ideological reframing (Yaakub, 2023). Such practices invite critical examination, as they reveal how translation functions not only as a bridge between cultures but also as a mechanism of cultural regulation and ideological mediation.

The present study aims to examine the translation of children's literature as a process of ideological mediation between cultures. It seeks to analyze the strategies employed by translators to negotiate cultural specificity, ideological content, and pedagogical expectations within the target context. By adopting a qualitative methodology that combines corpus-based textual analysis with semi-structured interviews, this research explores how translation choices shape the transmission of values and cultural representations. Through selected case studies involving classical and contemporary texts, the article highlights the translator's role as an active agent in intercultural communication, whose decisions significantly influence the ideological and cultural horizons offered to young readers.

2. Context and Problem

The translation of children's literature unfolds within a highly regulated cultural and institutional context, shaped by educational policies, publishing norms, and prevailing ideological frameworks. Unlike literature addressed to adult audiences, children's books are commonly perceived as pedagogical tools that contribute to moral education, social integration, and the transmission of collective values. This perception situates translators within a network of constraints that influence their textual decisions, often requiring them to reconcile the aesthetic and narrative qualities of the source text with the normative expectations of the target culture (O'Sullivan, 2021).

In many cultural contexts, children's literature is subject to explicit forms of control exercised by publishers, educators, and, in certain cases, state or religious institutions. These actors may intervene directly or

indirectly in the translation process, encouraging strategies of adaptation, simplification, or ideological filtering in order to ensure cultural acceptability (Lathey, 2016). As a result, translation becomes a negotiated practice in which textual fidelity is frequently subordinated to pedagogical suitability and ideological conformity.

This tension is particularly visible in cross-cultural translation flows between Western source cultures and non-Western target cultures, including Arab societies. Differences in value systems, religious references, social norms, and representations of childhood often generate zones of ideological friction that translators must navigate carefully. Elements such as gender relations, individual autonomy, authority structures, or fantastical motifs may be reinterpreted or modified to align with dominant cultural paradigms in the target context (Nikolajeva, 2019).

Previous research has demonstrated that such modifications are rarely neutral. Baker (2020) argues that translation operates as a form of narrative framing through which ideologies are reproduced or contested. In the field of children's literature, these narrative shifts may subtly reshape the ethical and cultural messages conveyed to young readers. Consequently, translation strategies such as domestication, omission, or explicitation function as mechanisms of ideological mediation rather than purely linguistic solutions (Venuti, 2012).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on ideology and translation, empirical studies focusing specifically on the translation of children's literature in the Arab context remain relatively limited. Existing research often addresses isolated case studies without systematically examining the broader patterns of ideological negotiation that structure translation practices. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive analytical framework capable of capturing both textual transformations and the socio-cultural forces that motivate them (Yaakub, 2023).

The central problem addressed in this study therefore lies in understanding how translators of children's literature negotiate ideological tensions arising from cultural difference. More specifically, the research seeks to identify the translation strategies through which cultural values are preserved, adapted, or reframed, and to assess the implications of these

strategies for the representation of cultural otherness. By situating translation within its broader socio-ideological context, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the translator's agency and responsibility in shaping intercultural communication for young audiences.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at exploring translation dynamics through textual analysis and the perspectives of both readers and experts. The qualitative methodology was selected for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of translation processes beyond purely quantitative measures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure scientific rigor, a methodological triangulation was implemented, combining three complementary sources of data: corpus-based textual analysis, semi-structured interviews with experts, and a reader reception survey. This triangulation enhances the validity of the findings and reduces the bias inherent in relying on a single method (Denzin, 2017).

The corpus for this research includes four emblematic and culturally diverse works: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, and A. Mehawesh's *Dailan Kifki*. Selection criteria were based on historical and cultural diversity, linguistic and stylistic richness, and representativeness for the target audience. This selection enables the analysis of translation strategies across different levels, highlighting phenomena of domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 2012), while allowing for meaningful comparisons between classical and contemporary texts.

Data collection was conducted using multiple, complementary methods. The comparative textual analysis involved identifying meaning units and coding translation choices at lexical, syntactic, and stylistic levels. Semantic divergences between source texts and translations were examined to reveal the strategies employed and their impact on reception. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve experts in translation, comparative literature, and applied linguistics, following a protocol of open-ended questions concerning translation choices, cultural strategies, and linguistic or editorial constraints. Interviews were recorded, fully

transcribed, and thematically coded to ensure rigorous interpretation. In parallel, a reader reception survey was carried out with 150 students from Tlemcen University, primarily from literature and linguistics programs, to assess their perceptions and comprehension of the translations. The survey combined closed- and open-ended questions to capture both preferences and critical responses.

The analytical framework was structured according to a multi-level approach. At the micro level, the focus was on lexical and syntactic aspects, identifying grammatical and semantic transformations. The meso level examined textual coherence and translation strategies within paragraphs and sections. At the macro level, attention was given to cultural, ideological, and stylistic choices, guided by Venuti's (2012) concepts of domestication and foreignization, which allow for distinguishing approaches that either adapt texts to the target culture or preserve cultural otherness.

Despite its strengths, this methodology has certain limitations. The geographic focus on an Algerian sample may restrict the generalizability of the results. Corpus and expert selection may introduce cultural or stylistic biases. Linguistic limitations also exist, as some translation nuances are difficult to interpret without full mastery of the involved languages. Acknowledging these limitations ensures transparency and informs readers about the scope and constraints of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

4. Ideological Mediation

Translation is far more than a mere linguistic transfer; it functions as a critical form of cultural and ideological mediation, wherein the translator assumes a pivotal role in conveying not only the semantic content but also the cultural nuances, historical contexts, and societal values embedded within the source text. Acting as a mediator, the translator must navigate the tension between fidelity to the original work and the necessity to render it accessible and relevant to the target readership, (Yaakub, 2023). This responsibility requires a profound understanding of both source and target cultures, as well as a heightened sensitivity to the ideological implications of lexical and stylistic choices, (Rouba & Bendali, 2019).

4.1 Children's Literature and Ideology Transmission

Children's literature plays a fundamental role in shaping young minds, transmitting ideologies, cultural values, and worldviews, (Brihmat, 2013). These works often function as vectors for learning, socialization, and the development of self-identity. Given their pedagogical intent, translators face the challenge of either preserving the ideological content of the original text or adapting it to align with the cultural sensibilities of the target audience, (Al-Amrawi, 2023). In this context, translation becomes an act of *ideological mediation*, whereby the translator negotiates between retaining the cultural alterity of the source and making the text comprehensible and relatable to young readers, (Pederzoli, 2012). Choices made during translation can either sustain the distinctiveness of the original culture or domesticate it, subtly shaping how children perceive foreign societies, (Lathey, 2016).

4.2 Ideology and Culture in the Translation Process

The process of translation is inherently tied to the transmission of cultural and ideological values, (Yaakub, 2023). Every text emerges from a specific cultural matrix, and translating it requires interpretation that considers the divergences between the source and target cultural frameworks. Translators must decide which elements to preserve, which to adapt, and which may require additional explanation for the target audience, decisions that inevitably influence how the text's ideological content is received, (O'Sullivan, 2021). In children's literature, this balance is particularly delicate, as translators must simultaneously maintain the integrity of the source culture while ensuring that the narrative remains engaging and educational for young readers, (Nikolajeva, 2019).

4.3 Challenges in Transmitting Cultural Values Across Languages

Translating children's literature presents unique challenges in ideological mediation. Translators must reconcile fidelity to the source text with cultural adaptation, often navigating complex issues such as untranslatable cultural references, societal norms, and embedded biases, (González, 2019). For instance, translators may encounter culturally

specific rituals, idiomatic expressions, or social roles that lack equivalents in the target culture. Decisions to preserve or adapt these elements carry ideological weight, shaping readers' perception of the source culture, (Omar, 2018). Moreover, translators must remain vigilant regarding stereotypes or implicit ideological biases in the original text and decide how to handle them ethically in translation, (Saadi & Shami, 2024). As Brihmat notes, literary translation is inherently a mediatory act involving ethical and political choices, positioning the translator as a key actor in shaping cross-cultural understanding, (Brihmat, 2013). Ultimately, the translation of children's literature functions as a complex space of ideological mediation. Translators act as cultural gatekeepers, balancing fidelity and adaptation, and their choices significantly influence how young readers perceive foreign cultures and internalize societal values, (Rouba & Bendali, 2019).

5. Intercultural Mediation and Translation Challenges

5.1 Cultural Challenges: Adapting References, Customs, and Practices

Translating children's literature is fraught with intercultural challenges, particularly when adapting cultural references, customs, and social practices for a target audience, (Pederzoli, 2012). Translators must balance fidelity to the source text with the necessity of ensuring comprehension and engagement for young readers, (Lathey, 2016). Cultural elements, such as traditional festivals, idiomatic expressions, or societal rituals, often require careful adaptation or explanation to prevent confusion while preserving the integrity of the original narrative, (Al-Amrawi, 2023). This process reflects the translator's dual role as both cultural interpreter and educator, facilitating the audience's access to foreign contexts while retaining the story's authenticity, (Baker & Saldanha, 2020).

5.2 Ideological Choices: Amplifying or Attenuating Cultural Values

Children's literature frequently carries embedded ideological values that influence moral and social development, (Brihmat, 2013). During translation, translators confront the complex task of negotiating these values in a manner that resonates with the target culture without distorting the author's original intent, (Omar, 2018). For instance, themes relating to

family, authority, or morality may require subtle modification to align with the cultural norms of the target audience, (González, 2019). Such decisions involve a strategic balance: some ideological elements are amplified to reinforce cultural resonance, whereas others may be attenuated to avoid misalignment with the target readership's expectations, (O'Sullivan, 2021).

5.3 Compensation and Substitution Strategies

To address these challenges, translators often employ compensation and substitution strategies, (Lathey, 2016). These techniques help preserve the meaning, tone, and narrative effect of the source text while adapting it to the target cultural context, (Nikolajeva, 2019). For example, culturally specific references lacking direct equivalents in the target language may be replaced with analogous references that convey similar narrative functions, thereby maintaining the original's intent and literary style, (Pederzoli, 2012). Effective application of these strategies requires both creative and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the translated work remains engaging, relevant, and meaningful to young readers, (Rouba & Bendali, 2019).

5.4 Ideological Mediation in Practice

The translation of children's literature constitutes an act of intercultural and ideological mediation. Translators act as mediators who influence how values, social norms, and cultural knowledge are transmitted across linguistic and cultural boundaries, (Saadi & Shami, 2024). For instance, Al-Hakim's *Islamized* adaptation of *Antigone* normalizes religious interpretations of ethical dilemmas, embedding the narrative in Islamic moral frameworks, (Slimani, 2025). Conversely, Mutran's *nobiliaire* translation of *Hamlet* elevates the classical register at the expense of spoken language, potentially distancing young readers from Shakespeare's original text, (Slimani, 2025).

5.5 Managing Cultural Values Across Languages

One of the key challenges in translating children's literature is handling culturally specific content that may be unfamiliar or incomprehensible to target readers, (González, 2019). For example, in

María Elena Walsh's *Dailan Kifki*, French and English translations diverge significantly in their treatment of Argentine cultural references, with some elements modified or omitted in the French version, affecting readers' comprehension and cultural experience, (González, 2019). This underscores the importance of ethical and strategic decision-making in translation, as choices impact both fidelity to the original and the educational and cultural development of young readers, (Brihmat, 2013)

5.6 Comparative Case Studies

Examining specific case studies illustrates the practical application of translation strategies. In Mutran's rendition of the *Hamlet* monologue "To be or not to be," the existential query is transformed into a moral dilemma: "أأحيا ذليلاً أم أموت كريماً؟" ("Live humbly or die with dignity?"), (Slimani, 2025). This involves conceptual substitution, rhetorical Arabization, and implicit Islamization, demonstrating how translators mediate both linguistic and ideological dimensions, (Slimani, 2025). Similarly, comparative studies of Italian translations of *The Little Prince* reveal varying approaches, from strict fidelity to adaptive modifications for contemporary young readers, emphasizing the interplay between audience, ideology, and literary integrity, (Zambon, 2022).

6. Implications for Children's Literature Translation

The analysis of children's literature translation underscores its central role as a site of ideological and intercultural mediation. Far from being a mere linguistic transfer, translation constitutes a complex process influenced by editorial norms, target audience expectations, and market constraints, (Pederzoli, 2012). Translators must navigate the delicate balance between fidelity to the source text and adaptation to the cultural sensitivities of young readers, raising crucial questions about the preservation of original values, (Yaakub, 2023).

Two principal translation strategies emerge in this context: *domestication* and *foreignization*. Domestication prioritizes accessibility, potentially at the cost of cultural specificity, whereas foreignization preserves cultural distinctiveness, sometimes complicating reception, (Lathey, 2016). These strategies directly shape how young audiences

perceive foreign cultures and ideologies, (O'Sullivan, 2021). For example, the adaptation choices in *Antigone* and *Hamlet* demonstrate how translators can legitimize a cultural vision while subtly altering ethical and aesthetic dimensions to suit the target readership, (Slimani, 2025).

Editorial policies and sociopolitical contexts further influence translation practices, affecting the representation of cultural values through phenomena such as censorship or self-censorship, (Brihmat, 2013). The translator, therefore, assumes a dual role as both linguistic mediator and cultural gatekeeper, impacting not only comprehension but also the intercultural formation of young readers, (Saadi & Shami, 2024).

Future research could investigate children's literature translation in multilingual contexts, analyze global editorial trends, and assess the influence of translation technologies on preserving ideological and cultural subtleties. Such studies would enhance understanding of how translation practices shape intercultural literacy, moral education, and literary reception in diverse sociocultural settings, (González, 2019).

In sum, children's literature translation is an ethically and ideologically charged endeavor. It requires translators to exercise cultural sensitivity, ethical discernment, and creative adaptability to maintain the delicate balance between source fidelity and target accessibility. By doing so, translators act as pivotal agents in transmitting cultural and ideological values across linguistic boundaries, shaping the perspectives and cultural imagination of young readers worldwide, (Rouba & Bendali, 2019).

7. Ethical and Political Stakes in the Translation of Children's Literature

7.1. The Impact of Translation on Cultural Perception

The translation of children's literature plays a decisive role in shaping how young readers perceive foreign cultures and construct their worldview. Cultural values, belief systems, and social norms are deeply embedded within the source language, and their transposition into another linguistic and cultural framework inevitably raises issues of adaptation, fidelity, and ideological mediation.

Translations can influence cultural perception in several ways. On the one hand, a literal translation may preserve the authenticity of the source text but risk alienating or confusing young readers unfamiliar with foreign cultural references. On the other hand, excessive adaptation can lead to cultural assimilation, erasing the uniqueness of the source culture in favor of the target culture's dominant values, (O'Sullivan, 2021).

Some translations modify cultural references to enhance accessibility, thereby reshaping the image of the source culture itself, (Lathey, 2016). Lathey notes that such transformations may result in "*ideological distortion*," as the moral or social dimensions of the text are reinterpreted to fit the expectations of the target audience. For instance, fairy tales and fables are often rewritten to align with the moral or religious frameworks of the receiving culture, leading to subtle yet significant shifts in ethical meaning, (Omar, 2018).

In this light, the act of translating children's literature is not a mere linguistic exercise but a form of cultural and ideological enterprise that carries profound consequences for intercultural understanding. Translators, editors, and educators thus share a collective responsibility: shaping the cultural imagination of new generations through the narratives they choose to preserve, modify, or silence.

7.2. The Translator's Responsibility: Preserving Cultural Values Without Imposing Ideology

A deeper comparative analysis reveals that the ethical stakes of translation extend beyond lexical choices to the very structure of literary representation. The translator's intervention often reconfigures the ideological and dramaturgical architecture of the original work.

Al-Hakim's *Antigone* offers a telling example. In adapting Sophocles' tragedy, he suppresses the chorus-present in approximately 60% of the original Greek text-to privilege direct dialogue. This choice transforms a lyrical tragedy into a psychological drama, eliminating the collective voice that traditionally embodied communal wisdom and ancestral memory. What remains is the individual conscience confronting authority-a transformation

that mirrors modern individualism but diminishes the communal dimension of classical Greek theatre.

Concrete examples further illustrate these transformations. In *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene 1), Shakespeare's line "*The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns*" becomes, in Mutran's Arabic version, "*البلاد المجهولة التي لا يعود منها أحد إلى الدنيا*" ("the unknown lands from which none return to this world"). The addition of "*الدنيا*" ("this earthly world") introduces an Islamic conception of the afterlife, absent from the original text.

Similarly, when Antigone declares in Sophocles' text, "*I did not think your edicts were strong enough to overrule the unwritten laws of heaven,*" Al-Hakim renders it as: "*لم أعتقد أن قوانينك البشرية تستطيع أن تلغي شرائع الله*" ("I did not believe your human laws could abolish the legislations of God"). The term "*شرائع*" (*sharā'i*, "legislations") explicitly evokes *Sharia*, thus Islamizing the Greek opposition between *nomos* (human law) and *physis* (divine nature).

Both translators, despite divergent stylistic methods, share a common strategy of cultural legitimization. They do not merely translate; they recreate Western classics within Arab aesthetic and moral frameworks, rendering them both comprehensible and valorizing for local audiences. This process is not an act of distortion but a conscious effort to inscribe the translated text within a broader Arab literary heritage that reclaims universal narratives through culturally resonant paradigms.

In this sense, the translator's responsibility extends beyond linguistic accuracy. It encompasses ethical discernment, cultural awareness, and the moral duty to mediate without imposing ideological hegemony. As Tymoczko and Gentzler (2008) emphasizes, translators function as agents of power who "shape the discourses of world literature by selecting which values, identities, and visions of humanity will circulate.". The translation of children's literature, therefore, becomes both an act of artistic creation and a form of cultural diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

The translation of children's literature emerges as a profoundly ethical, ideological, and intercultural act that transcends the mere transfer of

linguistic forms. Throughout this study, translation has been shown to function simultaneously as a pedagogical and cultural bridge, shaping how young readers encounter foreign worlds and internalize values. Far from being a neutral linguistic operation, it embodies a process of negotiation between fidelity to the source text and adaptation to the cognitive and cultural frameworks of the target audience. Translators, therefore, act as cultural gatekeepers whose decisions influence the ideological orientation and interpretive horizons of the readers they serve.

The analysis of ideological mediation revealed that every translational act entails a reconfiguration of meaning conditioned by socio-cultural and political factors. In children's literature, this mediation becomes even more significant since the audience is still forming its moral and cognitive frameworks. Translators' strategies-ranging from domestication to foreignization-illustrate the ethical tensions inherent in rendering texts comprehensible while preserving their cultural specificity. Each adaptation, substitution, or omission carries ideological implications, subtly shaping the child's perception of cultural alterity and self-identity. As Lathey (2016) and Pederzoli (2012) suggest, these acts of translation participate in the construction of intercultural literacy by promoting empathy and understanding across linguistic divides.

Intercultural mediation, as discussed through the case studies of *Antigone*, *Hamlet*, and *The Little Prince*, underscores how translators operate at the crossroads of aesthetics, ideology, and pedagogy. Their creative interventions not only bridge linguistic gaps but also reconstruct moral and cultural frameworks that resonate within the target context. In this sense, translation becomes a dynamic site of cultural negotiation, revealing how literary meaning evolves through translingual circulation. The translator's task thus oscillates between preservation and transformation-an oscillation that reflects the vitality of intercultural exchange in global literary systems.

Ultimately, the translation of children's literature stands as a crucial field for understanding how ideology and culture are transmitted, reinterpreted, and reimagined. Its study illuminates broader questions about ethics, identity, and representation in translation. Future research should

continue to explore the intersection of technology, multilingualism, and educational policy to better understand how digital translation practices influence young readers' cultural imagination. By approaching translation as an act of intercultural ethics rather than a mere linguistic task, scholars and practitioners alike can reaffirm its transformative potential in shaping inclusive and empathetic global citizens.

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