

## **Tttranslation of Proper Names in Children's Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Translation of Children's literature is a significant area of study, due to the fact that books for children have always been written by real authors at real places in different languages, and they have been and still are read, in translations into other languages, in all over the world. As a result of internationalism and multiculturalism, children's literature is translated into languages more increasingly, which means that the translated works need to be adapted to the young reader's language in every instance. Iran is one of the importers of foreign children's literature, which has many young addresses. One of the questions which usually arises in translation for children is whether proper names should be translated or not. The present study is based on Van Coillie's model of translating strategies of proper names in children's literature. Through conducting this thesis, twenty-five English books and their translations in Persian were selected. After extracting and comparing all proper names, the researcher concluded that the strategy of reproduction is the most commonly used one in translating proper names from English into Persian. Hence, preserving the foreign names in translating for children could lead to further the international outlook and understanding of the young readers.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Children's literature, Culture-specific items, Deletion, Exonym, Proper name, Reproduction, Substitution

### **Introduction**

Children's literature is a remarkable area of writing and a growing area of study. In the history of children's literature, Hunt (2005) identifies fantasy, warmth and security as key characteristics of children's literature. Oittinen (2000) emphasizes the impact that the translator's view of childhood has had on his or her translation. She believes that the translators of children's literature should reach out to the children of their own culture; they should understand the realm of childhood, the children around them and the child in themselves.

Concerning the importance of the young readers as the valuable national assets, translating children's literature is a very significant task. Ghesquiere (2006) wonders if children's literature needs translation. She (2006) continues that since a large group of children seems to enjoy child-

ren's books, they play a role in the development of a positive reading attitude and she assumes that they motivate the more reluctant readers towards reading.

Translation has therefore played an important role in children's literature. One of the problems any translator has to face, in all texts, in this case children's literature, independent of the theme or subject he/she is working on, is the translation of proper names. Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.429) defines the proper name as "a name of a particular person, place, or thing. Proper names in English are spelt with an initial capital letter." One of the questions which usually addresses the notion of "proper names" in any language is whether these should be translated or not. As a matter of fact, the same text, just in-

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tended for a different audience, may require the translation of proper names in one case and the conservation of them in another. According to Newmark (1993, p.15) proper names are a translation difficulty in any text. In literature, it has to be determined whether the name is real or invented. Van Coillie (2006, p.123) points out "that names are sacred, but not so in children's books, where there seems to be a widespread habit of adapting names to the target culture." By the increased translation of children's literature in Iran, Iranian children and youngsters are used to reading translated books but with unfamiliar foreign names.

Therefore, translation of proper names in children's literature seems to be problematic for the translators. The present research aims at focusing on the translation of proper names in children's literature and the strategies which could be employed to provide the translator with appropriate solutions of translation of proper names.

### Children's Literature and its Characteristics

One of the primary difficulties in defining what is meant by 'children's literature' is the enormously inclusive scope and potentially vague nature of the semantic fields covered by the concepts referred to using the nouns 'children' and 'literature'. Helsing (1963, as cited in Oittinen, 2000, p.62) considers sociological or psychological aspects of children's literature. So, he states that "children's literature is anything the child reads or hears, anything from newspapers, series, TV shows, and radio presentations to what we call books." He continues that by taking the child's view into consideration; we could also include not just literature produced for children, but also literature produced by children themselves, as well as the oral tradition. Briggs (as cited in O'Connell's, 2006, p.19) believes:

children's books are written for a special readership but not, normally, by members of that readership; both the writing and quite often the buying of them are carried out by adult non-members on behalf of child members.

Some commentators such as Knowles and Malmkjaer (as cited in Lathey, 2006, p.16) offer a very broad, pragmatic definition which seems to dodge the very difficult issues: 'for us children's literature is any narrative written or published for children and we include the "teen" novels aimed at the "young adult" or "late adoles-

cent" reader. Shavit (1986) and Ewers (2000) (as cited in O'Sullivan, 2005, p.14) see children's literature in system-theory based approach as a specific and distinct part of the literary system that needs a theory of its own. It has its own fields of activity in marketing, publishing, libraries, teaching, criticism, etc., which distinguishes it from adult literature.

### Literary Translation

Translation typically has been used to transfer written or spoken SL texts to equivalent written or spoken TL texts. In general, the purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts-including religious, literary, scientific, and philosophical texts-in another language and thus to make them available to wider readers.

Durišin (as cited in Bassnett, 2002, p.36) argues that the translator of a literary text not only deals with establishing equivalence of natural language, but also with artistic procedures. And those procedures cannot be considered in isolation, but must be located within the specific cultural-temporal context within which they are utilized.

### Children's Literature and its Translation

Writing and translating for children, though often as a simple and even significant issue, is governed by numerous constraints, which usually vary from culture to culture. The situation is also rendered problematic by the fact that a children's book must simultaneously appeal to both the genuine reader- the child – and the background authority- the adult. According to Shavit (1986), translation for children is directed by the following two principles, which can be either complementary or contradictory: adjusting the source text in order to make it appropriate or useful for the child, and adjusting the plot, characterization and language to the child's ability to read and comprehend, in accordance with a society's notion of what is 'good for the child' and what the child can read and understand, respectively.

Oittinen (2000) claims that the incorrect translation is more dangerous in a children's book, if the child reader cannot recognize and rectify the mistakes to the same extent as the adult reader can. Lopez (2006) refers to children's literature translation studies as an interesting subject, especially when they can highlight the differences between cultural behaviors by comparing con-

trasting treatments of a specific text. In this process the discrepancy among literary systems reveals ideological differences. She also believes a society's pattern of behavior and its moral values are also reflected in the textual modifications introduced in the translation of foreign works, which Klingberg (1986, as cited in Lopez, 2006, p.42) defines as cultural context adaptations.

According to L. Batchelder (2007, p. 7), children in all countries should have good books in translation from many parts of the world for the following reasons:

1. children of one country who come to know the books and stories of many countries have made a beginning toward international understanding
2. knowing the classic stories of a country creates an attitude for understanding towards the people for whom that literature is a heritage
3. children, who know they are reading in translation the same stories which children in other countries are reading, develop a sense of nearness with those in other lands
4. interchange of children's books between countries through translation enhances communication between the peoples of those countries, and, if the books chosen for traveling from language to language are worthy books, the resulting communication is deeper, richer, more sympathetic and more enduring.

### Culture Specific Items

Taking into account the cultural aspects of each language, the translator must pay attention to cultural elements of the two languages she/he is dealing with. No doubt, the greatest difficulty in translation lies in the differences of two languages. In any language, there could be found writings in which there are lexical items of this nature (Such as proper names), items that typically belong to the culture of that certain language. Different translators adopt different strategies to cope with the culture specific items in children's literature. These are culture bound items, which are semantic voids and often cause a translation problem. Fernandez (2006, p. 44) states that scholars usually subsume the issue of translating names under a discussion of culture-specific references, where names are seen as culture-specific items (CSIs) and as such, are approached in terms of the complexity of translating cultural patterns.

### The Concept of Proper Names

Nord (2003) defines name as the word(s) by which an individual referent is identified, that is to say, the word(s) whose main function is/are to identify, for instance, an individual person, animal, place, or thing. She continues by stating that in this sense, names possess a certain deictic quality in that they point directly to a single, concrete referent; however, sometimes they may also acquire a semantic load which takes them "beyond the singular mode of signification." Therefore, names are viewed as mono-referential-they refer to a single entity-but not as mono-functional, since they may function as carriers of semantic, semiotic, and/or sound symbolic meanings in literary works. Soltesz (1967, as cited in Vermes, 2001, p. 4) defines proper names as expressions denoting unique entities and states that they are part of the linguistic system of the community to which the donation of the name belongs. She then goes on to distinguish between three main types of proper names with respect to their meaning:

a. 'Sign names' like Duna, which have no meaning in the way that a common name does, and are non-descriptive, non-connotative and unmotivated.

b. 'Word names' are motivated, connotative and mostly descriptive. Like Mont Blanc. It is noted here that with the passing of time many of these names have lost their descriptive character and have become opaque in their respect.

c. Names which are combinations of sign names and elements from the common word classes. These elements may be adjectives, suffixes or, most frequently, words naming a higher-level conceptual category. The main difficulty relating to cultural markers or references concerns the translation of personal proper names that are different in the Persian and other language texts.

### Translation Strategies of Proper Names

Personal names often constitute a major problem in translation. For translating proper nouns, different models are suggested. As Vermes (2001, p. 1) mentions, "there is a popular view that proper names do not need to be translated into foreign languages. Even more surprisingly, the point is maintained not only by ordinary people but by

some scholars of language as well." Among those who believe in non-translation of proper names, Vendler (1975, as cited in Vermes, 2001, p. 1) claims that "since proper names do not have meaning, they are not translated and simply are carried over to the foreign language during translation." To reinforce this statement, he argues that we do not find proper names listed in dictionaries, which also shows that they are not part of our knowledge of the language. In this view, then, proper names are to be treated as labels, which are attached to persons and objects. The opposite view is held by Searle (1975) proper names, beyond their identifying function, may

also carry 'senses'. He argues that when somebody uses a proper name, he must be able to substitute an identifying description of the referent of the proper name; otherwise he would violate the principle of identification and consequently, would fail to perform a definite reference. Van Coillie (2006) talks about ten possible strategies a translator can adopt when dealing with the translation of proper names in fiction. The following table consists of different types of strategies adopted in translating proper names with the characteristic of each one (Van Coillie 2006, p.123).

Table 1: Van Coillie's Model of Translating Proper Name (2006, p.123)

| Types of strategy  | Character of translation  |
|--|---|
| 1) Reproduction  | Leaving foreign names unchanged   |
| 2) Non translation plus additional explanation   | Adding explanations, either in the form of a note or in the text itself                   |
| 3) Replacement of personal name by a common noun   | Replacing a proper name by a common noun that characterizes the person                    |
| 4) Phonetic or morphological adaptation to the target language   | Turning to phonetic transcription or morphological adaptation                             |
| 5) Exonym  | Replacing a name by a counterpart in the target language                                  |
| 6) Replacement by a more widely known name from the source culture or an internationally known name with the same function | Opting for recognize ability without abandoning the foreign context                       |
| 7) Substitution  | Replacing a name by another name from the target language                                 |
| 8) Translation of names with a particular connotation  | Reproducing the connotation in the target language, when names have specific connotations |
| 9) Replacement by a name with another or additional connotation  | Adding or changing the connotation of a name  |
| 10) Deletion   | Omitting all the proper names   |

Van Coillie (2006, p.129) mentions that "the actual choice of strategy the translator makes de-

pends on a variety of factors." He (2006) distinguishes four categories:

Table 2: Van Coillie's categorization of translator motives (2006, p.129)

| Factors                             | Translator Motives   |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Nature of the name                  | The connotation attached to a name appears to be the most important reason for changing it.  |
| Textual factors                     | Names are invariably embedded in a cultural context. If the context is not developed to a substantial degree, the chances are that the corresponding names will be modified. |
| The translator's frame of reference | In making their choices, translators are guided by their own frames of reference, the total sum of their knowledge, experiences, ideas, norms and values.                    |
| Other factors                       | Whatever strategy the translator chooses, sometimes the ultimate choices are made by or in co-operation with other actors in the literary communication process.             |

## Research Question

The research was intended to answer the following question: 1. Based on Van Coillie's model (2006, p.125), which strategies are the most common ones in translating proper names in children's literature from English into Persian?

## Method

The methodology employed to answer the aforementioned research question is described in the following section.

## Material

The corpus of the study consisted of twenty five English books and their translations in Per-

sian. The main reason for choosing the books was that they included a great number of foreign proper names.

Seven books were selected from among those appearing on the list of recommended books in Persian Literature Education Books for further study to fourth and fifth grades of elementary school students. Another eighteen books were chosen from those published by the six major publishers of children's literature in Iran. The availability of their Persian translation was also important. In Table 3, the information regarding the original English elements was provided. The data was sorted according to the title of the books and the author.

*Table 3: The English Corpus Used in this Research*

| Text No. | Title   | Author            |
|----------|---|-------------------|
| 1        | Dinosaurs Before Dark                         | Mary Pope Osborne |
| 2        | The Gold Coin                                 | Almaflor Ada      |
| 3        | Fantastic Mr. Fox                             | Roald Dahl        |
| 4        | Parrot in Isfahan                             | Fredric Field     |
| 5        | The Adventures of Pinocchio                   | Carlo Collodi     |
| 6        | Annie and the Old One                         | Miska Miles       |
| 7        | Finzel the Farsighted                         | Paul Fleishman    |
| 8        | See Behind Trees                              | Micheal Dorris    |
| 9        | Finders Keepers                               | Emily Rodda       |
| 10       | A Christmas Carol                             | Charles Dickens   |
| 11       | The Nuclear Winter Man                        | Terry Deary       |
| 12       | Break Out                                     | Terry Deary       |
| 13       | Vanished                                      | Terry Deary       |
| 14       | Discovery at Roswell                          | Terry Deary       |
| 15       | Friendship                                    | Nuria Roca        |
| 16       | If I Ran The Circus                           | Dr. Seuss         |
| 17       | I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today! And Other Stories | Dr. Seuss         |
| 18       | I Had Trouble In Getting To Solla Sollew      | Dr. Seuss         |
| 19       | The Cat In The Hat                            | Dr. Seuss         |
| 20       | Horton Hatches the Egg                        | Dr. Seuss         |
| 21       | Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!      | Dr. Seuss         |
| 22       | And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street | Dr. Seuss         |
| 23       | The Knights at Dawn                           | Mary Pope Osborne |
| 24       | Crispin The Cross of Lead                     | Avi               |
| 25       | Juan Bobo Goes to Work                        | Marisa Montes     |

In Table 4, the information regarding the Persian corpus was provided. The data was sorted according to the title of the books in Persian, the

name of the translators, the date and the name of Publication in Iran. It should be mentioned that no random selection has been done and all proper names have been gathered.

Table 4: The Persian Corpus Used in this Research

| شماره متن | عنوان  | مترجم                 | تاریخ انتشار در ایران | ناشر             |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| ۱         | دایناسورها قبل از تاریکی                       | هوری عدل طباطبایی     | ۱۳۸۴                  | نشر نخستین       |
| ۲         | سکه طلا  | نسرین وکیلی           | ۱۳۸۶                  | کانون پرورش فکری |
| ۳         | رویاة شگفت انگیز                               | سید حبیب الله لزگی    | ۱۳۸۶                  | انجام کتاب       |
| ۴         | طوطی اصفهان                                    | حسین ابراهیمی (الوند) | ۱۳۷۵                  | کانون پرورش فکری |
| ۵         | پینوکیو آدمک چوبی                              | صادق چوبک             | ۱۳۸۶                  | شکوفه، امیرکبیر  |
| ۶         | قصه زندگی                                      | محسن چینی فروشان      | ۱۳۸۵                  | کانون پرورش فکری |
| ۷         | فینزل پیشگو                                    | محسن فرزاد            | ۱۳۸۸                  | شکوفه، امیرکبیر  |
| ۸         | پشت درختها را می بیند                          | حسین ابراهیمی (الوند) | ۱۳۸۲                  | مدرسه            |
| ۹         | جوینده یابنده است                              | محبوبه نجف خانی       | ۱۳۸۶                  | مدرسه            |
| ۱۰        | سرود کریسمس                                    | حسین ابراهیمی (الوند) | ۱۳۸۵                  | مدرسه            |
| ۱۱        | مرد زمستان هسته ای                             | مهردادتویسرکانی       | ۱۳۸۶                  | قدیانی           |
| ۱۲        | نشت اطلاعات                                    | مهردادتویسرکانی       | ۱۳۸۶                  | قدیانی           |
| ۱۳        | ناوی که نامرئی شد                              | مهردادتویسرکانی       | ۱۳۸۶                  | قدیانی           |
| ۱۴        | اکتشاف در رازول                                | مهردادتویسرکانی       | ۱۳۸۶                  | قدیانی           |
| ۱۵        | دوستی  | محمد خلجی             | ۱۳۸۵                  | تیمورزاده        |
| ۱۶        | اگر سیرک دست من بود                            | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۵                  | افق              |
| ۱۷        | امروز سی تا ببر را داغون می کنم و قصه های دیگر | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۵                  | افق              |
| ۱۸        | دردسرهای من در راه سولاسولیو                   | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۴                  | افق              |
| ۱۹        | گربه ی با کلاه                                 | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۵                  | افق              |
| ۲۰        | هورتون جوجه از تخم در می آورد                  | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۵                  | افق              |
| ۲۱        | ماروین کی مونی خواهش می کنم همین حالا برو!     | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۴                  | افق              |
|           | فکرش را بکن                                    | رضی هیرمندی           | ۱۳۸۵                  | افق              |
| ۲۲        | این چیزها را در خیابان مالبری دیدم             |                       |                       |                  |
| ۲۳        | شوالیه ها در سپیده دم                          | هوری عدل طباطبایی     | ۱۳۸۴                  | نشر نخستین       |
| ۲۴        | صلیب سربی                                      | حسین ابراهیمی (الوند) | ۱۳۸۲                  | افق              |
| ۲۵        | ببو  | بهمن رستم آبادی       | ۱۳۸۳                  | کانون پرورش فکری |

### Data Collection

Data was collected from the parallel corpora, consisting of twenty five children's books, translated from English into Persian. Van Coillie's (2006, p. 123) model in translation of proper names in children's literature was used.

After deciding on the corpus of the study, the researcher carried out the data collection procedure. In the first stage, the chosen English books were read line by line twice and in some cases more than twice, to extract all proper names within the English books. In the second stage, the Persian translations were read in the same manner. Then, every English proper name was underlined to be compared with its Persian counterpart to identify the strategy used by translators, according to strategies presented by Van Coillie. Finally, the researcher transcribed all proper names in twenty five books. It means that, she made the collected data ready for the next phase of the research, i.e. data analysis. The collected data was tabulated. In every table, the strategies used by the translator were written in a separate column. In summarizing the results of the analysis of each strategy, the number of proper names was counted and then the frequency of the observed strategy was measured. The tables were analyzed and their results were discussed.

### Samples of Strategies Used in Translating Proper

#### Names

1. Reproduction: (Dinosaurs Before Dark)  
Jack: جک
2. Non translation plus additional explanation:  
(I Had Trouble In Getting To Solla Sollew)  
Skritz: اسکریترز کج بالو
3. Replacement of personal name by a common noun: (Juan Bobo Goes to Work)  
Dona Juana: مادر
4. Phonetic or morphological adaptation to the target language: (Finders Keepers)  
Smith: اسمیت
5. Exonym: (A Christmas Carol)  
Damascus: دمشق
6. Replacement by a more widely known name from the source culture or an internationally

known name with the same function: (And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street)

Fred: پت

7. Substitution: (Parrot in Isfahan)

Kelat: کمال

8. Translation of names with a particular connotation: (Fantastic Mr. Fox)

Mr. Fox : آقا روباه

9. Deletion: (Annie and the Old One)

Navajo = -

### Data Analysis

In the process of tracking down the samples, the collected data was first sorted and organized in tables. These data included proper name instances of each book. For this purpose, the researcher designed tables, consisting of the original and translated proper names and the type of strategy applied in translating that proper name. In summarizing the results of the analysis of instances, the number of applied strategies was counted in all books. Then, the frequency and the percentage of the different strategies used in translating that name was measured and were shown in tables as well as bar charts. Finally, tables were analyzed and their results were discussed. In the next phase, the frequency and the percentage of the most frequent strategies were measured in each book.

### Results

The following table is the frequency and percentage of strategies among all data.

The below table represents the of strategies used in translating proper names from the most commonly used strategies to less commonly used one. As the distribution of strategies shows, out of 513 data collected by the researcher from twenty five original children books, 239 instances refer to reproduction strategy. 181 instances refer to phonetic or morphological adaptation to the target language. 41 examples refer to translation with a particular connotation. 17 examples refer to exonym. 11 examples refer to deletion. Substitution strategy involves 9. The strategy of replacement of personal name by a common noun involves 7. Replacement by a more widely known name from the source culture is 5, and 3 instances refer to non translation plus additional explanation.

Table 5: Translation Strategies of proper name Instances of the books

| Strategies |   | Fr. | %    |
|------------|---|-----|------|
| 1.         | Reproduction  | 239 | 46.5 |
| 2.         | Phonetic/morphological adaptation to the TL                     | 181 | 35.2 |
| 3.         | Translation with a particular connotation                       | 41  | 7.9  |
| 4.         | Exonym  | 17  | 3.3  |
| 5.         | Deletion  | 11  | 2.1  |
| 6.         | Substitution  | 9   | 1.7  |
| 7.         | Replacement of personal name by a common noun                   | 7   | 1.3  |
| 8.         | Replacement by a more widely known name from the source culture | 5   | 0.9  |
| 9.         | Non translation plus additional explanation                     | 3   | 0.5  |
| Total      |   | 513 | 100  |

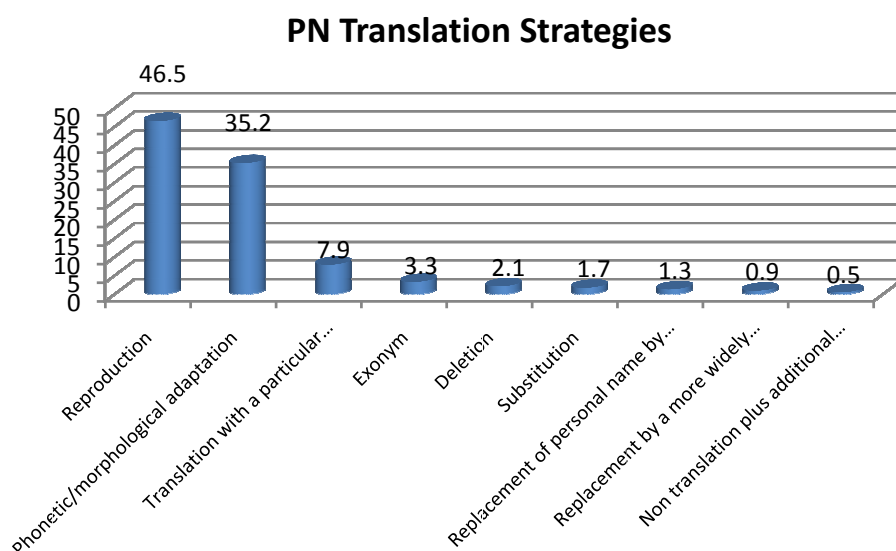


Figure1: Proper name Translation Strategies in All Books

## Discussion

As the summary of the statistical findings in the above figure presents, it can be concluded that among the translating strategies proposed by Van Coillie (2006), 1) the strategy of reproduction is the most frequent strategy with 46.5%; In fact, most of the original proper name instances are left unchanged in the receptor language in children's literature translating from English into Persian, 2) the strategy of non- translation plus additional explanation is the least common strategy with 0.5%; in which the translator adds explanations, either in the form of a note or in the text in order to bridge a difference in 'knowledge' between the reader of the source text and the reader of the target text; 3) replacement by a name with another or additional connotation is not used in translating proper names among these

books. It is notable how infrequently names that carry specific connotations, are translated literally. Sometimes a literal translation would result in a change of the emotional function. Hence, it is mostly avoided adding an extra connotation to a name, specifically when it is originally meaningless. Because of the extra connotation, the name evokes a different image in the reader's mind.

## Conclusion

When studying translated children's literature, social and pedagogical factors come into the foreground. Children's books do not only provide entertainment, but also help develop children's reading skills. As Puurtinen (2006) says, children's books convey knowledge about the world, values, customs, and accepted behaviors and can be used to shape identities, values, and cultural



expectations. Children's literature has special characteristics, which are deeply embedded in the language of children. Moreover, translators specializing in children's literature find it self-evident that a good translation is an equivalent, faithful translation, and a good translator is an invisible, faithful translator, and also the function of a translation should be the same as that of its original. Hence, in dealing with proper names, translators refer to their own knowledge of the target culture, experiences, ideas, norms and values. In order to maintain the function of the original work, the translator has to recognize the meaning of proper names. By increasing the notions of internationalism and multiculturalism, translators incline to preserve foreign names in translation and they often do so for the purpose of bridging children into contact with other cultures via translation. As the study reveals, what a translator does when s/he encounters proper names, is to leave foreign names unchanged. One of the aims of translating children's books is to further the international outlook and understanding of the young readers. This aim will lead to the same adherence to the original. Removal of foreign names which belong to the target language will not further the readers' knowledge of and interest in the foreign culture.

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