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PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS AND TRANSLATION SOLUTIONS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: BALANCING SIMPLIFICATION AND THE COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TARGET READER

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Abstract

The article investigates psycholinguistic constraints and translation solutions in children's literature with a special focus on balancing simplification and preserving the cognitive potential of literary texts for young target readers. The study examines children's age-related perception of texts, the role of emotionality, playfulness of language, and cognitive development in the translation process. The paper analyzes the main translation strategies applied in adapting children's literature, including explicitation, simplification, compensation, and cultural adaptation. The research material includes English children's literary works and their translations. The study demonstrates that excessive simplification may reduce the educational and developmental functions of literature, whereas an adequate translation contributes to imagination, linguistic competence, and cognitive growth.

Keywords: children's literature, psycholinguistics, translation, cognitive development, adaptation, simplification, translation strategies, pragmatics, text perception, child reader.

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена исследованию психолингвистических ограничений и переводческих решений в детской художественной литературе. Особое внимание уделяется проблеме баланса между упрощением текста и сохранением когнитивного потенциала произведения для целевой детской аудитории. Рассматриваются возрастные особенности восприятия текста детьми, роль эмоциональности, игровой природы языка и когнитивного развития в процессе перевода. Анализируются основные переводческие стратегии, используемые при адаптации детской литературы, включая экспликацию, упрощение, компенсацию и культурную адаптацию. Материалом исследования послужили произведения английской детской литературы и их переводы. В статье доказывается, что чрезмерное упрощение текста может снижать образовательную и развивающую функцию литературы, тогда как адекватный перевод способствует развитию воображения, языковой компетенции и когнитивных способностей ребёнка.

Ключевые слова: детская литература, психолингвистика, перевод, когнитивное развитие, адаптация, упрощение текста, переводческие стратегии, прагматика, восприятие текста, детский читатель.

Introduction

Children's literature occupies a special place in translation studies because it combines linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. Unlike adult readers, children perceive literary texts through the prism of their age, emotional experience, and developing cognitive abilities. Therefore, translators of children's literature face a complex task: they must preserve the artistic and cultural value of the original while adapting the text to the psycholinguistic characteristics of young readers.

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Modern translation studies increasingly consider translation not merely as linguistic substitution but as a cognitive and communicative process [1]. In the case of children's literature, this process becomes more complicated because the translator must take into account the child's vocabulary range, level of abstract thinking, emotional sensitivity, and cultural background. As noted by researchers, children's literature performs not only an entertaining but also an educational, developmental, and socializing function [2].

Psycholinguistic factors significantly influence the comprehension of literary texts by children. According to the cognitive theory of Jean Piaget, children pass through several stages of intellectual development, each characterized by different forms of thinking and language processing [3]. Young readers usually rely on concrete imagery and direct associations, whereas older children gradually develop abstract and analytical thinking. Consequently, translation strategies suitable for one age group may not be effective for another.

One of the main challenges in translating children's literature is balancing simplification and preservation of cognitive complexity. Simplification is often necessary because children may have limited vocabulary and insufficient background knowledge. However, excessive simplification can diminish the artistic expressiveness of the original text and reduce its cognitive value. This issue becomes particularly relevant in translating metaphorical expressions, wordplay, culture-specific references, and emotionally colored vocabulary.

The relevance of this study lies in the growing interest in psycholinguistic approaches to translation and the increasing importance of children's literature in intercultural communication. Despite numerous studies devoted to children's literature, the interaction between psycholinguistic constraints and translation strategies remains insufficiently explored.

The aim of this article is to investigate psycholinguistic constraints in translating children's literature and to analyze translation solutions that help balance simplification with the cognitive development of the target reader.

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Materials and Methods

The research is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining methods of translation studies, psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and literary analysis. The material of the study includes English children's literary texts and their translations into Russian and Uzbek. Particular attention is given to works characterized by rich figurative language, emotional expressiveness, and language play.

The following methods were employed in the research:

- 1. Comparative analysis** – used to compare original texts and translated versions in order to identify transformations and adaptation strategies.
- 2. Psycholinguistic analysis** – applied to examine age-related peculiarities of children's text perception and language comprehension.
- 3. Contextual analysis** – used to interpret the pragmatic and cognitive functions of linguistic units within literary contexts.
- 4. Descriptive method** – employed for the classification of translation strategies and psycholinguistic constraints.

The theoretical basis of the research includes works in translation studies, psycholinguistics, and children's literature by scholars such as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Venuti, Riitta Oittinen, Peter Newmark, and others [3; 4; 5].

Results

The analysis revealed that psycholinguistic constraints strongly influence translation choices in children's literature. These constraints are primarily connected with children's cognitive development, emotional perception, limited linguistic competence, and reliance on concrete imagery.

One of the most significant psycholinguistic constraints is the developmental stage of the child reader. According to Piaget's theory, children at the preoperational stage perceive information mainly through concrete images and

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emotional associations [3]. Therefore, translators frequently replace abstract concepts with more accessible and visual expressions.

For example, metaphorical expressions in English children's literature are often simplified or explicated in translation to facilitate comprehension. In Roald Dahl's works, many figurative expressions are intentionally playful and unusual. Translators sometimes replace culturally unfamiliar metaphors with more understandable equivalents.

Original: "Dreams are like golden eggs."

Possible translation solution:

"Dreams are precious and wonderful, like golden treasures."

In this case, explicitation helps younger readers understand the intended meaning while preserving the emotional effect.

Children's literature is characterized by emotionality and dialogic interaction with the reader. Emotional vocabulary, sound imitation, repetitions, and rhythm play an important role in children's text perception [6]. Translators therefore often adapt emotional expressions to maintain the pragmatic effect of the original. For instance, onomatopoeic words may require cultural adaptation because sound symbolism differs across languages. English sounds such as "buzz," "bang," or "woof" may be translated differently depending on the phonetic traditions of the target language.

The study also revealed that translators frequently use compensation strategies when direct equivalence is impossible. Wordplay and puns are among the most difficult elements to translate because they rely on phonetic or semantic ambiguity.

Example:

Original: "Human beans" instead of "human beings" in Roald Dahl's text.

The intentional phonetic distortion creates a humorous effect understandable to children. Translators often replace such expressions with target-language wordplay to preserve the playful cognitive function.

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Simplification was identified as one of the most common strategies in translating children's literature. This strategy includes:

- shortening complex sentences;
- replacing rare lexical items with common vocabulary;
- reducing syntactic complexity;
- explicating implicit meanings.

However, the analysis demonstrated that excessive simplification may negatively affect the cognitive and aesthetic value of literary texts. Simplified translations sometimes eliminate metaphorical richness, stylistic individuality, and opportunities for cognitive development.

The study found that balanced simplification is more effective than radical adaptation. Successful translations preserve a certain level of linguistic complexity while remaining understandable to children.

Children often lack sufficient cultural background knowledge to interpret foreign cultural references. As a result, translators may use domestication strategies to make texts more accessible [4].

For example, references to unfamiliar holidays, foods, or traditions are frequently replaced with culturally recognizable equivalents. Nevertheless, complete domestication may reduce intercultural awareness and deprive children of exposure to foreign cultures.

The analysis suggests that moderate cultural adaptation is preferable because it combines accessibility with educational value.

Discussion

The findings confirm that translating children's literature is a multidimensional process involving linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pragmatic considerations. The translator acts not only as a mediator between languages but also as a mediator between cognitive worlds.

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Psycholinguistic research demonstrates that children process literary texts differently from adults. Their comprehension depends heavily on emotional engagement, repetition, rhythm, and visual imagery [7]. Therefore, translators must preserve not only semantic meaning but also emotional and cognitive functions.

The results of the study support the idea that children's literature should not be excessively simplified. While accessibility is important, literary texts also serve as instruments of intellectual and linguistic development. Exposure to moderately challenging vocabulary and imaginative structures contributes to language acquisition and cognitive growth.

This view corresponds with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, according to which children learn more effectively when exposed to material slightly above their current competence level [8]. In translation practice, this means that the translator should create a text that is understandable yet intellectually stimulating.

Another important issue concerns the preservation of playfulness in language. Wordplay, rhymes, and phonetic experimentation stimulate linguistic awareness and creativity in children. If these elements are removed during translation, the text may lose its developmental function.

The study also demonstrates that pragmatic equivalence is especially important in children's literature. The translator's task is not only to transfer information but also to reproduce the emotional response intended by the original author. This includes humor, suspense, empathy, and identification with characters [9].

Furthermore, cultural adaptation should be approached carefully. Although domestication increases readability, excessive localization may deprive children of intercultural experience. Foreign elements in children's literature can broaden cultural awareness and stimulate curiosity about other societies.

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Conclusion

The research has shown that psycholinguistic constraints play a crucial role in translating children's literature. The translator must consider the age-related cognitive abilities, emotional sensitivity, linguistic competence, and cultural background of child readers.

The study demonstrates that simplification is a necessary but potentially problematic strategy. Moderate simplification improves comprehension, whereas excessive simplification may reduce the artistic, educational, and cognitive value of literary texts.

Effective translation solutions include explicitation, compensation, cultural adaptation, and preservation of emotional and playful language elements. Successful translations balance accessibility with cognitive stimulation and maintain the developmental function of children's literature [10].

The findings confirm that children's literature translation should be viewed as a psycholinguistic and cognitive process rather than merely a linguistic operation. Future research may focus on experimental studies of children's responses to different translation strategies and comparative analyses of multilingual translations of children's literary works.

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