

RIITTA OITTINEN

“The Verbal and the Visual: On the Carnivalism and Dialogics of Translating for Children” (2006)

Key words:

children’s literature studies, children’s literature translation studies (CLTS), carnivalism, dialogics, verbal aspects of translation, visual aspects of translation, illustration studies, reader – response criticism, translator studies

1. Author information

Riitta Oittinen is a lecturer at the University of Tampere and at the University of Helsinki and a member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences. She is an author of many important publications in CLTS, both in English and in Finnish. She has also been teaching translation in several universities, and has published many articles on the subject of translation teaching. Her professional interests lay primarily in the translation of the verbal and the visual in picture books and the concept of *translation as a dialogue*. In addition to her academic work, Oittinen is also an active translator and illustrator of children’s literature.

Main works:

I Am Me – I Am Other: On the Dialogics of Translating for Children.
Tampere: University of Tampere, 1993.

Translating for Children, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000.

2. Abstract

For Riitta Oittinen, translation is a creative act of composition. In this article, she looks at many aspects of translating for children that stem from the fact that translating is not only rendering equivalent words on paper, but also the cultural background, the reading

situation, the “texts in words and illustrations,” as well as taking into account various users.

Oittinen connects Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of *carnivalism* with TS, claiming that, firstly, every act of translation is a carnivalistic process and, secondly, that the whole children’s culture is carnivalistic in nature. It is a nonofficial culture of laughter and play that, though it is not antagonistic to the official “adult” culture, lives on “in spite of it.” Oittinen uses another term of Bakhtin’s in connection to CLTS, that is his idea of *dialogics*. She states that every act of translation is a dialogue between the text, the translator’s readings of it, the author and the recipient, etc. In the instance of translating for children, the translator leads a dialogue between her/himself, her/his¹ perception of children and the child within her/himself, as well as with the text and the target reader (a certain image of a child). The translator should have respect for the children and should try to learn from them.

The author of this article pays attention not only to the process of translation and its background. She also emphasizes the *experience* and the *performance* of reading. Every piece of literature for children, be it the original or translation, functions not only as written text, but also has its visual (illustrations) and verbal (it is often meant to be read aloud) aspects. All those factors combined, the ultimate goal of children’s literature is a carnivalistic one – to provide the pleasure of a reading experience for children (and for parents reading to them). The role of the translator is to translate her/his readings of all those aspects not only into the culture of the target language, but also into a somewhat different, parallel culture – a child’s culture.

3. Terminology

ST TERM	MEANING	TERM IN POLISH
Carnivalism	Bakhtin’s term for the literary mode that rejects or changes the dominant style through its relation to the	Karnawalizacja

¹ I am using Oittinen’s method of “writing with the feminine.”

	<p>culture of laughter and chaos.</p> <p>It is often expanded to involve wider social and cultural issues. Oittinen draws parallels between carnivalism and the act of translation and children's culture.</p>	
Coming – together	It is Louise Rosenblatt's term for a certain uniting reading experience happening between the reader and the text.	Scalanie się (czytelnika i tekstu) ?
Dialogics	<p>Bakhtin claims that each word exists as a part of a greater whole, that is, that everything exists in a larger context, with constant interactions between meanings. Oittinen claims that the act of translation is a constant dialogue between the text and the translator's readings of the text and her/his perception of the target reader.</p>	Dialogiczność
Verbal aspects of translation	The oral – aural aspect of a text; it has to function not only for silent self-reading, but also as an element of a "performance" (for example, like when read to a child by a parent).	Werbalne aspekty przekładu

Visual aspects of translation	The interrelation of a text and it's graphic aspect, for example illustrations.	Wizualne aspekty przekładu
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4. Methodology

Oittinen adapts many terms from the field of literature studies (*carnivalism, dialogics, coming-together*). She focuses on the process of translation (with emphasis on the role and cognitive processes of the translator), as well as on the reading experience of the user (be it child or parent). She points out the importance of non-textual aspects of the text, the visual and the verbal, alluding to the fields of communication and illustration studies.

5. Links with other publications on the subject

Oittinen, R. 1993. *I Am Me –I Am Other: On the Dialogics of Translating for Children*. Tampere: University of Tampere.

-----, 2000. *Translating for Children*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

-----, 2003. "Where the Wild Things Are: Translating Picture Books" *Meta* 48.1-2 (2003): 128-141.

Bakhtin, M.1990. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Engl. trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

6. Critical commentary

"The Verbal and the Visual: On the Carnivalism and Dialogics of Translating for Children" is a useful brief overview of Oittinen's views on translating literature for children. The article can be read not only as a theoretical work, but is also a source of practical information for a translator on how to approach the task of translating a book intended to be read by or to children.

7. Quotations to remember the text by

“Yet I consider translation an act of composition; I consider it a dialogic, carnivalistic, collaborative process carried out in individual situations.”

“As a whole, children’s culture could well be seen as one form of carnivalism – imagine the situation when we as translators for children join the children and dive into their carnival, not teaching them but learning from them. Through and within dialogue, we may find fresh new interpretations, which does not mean distortion but respect for the original, along with respect for ourselves and for the carnivalistic world of children.”

“Moreover, as interpretative tasks, reading a poem and reading a picture ... are not that different as they might seem at first – much depends on the reader/viewer her/his point of view. Illustrations can be seen as a form of translation, in the sense that it is another channel for interpreting the original, though visually.”

8. References

Oittinen, R. 2006. “The Verbal and the Visual: On the Carnivalism and Dialogics of Translating for Children”, in: Gillian Lathey (ed.), *The Translation of Children’s Literature: A Reader a Reader.*, Ontario: Multilingual Matters, 84– 141.