

O'Connell, Eithne M.T. (2003) *Minority Language Dubbing for Children: Screen Translation from German to Irish*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp.211. ISBN 3-03910-011-4 / US-ISBN 0-8204-6280. 37.90 €. \$ 41.95.

By taking an appropriately descriptive approach to the dubbing into Irish of the German animation series for children, *Janoschs Traumstunde*, Eithne O'Connell addresses an apparently small topic that raises some big issues in relation to translating for children. Since context is all-important in this case study, a historical survey of the status of Irish as a minority language emphasises the role of translation into Irish in ensuring its survival, in particular by developing children's competence in the language. Indeed, translators of the German series have seized every opportunity to extend knowledge of the language, rendering Swiss German as Donegal Irish, or introducing a range of Irish dialects even where there is no regional variety in the original animation. Then there is the question of audience. Subtitling, of course, is not an option for younger children who cannot read fluently, and child viewers have needs that are quite different from those of adults. O'Connell therefore engages with the qualities and constraints of a second minority interest – children's literature. She is quite right to cite decades of critical neglect of translating for children, but rather underplays the recent burgeoning of publications, conferences and journal articles on the subject.

In reviewing literature on translation for children, O'Connell does not allow the limiting and indefinable goal of 'comprehensibility' to dominate discussion, tracing instead actual historical practices such as adaptation and explication. She identifies aspects of children's texts that require specific insights and talents of translators for children: dual audience (the censorious or delighted adult looking over the child's shoulder), changing constructions of childhood, language play and the significance of sound in texts to be read aloud. Placing these insights into children's texts alongside an informative, step-by-step account of the technicalities of the dubbing process and an analysis of examples from her corpus of dubbed texts, O'Connell questions the lexical simplification in the Irish version of Janosch's sophisticated German narrative and dialogue. This proves to be a major finding of the study: that, contrary to expectation, it is not the minority status of Irish that proved to be the greatest constraint on the dubbed version of *Janoschs Traumstunde*, but an underestimation of the child reader that leads to a loss of linguistic artistry. An illuminating discussion of extracts makes this point effectively, although a brief introductory appraisal of Janosch as a verbal and visual artist early in the book would enhance O'Connell's conclusion.

A reductive process of simplification comes as no surprise to those researching translation for children, but it is disappointing to find it at work even where 'readability' is not an issue. It seems that the prevalence of notions that children cannot appreciate irony or should not encounter

unfamiliar vocabulary (although, as O'Connell points out, Beatrix Potter's 'soporific' has delighted and intrigued generations of children) has restricted the linguistic and literary potential of the source text. There is hope, however, in O'Connell's assertion that simplification does not arise from demands for a minority language to create new terminology, but rather from a misunderstanding of children's needs, and that there is a possible solution. Her argument for translation courses should include sessions on children's literature is one that I would wholeheartedly endorse. In an age of rapidly increasing international traffic in animation and film adaptations for child audiences, O'Connell's findings have implications far beyond the case study that she presents with such conviction and clarity.

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