Harry Potter and the Linguistic, Cultural Ethnocentrism: Some Reflections on the Americanization of J.K. Rowling's books

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Abstract: This article analyses the intralingual translation carried out on the *Harry Potter* book series for their publication in the US, as well as the repercussions that this translation had on these books. Even though the analysis presented here is limited to a translation within a single language, the conclusions obtained may also be applied to the field of the interlingual translation of literary texts. In this sense, this article seeks to show how either domestication alone or its combination with foreignization distorts the meaning and aesthetics of a literary work. Furthermore, this article discusses the consequences of domestication and foreignization for the relation between dominant and dominated cultures, as well as the ethical dilemma they pose.

Keywords: foreignization, domestication, *Harry Potter* books, ethnocentrism, intralingual translation, literary translation.

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Resumen: *Este artículo analiza la traducción intralingual de los libros* Harry Potter *para su publicación en Estados Unidos, así como las repercusiones que dicha traducción ha tenido para la obra. Si bien se aborda aquí el análisis de una traducción dentro de una misma lengua, es posible extrapolar las conclusiones obtenidas al ámbito de la traducción interlingual de los textos literarios. En este sentido, el artículo pretende ilustrar cómo la domesticación o la mezcla de este método con la extranjerización acaba por desfigurar el sentido y la estética de una obra literaria. Asimismo, se discuten las consecuencias de la domesticación y la extranjerización en lo que respecta a la relación entre culturas dominantes y dominadas, así como el dilema ético que estos métodos plantean.*

Palabras clave: *extranjerización, domesticación, libros de Harry Potter, etnocentrismo, traducción intralingual, traducción literaria.*

Translation entails much more than a mere linguistic transfer. In fact, translation is a kind of cultural mediation that involves a high degree of manipulation, particularly in those texts where the human aspect is very present, as in the case of literary translation (Britto, 2010). Translating therefore consists of an activity that is not innocent at all.

One of the most influential accounts of the crucial decisions that any translator as a linguistic and cultural mediator must make comes from Friedrich Schleiermacher over two centuries ago. In his landmark essay, 'On Different Methods of Translating', Schleiermacher (1813: 49) distinguishes only two methods of translation: 'Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him.' Years later, Venuti (1995) reintroduced these two concepts, renaming them as 'foreignization' and 'domestication', respectively.

Translators can choose between these two methods; however, Venuti (1995) claims that the choice makes clear the ethical attitude of a translator towards a foreign text and culture. According to this author (Venuti, 1995: 15), domestication entails 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values', whereas foreignization consists of 'an ethnodeviant pressure on those values

to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text'. Schleiermacher (1813), Berman (1985a; 1985b) and Venuti (1995) favour a foreignizing approach that recognizes and receives the foreignness of the other, since 'translation is essentially the shelter of the distant' (Berman, 1985a: 97, my translation).

Foreignization turns out to be particularly important, Britto (2010) suggests, when a text coming from a dominated culture has to be translated into the language of a dominant culture, since foreignization may contribute to the resistance against the cultural colonialism to which a dominated culture is constantly exposed. Nevertheless, this author also stresses that foreignization must be the favoured method in any text, no matter if it comes from a dominant or dominated culture, since foreignization entails an 'attitude of respect for the foreign language and culture; a deep respect that sometimes compels translators to venture beyond the boundaries of their own languages' (Britto, 2010: 139, my translation). Foreignization thus emerges as the most ethical method when it comes to translation.

However, reality seems to be far away from this ideal, at least in the case of the countries with dominant cultures. Venuti (1995) observes that these countries, especially the US and the UK, favour by far a domesticating attitude when it comes to the translation of foreign works into English. This may be mostly explained because these countries favour fluency over other features when assessing the quality of a translation: 'A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign text' (Venuti, 1995: 1).

This fluency, Venuti (1995) suggests, creates the illusion of transparency, which makes the final readers think they are not in front of a translation, but the 'original' text. In order to ensure fluency and transparency, a translated text has to present some lexical, syntactical and semantic features:

> A fluent translation is written in English that is current ("modern") instead of archaic, that is widely used instead of specialized ("jargonisation"), and that is standard instead of colloquial ("slangy"). Foreign words or English words and phrases imprinted by a foreign language ("pidgin") are avoided, as are Britishisms in American translations and Americanisms in British translations (Venuti, 1995: 4).

According to this author, the domesticating approach favoured in American and British cultures regarding translation has a very instrumentalist vision of language, where the transfer of information is considered more important than the language itself. Additionally, as Venuti (1995) suggests in the last line above, this ambition for fluency and transparency is so significant in these cultures that domestication goes beyond the boundaries of different languages and takes place even within a single language. If we consider Britto's argument (2010: 137, my translation) claiming that when the cultures at stake in a translation are not so distant (as in the case of British and American cultures), 'using either a more domesticating or a more foreignizing approach would hardly produce any difference', the tendency towards domestication within these two dominant cultures seems to be not so problematic, as any approach may produce a rather similar text. However, the discussion I will present in this article aims to show that, even when the cultures involved in the translation of a literary text are not so distant and they even share the same language, a domesticating approach does entail several consequences for a literary text.

1. Domestication of children's literature in the US

Unlike translation of adults' books, translation of children's literature receives a quite free treatment since the peripheral position of children's books within the literary polysystem (Shavit, 1986). In this sense, Nord (1997: 103) observes that the translation of children's books tends mostly towards domestication. Even though Nord's observation applies to the field of interlingual translation (Jakobson, 1959: 114), domestication also takes place at

an intralingual level (in which case, translation will be performed by an 'editor' instead of a 'translator'). This is the case with children's literature in English, which is also subjected to the method of domestication. Yet, unlike Venuti's (1995) claim in relation to American and British texts, at least in the case of children's literature, domestication would not be reciprocal, but have a clear direction: domestication seems to be more frequent in the case of British literature that is intended to be published in the US, but not in the opposite direction; in other words, American editors seem to be more interventionist when dealing with foreign works, whereas their UK counterparts seem to be less interventionist (Whitehead, 1996).

Whitehead (1996) points out that the domestication of children's books for American readers (also known as 'Americanization') may go from 'minor' changes, such as spelling and vocabulary, to more 'dramatic' modifications, such as titles, setting, characters' names and cultural references. These modifications, as mentioned earlier, are mainly related to legibility, fluency and transparency, since 'the merest whiff of "Britishness" scented by a reviewer may be considered a strike against the book' (Donovan in Whitehead, 1996: 688). However, there are also other important factors when defining the appropriate degree of Americanization for a certain book, such as the age of the target readers and the reputation of the author in question.

Donovan (in Whitehead, 1996) suggests that the age of the target readers is a crucial aspect when determining the degree of Americanization of a text: 'the younger the child, the heavier the hand'. This factor seems to be related to the supposition that children may be less tolerant towards foreignness than adults (Davies, 2003). However, this idea is strongly rejected by Hogarth (1965, in Whitehead, 1997: 27), who claims that children are eagerly interested in foreignness and strangeness, 'the odder the better'. On the other hand, regarding the author's reputation, Donovan (in Whitehead, 1996) points out that, if an author owns a bankable name and is linked to bestsellers, then the changes planned for the

Americanization of his/her book may be negotiable and even minimal.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels represents one body of literary texts that can highlight the degree of Americanization and lack of consistency in the alterations that British children books are subjected to when published in the US.

2. The *Harry Potter* books: literature as an art, literature as a business

The *Harry Potter* series comprises seven fantasy novels written by British author J.K. Rowling. The books are mainly targeted at children and young people, but they have also attracted a wide audience of adult readers. The books tell the story of a young wizard (Harry), who is a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and undergoes different adventures in the company of his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. The *Harry Potter* novels have been considered a cornerstone in children's and young people's literature: with more than 400 million copies sold, they have become one of the most widely read children's books in recent years (BBC, 2008). They have been translated into over 70 languages (Time, 2013) and have their own versions in American English.

The first novel in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in June 1997 by Bloomsbury Publishing, in the UK, after being rejected by 12 publishers (Sickels, 2002). The book achieved local success in the UK, but it was only after attracting the attention of American publishers that everything took an unexpected turn. In September 1997, Scholastic bought the rights to publish the *Harry Potter* books in the US for $105,000. This 'very high amount for an unknown author' (Sickels, 2002: 57) was an important factor behind the decision of Scholastic Book Group president Arthur Levine to follow the usual American editors' practice of Americanizing British children books in order to guarantee their sales in the US.

Unlike other editors, Levine was in permanent contact with author J.K. Rowling during the Americanization of the *Harry Potter* novels; however, it seems relevant to mention that, especially during the publication of the first novel, Rowling was still an unknown author to American readers, so she was willing to do anything in order to have her book published in the US. As a matter of fact, Scholastic was not the only publisher that suggested changes to Rowling: Bloomsbury Publishing had already recommended her to omit her first name and replace it with her initials, as they presumed that boys would not be happy to learn that the author of their favourite book was a woman (Sickels, 2002). Given the disadvantageous position she was in, having already been rejected by 12 publishers, Rowling accepted the suggestion without offering any resistance: 'I would have let them call me Enid Snodgrass if they published the book' (Rowling in Nel, 2002: 274).

2.1. Substitutions

Gleick (2000) observes that the alterations made by Scholastic for the publication of the *Harry Potter* books in the US can be divided into three main categories: spelling, common words and concepts closely related to truly British experiences. This classification, with some slight changes, will serve as a framework for the following article. Additionally, I have included a fourth category: the substitution of the title of the first novel in the US version.

Levine (in Radosh, 1999: n.p.) claims that the aim of these substitutions was to avoid unnecessary confusion: 'A kid should be confused or challenged when the author wants the kid to be confused or challenged and not because of the difference of language.' In other words, Levine intended to ensure the fluency and transparency of the novels for the American market in particular. Levine's motivations therefore involved an essentially instrumentalist conception of language. Drawing on the functionalist approach proposed by Nord (1997), it is possible to state that Levine only had the referential function as the guiding

principle for his 'translation', since he favoured the semantic transfer of the message in the books over the language itself. Nevertheless, the *Harry Potter* novels are literary texts and thus the language in them plays a vital role: 'Literary language has been defined as either "deviant" from the norms of everyday communication […] or as the creative use of the potential of the language against which ordinary language use represents a reduction […], literary language is clearly assumed to have a particular connotative, expressive or aesthetic meaning of its own' (Nord, 1997: 81).

Therefore, when it comes to literary texts, expressive and poetic functions of language emerge as vital as the transfer of a denotative meaning (referential function). In fact, Nord (1997: 82) claims that the poetic function plays an important role in these texts, as it is the function that distinguishes a literary from a non-literary text and 'gives the literary text a specific value of its own'. This poetic function is of paramount importance when it comes to children's literature since children engage in discovering the power and delights of their native languages (Lathey, 2009).

On the other hand, Berman (1985a) suggests that, in literary texts, 'meaning' is not confined to the mere transfer of information. According to him, literary texts are in fact a 'formidable concentration of meaning that goes further than the denotative meaning (1985a: 52, my translation). In this sense, literary texts display a series of superficial and underlying networks of signification, where language itself (the letter) plays an essential role. However, in his desire to avoid 'unnecessary confusion' for American readers, Levine seemed to have ignored these important considerations.

2.1.1. Spelling

The most obvious alterations made to the US version of the *Harry Potter* novels are related to spelling. However, this begs the question about the real need for these changes in order to ensure the comprehension of the novels by American children. It seems

unlikely that an American child would not recognize the meaning of 'colour', 'practise', 'travelled', 'Defence Against the Dark Arts' or 'Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans' given the similarity with their American counterparts, as well as the occurrence of these words in a particular context. These alterations are also present at the level of punctuation, where, for instance, single-inverted commas in dialogues were replaced with double-inverted commas, which are more typically used in American English. Gleick (2000: n.p.) wonders whether these replacements were really crucial in order to avoid American children's confusion: 'Are we afraid […] that alternative spellings of previously known words will make children (and adults) suddenly start spelling things wrong, sending school test scores falling?'

2.1.2. Substitutions of common words

By having the referential function as the guiding principle for the intralingual translation of the *Harry Potter* novels, Levine decided to carry out a series of replacements of Briticisms. One of the most representative substitutions was the replacement of the British word 'jumper' for 'sweater'. According to J.K. Rowling herself, this change was more than necessary as otherwise 'Harry, Ron and Fred would have all wearing pinafore dresses as far as the American readers are concerned' (Rowling in Nel, 2002: 274). However, by replacing this word, Levine and Rowling seem to have underestimated American children's abilities: not only could the context probably enable readers to conceive that the item of clothing being referred to here was not a dress, but also Rowling herself uses the word 'sweater' as a synonym to refer back to 'jumper' in the UK version of the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone:*

> (1) 'Oh, no,' he groaned, 'she's made you a Weasley *jumper*.'
> Harry had torn open the parcel to find a thick, hand-knitted *sweater* in emerald green […] (Rowling, 1997a: 147, my emphasis).

Even though it may seem a minor substitution, some subtitles are inevitably lost since 'synonymy, as a rule, is not complete equivalence' (Jakobson, 1959: 114). Therefore, as Nel (2002: 280) argues, 'when Percy's "lumpy jumper" becomes a "lumpy sweater," we lose the rhyme and the phrase becomes more ordinary'. The replacement of these common words results in what Berman (1985b: 247) calls 'qualitative impoverishment' (i.e., the replacement of words and figures in the original with words, expressions and figures that lack their sonorous richness or, correspondingly, their signifying or 'iconic' richness). This impoverishment has deep consequences, given the importance of the sensual dimension of the spoken word in children's literature (O'Sullivan, 2012).

A similar situation happens with the word 'pitch', which is defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as 'an area painted with lines for playing particular sports, especially football'. This term was replaced by 'field' in the Scholastic version of the *Harry Potter* novels. This substitution is rather controversial because, one more time, American children could have retrieved the meaning of 'pitch' because of the context. In addition, in terms of textual cohesion, Rowling uses the word 'field' to refer back to 'pitch' on two occasions in the UK version of the first book, in the chapter entitled 'Quidditch' (on both occasions, curiously, there is only one character who uses 'field' instead of 'pitch', namely, Lee Jordan, the Quidditch commentator):

> (2) […] that's Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the *field* and – OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger […] (Rowling, 1997a: 137, my emphasis).

> (3) […] nice play by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a clear *field* ahead and off she goes – she's really flying […] (Rowling, 1997a: 137, my emphasis).

However, in the UK version of all the *Harry Potter* novels, every time the word 'Quidditch' becomes the noun phrase modifier, it is

'pitch' –not 'field'– the head of that noun phrase. In fact, the association between 'Quidditch' and 'pitch' is not casual. Firstly, the choice of the word 'pitch' as the noun phrase head has a sonorous richness (aesthetic effect), since 'pitch' and the last syllable of the word 'Quidditch' are pronounced almost identically, with the exception of the sounds [d] and [p]. This assonance is also observed in other words related to Quidditch: 'Snitch' (one of the game balls) and even 'witch', which to a certain extent reminds the readers that Quidditch is a sport only played by wizards and witches. The use of 'pitch' thus contributes to the creation of 'an underlying text, where certain signifiers correspond and link up, forming all sorts of networks beneath the "surface"' (Berman, 1985b: 248). This underlying network, Berman (1985b) claims, constitutes one key aspect of both the rhythm and the signifying process of the text. Signifiers (words) themselves do not have as much value as their linkage. It is their linkage that signals the most important dimension of the text in question (Berman, 1985b). In this case, the linkage of these four words enhances the magical aspect of Quidditch as a wizarding sport. When 'pitch' is replaced by 'field' in the Scholastic versions, this chain is not completely transmitted and the signifying process of the text is somewhat destroyed.
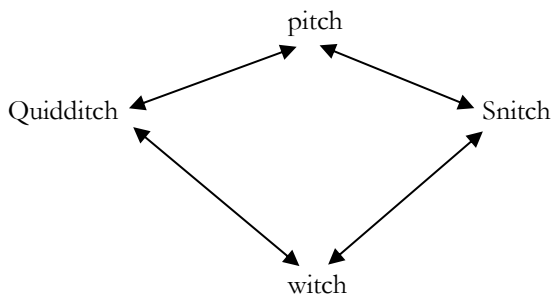

Fig. 1. Underlying networks of signification for the word 'pitch', enhancing its linkage with the wizarding world in the *Harry Potter* books.

Second, the use of 'pitch' alludes to a very popular sport in the UK: cricket. As Nel (2002: 268-269) observes, even though

> Quidditch clearly refers to sports other than cricket […], cricket is clearly one of the sporting referents here. That 'cricket pitch' and 'Quidditch pitch' share the same number of syllables rhythmically reinforces the connection between the two sports, as do the many jokes about how long Quidditch matches can last. The longest cricket test matches have lasted for more than a week, and Rowling comically exaggerates this length of time even further. In *Philosopher's Stone*, Gryffindor captain Oliver Wood tells Harry that Quidditch "can go on for ages" (Nel, 2002: 268-269).

Another word that has been replaced in order to favour fluency and transparency of language is 'bin', a word that depending on the context has been replaced by 'trash can', 'basket' and so on. So, in the example below, it is possible to observe how the rhythm and part of the assonance of the sentence present in the UK original (a) are missing in the Scholastic version (b):

> (4) a. Behind the big *bins* outside the kitchen doors. (Rowling, 1997a: 24, my emphasis)
>   b. Behind the big trash *cans* outside the kitchen doors. (Rowling, 1997b: 25, my emphasis)

The loss of rhythm is not minor when it comes to prose, as in the case of the *Harry Potter* books: Berman (1985b: 248) claims that 'a novel is not less rhythmic than poetry' as it 'even comprises a multiplicity of rhythm'. In the particular case of children's literature, rhythm and assonance play a vital role since children's natural curiosity about phonologic aspects of their native languages (Lathey, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2012).

However, the substitution of 'bin' not only gives up on the poetic function for the sake of the semantic transfer. The use of 'bin' is also connected to humour (operative function) in the UK version of the novels, as the plural of this word ('bins') resembles

the surname of the History of Magic Professor, Cuthbert Binns, whose lessons are regarded by the students as some of the most boring at Hogwarts. This punning on words logically disappears in the US version (b) of the books.

Other important replacements take place at the level of register and dialect. In the case of register, it is possible to mention the replacement of 'rubbish' with 'crap' in a speech of one of the main characters, Harry Potter's best friend Ron Weasley, in the Scholastic version of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban:*

> (5) a. 'I'm not going to take any *rubbish* from Malfoy this year […]' (Rowling, 1999b: 91, my emphasis).
>   b. 'I'm not going to take any *crap* from Malfoy this year […]' (Rowling, 1999c: 80, my emphasis).

The substitution of 'rubbish' by 'crap' is controversial: not only has a Briticism –whose context may help an American child to retrieve its meaning– been replaced, but also, and most importantly, the level of vulgarity associated with 'crap' has no relation with 'rubbish', as Nel (2002: 267) observes. This is particularly reproachable considering the didactic aim of children's books (Shavit, 1986). As Collinson (1973 in Shavit, 1986: 128) states, 'the writer for children will weigh his words carefully'. This, combined with the fact that this replacement takes place within the speech of one of the main characters, ultimately goes against his portrayal, since Ron appears ruder in the Scholastic versions.

Regarding dialect, it seems relevant to mention the substitution of 'mam' and 'mum' by the American 'mom'. Rowling, as most writers, uses some dialectal elements to reinforce the portrayal of the characters in her novels. For instance, in the original version of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Seamus Finnigan, a character of Irish descent, does not use the same word as his schoolmates (who are mostly British) to refer to his mother, so instead of 'mum', he calls her 'mam' (Rowling, 1997a: 93). In the US version, however, Seamus refers to his mother as 'mom', as all his classmates do in

this version, so he losses a good deal of his singularity (Rowling, 1997b: 125).

On the other hand, Harry and Aunt Petunia alternate the words 'mum' and 'mom' as well as 'mummy' and 'mommy' in the US version of the first book, whereas in the UK version, they only use the British 'mum' or 'mummy'. Similarly, the Weasley twins in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* always refer to their mother as 'mom', whereas in the next book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, they only use 'mum'. These changes in the continuity of the dialect threaten the portrayal of the characters and also contribute to a real –and mostly unnecessary– confusion among the readers, who probably end up wondering why the characters have changed the way they speak. In this sense, as Nel (2002: 269) suggests, with those inconsistencies, Scholastic seems to indicate that 'linguistic signs of difference do not matter'.

2.1.3. Culture-specific concepts

The third category proposed by Gleick (2000: n.p.) includes the 'metamorphoses of truly English experiences or objects into something different, but distinctly American'. These elements correspond to what are known in translation studies as 'culturemes' (Nord, 1997) or 'culture-specific concepts' (Baker, 1992). These concepts 'may be abstract or concrete; [they] may relate to a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food' (Baker, 1992: 18). It is precisely the concepts related to food those that experience major alterations, at least in the first novels. The allusion to food is not trivial at all in the *Harry Potter* books. In fact, more than functioning as a mere framework to the narrative, the reference to food, as Davies (2003: 92) suggests, has a 'powerful cumulative effect'. Davies (2003) observes that such elaborated and detailed descriptions of food in the story entail three important functions: firstly, they give realism to the scenes there described; secondly, they contribute to a balance between the fantastic wizarding world and the ordinary British world present in these books; and finally, these descriptions prove to be very appealing to child readers, since they

satisfy their curiosity about what exactly the characters are eating or drinking. Regarding this latter function, Rowling herself points out that food descriptions in the *Harry Potter* books were influenced by her experience as a reader of Elizabeth Goudge's *The Little White Horse*, her favourite book as a child: 'She [Goudge] always listed the exact food they [the characters] were eating […], whenever they had a meal, you knew exactly what was in the sandwiches, and I just remember finding that so satisfying as a child' (Rowling in Pattison, 2001: n.p.).

One of the culture-specific concepts related to food that is Americanized by Scholastic is 'crumpet', a type of traditional bread that is very common in Britain, which has been replaced in Scholastic's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by 'English muffin', a similar kind of baked good that is more common in the US. So, whereas in the UK version Harry and his friend Ron enjoy eating 'bread, crumpets and marshmallows' (Rowling, 1997a: 146), in the US version they eat 'bread, English muffins, [sic] marshmallows' (Rowling, 1997b: 199). However, only five pages ahead in the same book, Levine has no problems in preserving 'crumpets', which is retained as such in the remaining *Harry Potter* novels, along with other typical British food, such as trifle and Christmas cake:

> (6) After a meal of turkey sandwiches, *crumpets*, trifle, and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy to do much before bed […] (Rowling, 1997b: 204, my emphasis).

This inconsistency in the treatment of these culture-specific concepts begs the question about the criteria used by Levine in order to determine which of them had to be replaced, at least once, and which had not. For example, as British as 'crumpets' are the sweets known as 'humbugs'. When American readers asked Levine why he decided to preserve this concept, he answered: 'Humbug is clearly a magical term. It's something that should be imagined' (Levine in Radosh, 1999: n.p.). This, however, is not true, as 'humbugs' do exist in real life, at least in the UK.

On the other hand, it is precisely the opposite that happens with 'treacle toffee' and 'treacle fudge', both pieces of food prepared by Hagrid and offered to Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In the Scholastic version, only 'treacle toffee' is retained. In this case, however, even though 'treacle toffee' does correspond to real food (as British as 'crumpets'), it is not altered in the US version, whereas 'treacle fudge', a term invented by J.K. Rowling herself, which does not exist in real life (and therefore should have been preserved following Levine's criteria for 'humbug'), disappears.

Finally, the last example I shall mention in this section is 'sherbet lemon'. 'Sherbet lemon' is a hard lemon-flavoured sweet that is filled with fizzy sweet powder and is very popular in the UK. Dumbledore, the Hogwarts director and one of the main characters in the novels, is particularly fond of them. His liking for these sweets contributes, to some extent, to his characterization: as Davies (2003: 92) observes, Dumbledore's liking for sherbet lemons 'brings him immediately closer to young readers, contributing to his portrayal as a rather endearing character'. However, in the *Harry Potter* books, 'sherbet lemon' is not only used in a denotative way to refer to a sweet, it also has a function in the plot, since the word corresponds to the password needed to access Dumbledore's office. In the US version of the first and second books, 'sherbet lemon' has been replaced in absolutely every instance by 'lemon drop', a very popular American sweet similar to 'sherbet lemon':

> (7) a. 'Sherbet lemon!' she said. This was evidently a password, because the gargoyle sprang suddenly to life, and hopped aside as the wall behind him split in two (Rowling, 1998: 152).
>
> b. "Lemon drop!" she said. This was evidently a password, because the gargoyle sprang suddenly to life and hopped aside as the wall behind him split in two. (Rowling, 1999a: 204).

However, in the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* Scholastic preserves the original 'sherbet lemon', even though it explicitly alludes to the same password used in the second book:

> (8) "Sher – sherbet lemon!" he panted at it.
>
> > This was the password to the hidden staircase to Dumbledore's office – or at least, *it has been two years ago* (Rowling, 2000b: 557, my emphasis).

Given the relevance of this element in the storyline, the lack of consistency in Levine's decisions is certainly reproachable. This inconsistency probably causes more confusion among careful readers than retaining the term 'sherbet lemon', since in the latter case at least the context may enable readers to retrieve its meaning. This incongruity ultimately demonstrates 'the arbitrary nature of the editorial changes, which prove to be incredibly inconsistent' (Eastwood, 2010: 4). This inconsistency not only seems reproachable to more careful readers, but also threatens the particular characteristics of literary texts. As Nord (1997: 87) claims, one of the most important features in a literary work is to maintain internal coherence: 'With a literary text, [the receivers] readily accept information that contrasts with their own reality […]. What they expect in this case is not coherence between the text world and reality but coherence between the elements in the text world.' This is particularly important when writing for children, since storylines have to be stronger. As Bawden (1974 in Shavit, 1986: 124, emphasis in the original) states: 'The clue to what they [children] really enjoy is what they reread, what they go back to, and this is almost always a book with a strong *narrative line*'. By insisting, mainly in the first two books of the series, on replacing concepts that could have been preserved, while retaining these same concepts in the following books, Levine overlooks the coherence of the storyline.

Additionally, it seems relevant to state that these concepts occur in a series of novels that belong to the fantastic genre. This genre, Cote (in Whitehead, 1997) claims, is characterized by readers who

are particularly tolerant towards the unfamiliar, so there was no real need to replace these concepts. In this sense, one can hardly imagine that children who are able to deal with particular concepts and elements of the wizarding world as described in the *Harry Potter* novels, such as the confusing rules of the Quidditch game (which is played using four balls: the Golden Snitch, the Quaffle and two Bludgers) or the wizarding currency (with its three different coins, Galleon, Sickle and Knut) will be unable to deal with Briticisms in a context where there are so many overt references to the UK that are retained in the US versions: for instance, the Dursleys live in Surrey, Platform 9 ¾ is at King's Cross station in London and, in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* Charlie Weasley, one of Ron's brothers 'could have played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons' (Rowling, 1997b: 170).

The inconsistency in the treatment of these concepts proves to be evident when observing that, for example, Levine, apart from preserving the explicit geographic references to the UK, also seemed less interventionist with elements associated with British festivities. Thus, at the beginning of the first novel of the series, it can be read in the Scholastic version that:

> (9) Viewers as far apart as Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead of the rain I promised yesterday, they've had a downpour of shooting stars! Perhaps people have been celebrating *Bonfire Night* early – it's not until next week, folks! (Rowling, 1997b: 6, my emphasis).

The reference to Bonfire Night, a very popular British celebration which takes place every year on 5th November, contributes to both the temporal framework for the events described in the story and to the balance between the ordinary British world and the wizarding world. However, when considering that Levine's aim was to ensure a 'dynamic equivalence' (Nida, 1964: 157), whereby 'an American child reading the book would have the same literary experience that a British kid could have'

(Levine in Radosh, 1999: n.p.), he hardly succeeded, since Bonfire Night is not especially known in the US. Regarding this point, Halperin (in Whitehead, 1996: 690) points out how problematic this festivity is for American readers, particularly children, as 'in America, the major holiday associated with November is Thanksgiving, whereas in Britain, it is Guy Fawkes' Night [another name for Bonfire Night]'.

As a result of the inconsistency in the treatment of these elements, the Scholastic versions result in hybrid texts or 'British simulacra' (Nel, 2002: 267) of the language and culture present in the originals. This hybridity is precisely what Schleiermacher (1813: 49) warns about when emphasizing that there are only two methods to carry out a translation and that they should be strictly approached, since any attempt to combine them will be 'certain to produce a highly unreliable result and carry with it the danger that the writer and the reader might miss each other completely'. By domesticating most of the elements in the books, but preserving others (foreignization) without clear criteria, the US versions of the books result in a mere patchwork of the linguistic and cultural aspects expressed in the UK originals.

2.1.4. Philosopher or sorcerer? *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* versus *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

The last substitution I shall discuss in this article is the famous and controversial replacement of 'philosopher's stone' with 'sorcerer's stone' in the title of the first book of the series. Unlike the entitled content ('co-text'), where the elements discussed above belong to, the title stands on a higher level and maintains a certain independence from the co-text (Nord, 1990). Taking into account these particular textual features of the titles, I have considered it relevant to create an additional category to the ones proposed by Gleick (2000).

In general, the alteration of titles is a rather common practice. Titles seem to receive a much freer treatment since they have a

commercial aim (Davies, 2003), as 'it may depend on them whether a book becomes a bestseller or not' (Nord, 1990: 153, my translation). In other words, titles have, according to Nord (1990), an 'operative function of language', which seeks to attract potential readers to read the content of the co-text. However, the operative function is not the only function, nor is it the most important in the case of titles. Nord (1990) distinguishes six functions in titles: three of them are essential and the other three are specific. The essential functions comprise the distinctive function (to identify the text and distinguish it from others), the metatextual function (to provide information about the existence of a particular text) and the phatic function (to establish the first contact between sender and receiver), whereas the specific functions are composed by the referential or descriptive function (to describe the content or the factors in the communicative situation of a certain text), the expressive function (to offers an evaluation of the text) and, finally, the operative function described above.

Drawing on Nord's essential functions, the alteration in the title of the first book in the Scholastic version seems very risky, because it threatens what she describes as the distinctive function. This is because in order to achieve this function, 'the title must be singular, which also applies to the translated title' (Nord, 1990: 156, my translation). Considering that the title of the first *Harry Potter* novel was translated within English and also that this book belongs to a series of another six books, whose *Harry Potter and the Next Element* structure remains invariable, it seems likely that some readers may get confused thinking that any of the versions (either British or American) is another new book in the series.

Regarding the specific functions of titles, Nord (1990) suggests that they can be essentially divided into two groups, drawing on their functional characteristics: those that are receiver-oriented and those that are related to the author's intentions. According to Nord (1990), those functions related to the author's intentions should always be retained in any translation because of translators' loyalty towards the author of any text. Therefore, the alteration of the

original title to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* fulfils neither the descriptive-referential function nor the author's intention.

The original title, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, alludes to both a myth and a famous discipline in the Western world in the Middle Ages: alchemy. This allusion is reinforced in the novels with the inclusion in the co-text of characters who have been recorded to have existed and who were supposedly closely associated with the elements referred to in the books, such as Nicolas Flamel (or Nicholas Flamel, according to Scholastic) and his wife Perenelle, who are now believed to have studied alchemy in depth and discovered the philosopher's stone. The inclusion of these elements in both the title and the co-text makes it clear the intentions of the author towards contributing to the connection between the wizarding world and the real world, seeking to make any reader wonder, for instance, whether the real Nicolas Flamel and Perenelle might have been wizards as well. However, when the title is altered, replacing 'philosopher's stone' with the fictitious 'sorcerer's stone', this allusion to the real world disappears.

Levine argues that, given that the target public of the *Harry Potter* novels were children, retaining 'philosopher's stone' in the US version could have given a misleading idea about the book's content (Davies, 2003). In other words, the descriptive function of the title would have been threatened, since only a few children could have known what a 'philosopher's stone' was. However, the argument above suggests that Levine forgot that the original UK novels were also addressed to children, whose knowledge about the concept of alchemy was probably not very different from that of their American counterparts. Levine thus prioritized the commercial objective in his edition of the title, affecting the essential functions (e.g., the distinctive function), specific functions (e.g., referential function), as well as the fluency of the message (because, what is a 'sorcerer's stone' after all?). This commercial aim is clear when observing that he decided to use elements that allude to the wizarding world in the title ('sorcerer') in order to emphasize the fantastic features of the book, since this would result more attractive to a potential reader-consumer. By doing this, Levine,

despite being in touch with J.K. Rowling while preparing the US edition of the book, infringed the principle of loyalty towards the author's intentions, which resulted in Rowling's eventual regret about the modification of the title: 'She [Rowling] says that she regrets her decision to allow the change, but at the time she felt that she had to go along with the advice of her editors' (Vander-Ark, 2017: n.p.).

3. Harry Potter and the transfiguration of language and culture: some thoughts on interlingual translation

The modifications made in the US version of the *Harry Potter* novels may seem incidental; however, they expose certain practices that are carried out not only in children's literature in English as in this case, but also in a wide variety of texts written in different languages that are translated into English (Venuti, 1995). Nowadays, interlingual translation and communication in general show an immense devotion to the transfer of meaning and information, with the role of language itself (the letter) fading into the background. This devotion, according to Berman (1985a: 43), can even be glimpsed in antiquity, with regard to figures such as Cicero and Saint Jerome, who applied the platonic idea of body and soul to the context of translation: the letter was thus the equivalent of the mortal body, a mere shell, whereas the meaning rose to the level of the spirit, the universal *logos*. This conception of the secondary role of the language has been further enhanced since the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century (Bennett, 2007; 2011). As a result, the transmission of the message (the denotative meaning) has become the essential goal of any communication (including translation), whereas the role of language has been reduced to a mere means to achieve this goal (Halliday and Martin, 1993).

This approach which dominates scientific and technical fields (Halliday and Martin, 1993; Bennett, 2007) has also been applied now to the context of literary translation, where fluency and transparency have also become the essential characteristics to determine a 'proper translation' (Venuti 1995: 4). In order to

achieve fluency and transparency, domestication has proved to be particularly useful, especially in British and American cultures, which have used it extensively in literary translation (Venuti, 1995). However, the ultimate goal of literary texts is not limited to the transmission of their denotative meaning. Berman (1985a: 52, my translation) claims that literary texts 'have their own meaning and seek the transfer of this meaning'. According to him (1985a), this meaning is so exquisitely condensed that trying to capture it exclusively by means of a denotative transmission results in a naive task. To Berman (1985a; 1985b), signification is not associated with the meaning of a word only, but to the networks set up amid different words in a text, establishing signification chains at rhythmic, iconic and semantic levels. These networks, Berman (1985a; 1985b) argues, promote the use of certain words instead of their semantic synonyms. The force of these networks is thus not significant for a single word, but it is the union of different words in the text that transfers an underlying message that goes beyond the one transmitted by the superficial denotative meaning captured at first sight. In this sense, Berman (1985a: 90, my translation) claims that, instead of the transmission of information, the ultimate goal in a literary text is much more ambitious, since it aims to 'open up the experience of an entire world'.

Aiming at the transfer of information while reducing the role of language proves to be illusory and contradictory when it comes to literary translation. As Berman (1985a) argues, when focusing merely on communication (understood as a denotative transmission of meaning), translators neglect other elements that are essential for the manifestation of a particular text. By 'amending the oddness of a text in order to *facilitate* its reading, [translators] end up distorting it and therefore deceiving the reader they seek to serve' (Berman, 1985a: 93, my translation). Regarding what has been discussed in the present article, Levine, in his desire to produce a dynamic equivalence on American readers by means of a linguistic transparency, unintentionally deceives them, since he neglects elements that are essential for the manifestation of the universe in the *Harry Potter* novels. As a result, the American *Harry Potter* books,

instead of showing a unique universe where the wizarding world coexists with the ordinary British world, displays a universe where the wizarding world combines with a world that is a mere simulacrum of the British one, a world where the 'transfiguration' spell present in the novels, consisting of transforming an element into another completely different, has not worked properly because of its intense manipulation by means of a mixed approach where intense domestication has been combined with some attempts of foreignization.

The loss of signification networks caused by the substitutions and modifications discussed above also makes the edited texts lose their lustre and sometimes even makes them inconsistent. These inconsistencies not only affect some of the storylines and the portrayal of certain characters in the novels, as discussed earlier, but they also threaten the intention of the author, who constantly invites readers to have a look at the oddness, to be amazed by the strangeness and the foreignness, and to bring down the ethnocentric vision of their world, by means of characters with different ethnic ancestries (e.g., Cho Chang, Parvati and Padma Patil, Viktor Krum, Fleur Delacour), in order to represent a cosmopolitan Britain and transfer it to the wizarding world, where they live harmoniously. The desire for fluency and transparency cannot therefore be explained by a sympathetic goal, seeking to facilitate a complete comprehension by the readers and produce on them the same effect that the original had on the source culture readers. Rather, these ideals may be better explained by reasons that are essentially economic. In this regard, Venuti claims that when transparency and fluency are the principles ruling a translation the objective to be achieved confines itself to producing translations that are 'eminently readable and therefore consumable on the book market, assisting in their commodification' (Venuti, 1995: 12).

This commercial motivation is evident when observing the change towards a more foreignizing approach in the case of the elements related to the fantasy nature of the *Harry Potter* novels (such as the substitution of the title in the first book), as though fantasy and magic were the only exotic elements worth retaining.

On the contrary, differences in dialects, habits and traditions in certain cultures (in this case, British culture) seemed not that interesting for Scholastic, so they were domesticated or foreignized without clear criteria.

It seems imperative therefore to reflect on the practices we carry out in our task as translators and reconsider the enormous power of translation as a means of cultural affirmation and respect towards foreignness. A translation favouring foreignization seems to be the more ethical choice for a text originally written in either another language or a different linguistic variation, revealing the richness of its world and inviting us to learn about its particular values, principles and traditions. This approach is essential these days, as we are increasingly interconnected, despite geographic distances.

4. Conclusion

This article sought to shed some light on the degree of manipulation that literary texts experience when translated by means of a mostly domesticating approach. Even though this article only analysed an intralingual translation in English, the discussion here may also apply to what happens on a daily basis in the interlingual translation of literary texts, particularly those into English. In fact, it is precisely the intralingual characteristic of the translation here analysed that may allow us to observe, in plain sight, what we are unable to see most of the time, given the transparency and fluency that characterize literary translations in different languages these days.

Fluency and transparency, as well as the achievement of a dynamic equivalence, constitute now essential requirements for the assessment of the quality of any translation, including literary translation. However, by aiming to achieve these characteristics, translators unintentionally deceive both the reader and the author of a particular book, producing a distorted, inconsistent dull text that often does not match the original. On the other hand, it seems relevant to remember that one of the objectives of literature is the invitation to experience the particular world of a given text. In the

particular case of children, it is not that they cannot deal with exotic elements of a text; on the contrary, 'children everywhere are keenly interested in, and ready to learn about, other children; and the other, the better' (Hogarth, 1965 in Whitehead, 1997: 27).

Domestication and the high degree of manipulation that takes place in the translation of literary texts have a rather commercial motivation that seeks to create highly digestible and consumable products, thus contributing to the literary market. However, these practices also have some repercussions that go far beyond the commercial field, as they promote an ethnocentric approach that favours the language, habits, values and traditions of certain – mostly dominant– cultures, which emerge as more important than others. In this sense, it seems imperative to reflect on the power of translation, as it can either contribute to this ethnocentrism, favouring more domesticating practices, or precisely serve the contrary, as a means to promote and shelter minority cultures.

As Dumbledore, the wise Hogwarts director, claims in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 'difference of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open' (Rowling, 2000a: 627). Opening our hearts towards the exotic character of foreignness is precisely the ethical principle that should guide our work as translators in order to contribute to the equality and respect for other cultures, especially when considering the enormous power of translation in the 'construction of identities and in ethnic discrimination' (Venuti, 1995: 12). We therefore need to be aware of the power of translation as a means of resistance in an increasingly uniform world, where the values of dominant cultures are favoured, since only a diversity of visions and perspectives can enable us to live in harmony with otherness.

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