Translated literature: In and Out of the School Canon

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This paper discusses translated books for children and teenagers present in – and absent from – the Polish school curricula. A translation may be quite popular with readers, yet not included in the curriculum. The author tries to ascertain the reasons behind the positive and negative choices of school canon makers and the patterns such choices reveal. Factors examined include: un/suitability for the target-culture taste, setting good/bad example, political expectations, attitude towards the source culture, genre characteristics, date of translation (with respect to the appearance of other literary works), and translation quality. Examples from various traditions (German, Russian, Swedish, Anglo-Saxon, Italian, Hungarian) are given and connections are made with translational issues.

Key words: translation, reading lists, changes in the canon, ideology, literary values, literature for young readers

Cet article étudie les œuvres traduites pour enfants et adolescents, présentes dans le cursus éducatif polonais ou bien absentes de celui-ci. Une traduction peut jouir du succès chez les lecteurs sans toutefois être inclus dans le programme scolaire. Cet article analyse les raisons qui motivent les choix positifs et négatifs des responsables de ces programmes et les modèles de sélection qui s’en dégagent. Différents facteurs sont examinés : (in)compatibilité avec le goût littéraire de la culture d’arrivée, éventualité de constituer un mauvais/bon exemple, attentes politiques, opinion à l’égard de la culture-source, genre littéraire, date de parution (compte tenu d’autres ouvrages littéraires), qualité de la traduction. Les exemples sont puisés dans diverses traditions (allemande, russe, suédoise, anglo-saxonne, italienne et hongroise). Des facteurs traductologiques sont également envisagés.

Mots clés : traduction, listes de lectures, changements dans les canons littéraires, idéologie, valeurs littéraires, littérature jeunesse

Aims and Assumptions

In a very basic sense, translators’ voices are present in Polish schools, because examples of translated literature (books for children as well as works from the world canon) are included in school reading lists. Such presence is far from obvious; for example some post-Soviet countries curricula apparently include very few texts from the Western canon. In Russia many classic children’s books have their ‘native’ rewritings by Russian authors, which have gained autonomy and superseded the original foreign works. Examples include Aleksei Tolstoy’s Буратино for Pinocchio or Alexander Volkov’s Волшебник Изумрудного города
for *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and these appropriations mean that Carlo Collodi and Frank L. Baum are rarely credited at all and may remain unknown to the young Russian readers. Ronald Jobe, in turn, points to English-speaking countries as lacking a “welcoming tradition of translations” of books for children, not to mention welcoming them at school.

The present paper discusses translated books for children and teenagers present in – and absent from – the Polish, mostly primary, school curricula, with a view to determining what governs the decisions of the makers of the school canon as regards foreign literature. Admittedly, the capacity of any curriculum is limited, so not every translated book, even if known and valued, can be included. Besides, children or teenagers do not encounter translated literature only on official reading lists. Many more titles are circulated by school libraries, which is also a form of recommendation. Still larger numbers are translated and published and by that very fact available to the young readers. Nonetheless, I think it is important to ascertain – and make more transparent – the criteria which allow a given translated book to achieve school program priority in the eyes of the authorities.

The strategies behind the lists of required readings are not stated explicitly by their makers and can only be inferred from their positive and negative choices. Therefore, the points set forth here are hypotheses. Yet I believe that making such hypotheses is possible given Władysław Dynak’s reflections on the notion of *lektura* (among other meanings: ‘required reading’) and on the pedagogical strategies underlying canon-making: “the real recipient of programmatic content is strictly defined and the selection of programming criteria is often based on a *maximally coherent* socio-educational model.” To determine the selection mechanisms in question, I will take as points of reference the Polish socio-educational models (the present and the communist one) and the ‘defined recipients,’ i.e. juvenile Polish readers. To highlight the explanatory hypotheses about the reasons behind the choices of the canon-makers and the logic which such choices reveal, the paper is organised according to factors
that can influence a text’s position rather than by the original induction process, from examples to generalisations.

As I am interested in uncovering many possible mechanisms operating under different conditions, I discuss books from various national traditions, written in various periods and included in/excluded from the school canon at different points of time in post-war Poland, up to this day. The mechanisms often prove external to translation as such. This, together with space limitations, is why a comparative analysis of source- and target-text excerpts will not be conducted. Focusing on the fate of the texts rather than on the translators’ agency is, as will be seen, a derivative of the canon-makers’ perspective which I have been trying to reconstruct.

If not stated otherwise, the assumption of a given book’s position within or outside the school canon is based 1) on Anna Franaszek’s comprehensive register of works set as readings in Polish schools during the period 1945-19995 and 2) for recent years, on three current government-approved syllabi.6 For the convenience of reading the present text, established English titles of the works discussed are used alongside the original and Polish ones. Due to the number of books tackled, specific references are limited to Polish editions, as they are the actual topic of the paper, and placed in the Bibliography section. References in endnotes accompany quotations.

Un/suitability for Target-culture Taste

The factor of taste is highly subjective and elusive, yet can strongly influence canonisation, especially as a mechanism of exclusion: the decision makers may consider a text unsuitable for the target audience’s taste. This ‘aesthetic’ criterion implies either the risk of the book being disliked or of it spoiling the taste of young readers. If voiced by public authorities, it is an indirect censure on translators – questioning their strategy on the level of text selection (or preliminary norm, to use Toury’s term). In fact, what is judged unpalatable may be so from the point of view of the decision makers and not the young audience themselves. Katharina
Reiß has shown that translating for children can be a tug-of-war between parents, pedagogues and publishers – a dynamics from which the target recipients of the translation are significantly missing. These intermediaries filter the mass of foreign literature many times, so only a tiny fraction of it reaches a specific child. As studies in child psychology, notably by Bruno Bettelheim, have shown, children do need and enjoy encounters in literature with the spheres which adults consider taboo for them. Discrepancies between the adults’ and children’s reaction to a book have been mentioned in the context of translation, notably by Riitta Oittinen.

An example of a foreign work reluctantly presented to Polish children due to concerns about taste are the fairy tales of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, commonly associated in Poland with an excess of cruelty and obscenity. The prevailing opinion is that if they reflect the ‘national spirit’ in which the Romantic intellectuals believed, this is definitely not a kindred spirit. As a result, until the 2010 complete edition, translated by Eliza Pieciul-Karmińska, these tales have been censored in Polish for two centuries. The censorship was, as I would put it, both quantitative – which meant selecting ‘digestible’ tales and expurgating shocking fragments – and qualitative – the style was made more poetic and dramatic, characters were modified and even plots altered. Thus, the collection of the Brothers Grimm, despite appearing on the lists, has remained largely outside the Polish school canon, with only censored versions available, with vague selection recommendations for in-class and teachers’ use.

A book that seems not only marginalised but excluded for similar reasons is Wilhelm Busch’s 1865 internationally known comic-didactic verse Max und Moritz – Eine Bubengeschichte in sieben Streichen (Max and Moritz: A Story of Seven Boyish Pranks). In German-speaking countries it is a children’s and parents’ classic as well as part of popular culture and source of stock phrases. An early picture book, it is also held in esteem as the forerunner of the modern comic strip. It has been widely translated into European and non-European languages.
has been rendered into Polish at least three times: in 1905 by Ludwik Halski, in 1985 by Lech Konopiński, and in 2004 by Robert Stiller. The second translation was released in the impressive number of 200,000 copies, yet Busch’s verse has not entered Polish school reading lists.

One may venture a claim that this is the case not so much because the tale is deemed improper on moral grounds, but rather that, in the educators’ view, it is too coarse. The tale advertises itself as “cautionary” and indeed the “pranks” are throughout presented as vile and reprehensible and are finally severely punished. Moreover, because of civilizational changes, there is little possibility that the young readers could ever follow some of the devilish duo’s ideas – for instance, it is not easy to find a mill to play mischief in. Yet the tale is far from “edifying” (despite a remark to the contrary on the flap of the newest Polish rendition). From the point of view of educators, the boys’ disinterested malice and cruelty, and the callous retaliation, may be simply aesthetically appalling, the black humour rather crude, while there is little artistic or intellectual finesse to compensate for it (even if Stiller’s translation can be deemed more inventive linguistically than the original, although in keeping with the initial proviso I refrain from analyzing the style here in depth).

Let us consider rapidly a fragment from “Erster Streich,” the “First prank,” when Max and Moritz hang poultry belonging to a widow, as illustrated below:
An English translation, rather elegant in comparison with the original and Stiller’s Polish, renders the text here as:

Each lays quickly one egg more,
Then they cross to th’ other shore.

Both verbally and graphically, this episode breaks at once two taboos obtaining in children’s literature: of death and physiology. I would argue that elements like these will block Busch’s admission to Polish schools for many years to come, on grounds of taste rather than morals (although another taboo broken is that of adults’ faults – since the murderous punitive drive in the adult characters of the tale can be perceived as such). Busch has also been completely ignored by the authors of Polish companions to children’s literature, which suggests a deliberate silence on an inconvenient text rather than a neutral omission of something anachronistic and funnily absurd.

Setting (In)appropriate Examples

The next factor to be discussed is the ethical impact of books. Cheeky language, unruly humour, or disruptive behaviour can be perceived as exerting a demoralizing influence. Here censorship of translation or through translation comes into play: if a potentially subversive
book is ‘properly’ edited, it can be accepted in the canon. By contrast, some foreign works may be welcome if they promote attitudes which are fostered or considered desirable in the target culture.

It seems a common practice that books for young recipients are doctored in translation. As regards translations into Polish, several case studies have shown a tendency to introduce or reinforce didactic goals. The translator Jadwiga Włodarczykowa is judgemental towards the faults of the young characters in Burnett’s The Secret Garden.\(^{21}\) Pippi Långstrump has been divested of some elements of her independent character and prevented by the translator from eating a toadstool and from propagating picking poisonous mushrooms.\(^ {22}\) The Grimms’ Rotkäppchen is made into a good little girl, submissive towards adults, and retribution is eliminated from fairy tales with the intention of teaching the young readers forgiveness and generosity.\(^ {23}\) Didacticism has also been noted in language choices, such as embellishments, explanations of implicatures and reformulations to strengthen text logic.\(^ {24}\)

In this context, comparing the Polish reception of two of Astrid Lindgren’s novels is revealing. Pippi Långstrump, written in 1945 and first published in Polish in 1961 (as Fizia Pończoszanka), includes scenes satirising school. While those that are narrated as imaginary or purely absurd have been retained in Irena Szuch-Wyszomirska’s translation,\(^ {25}\) others, that could be interpreted realistically, have been cut out or significantly altered to eliminate their subversive potential.\(^ {26}\) Despite the slight modifications, Pippi / Fizia remains quite an unruly character, alarmingly self-sufficient for a nine-year-old girl, and still manages to expose the hypocrisy of the grown-up world. As such, she was presumably not a model approved by the canon-makers, and although widely read, the book never made it into the classroom. Of Lindgren’s classics, it is The Six Bullerby Children (Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn, Mer om oss barn i Bullerbyn and Bara roligt i Bullerbyn – published in Polish as one book), that has been read at school.\(^ {27}\) Here the pranks are usually innocent, the vision of childhood idyllic but far from
idle, and the narrator Lisa a good-natured girl. Unlike Fizja Pończoszanka, Dzieci z Bullerbyn does not undermine educational or social norms. Moreover, the book has informative value, offering young readers a first encounter with Scandinavian culture and thus the realistic style of writing becomes another advantage over the half-fantastic Pippi.

Just as translated books setting potentially bad examples may remain on the periphery, so the ones setting a ‘good’ example may become central to the school canon. This was the case with literature imported to the Polish People’s Republic from the Soviet Union, supposed to educate the new man, a task inscribed in the books for young readers, too. This subject deserves a separate study; here I would only like to point out that the highest saturation of the school lists with such works can be observed for the 1950s and 1960s, when the reading lists were designed to partly overlap with the Soviet ones.

The general aim of inculcating the right ideology and shaping attitudes in USSR’s satellite country can, on basis of the analysis of the choices of texts, be broken down into several operational goals:

- teaching a love for the leaders of the Revolution (stories about Lenin or Felix Dzerzhinsky; even fragments of Karl Marx’s treatises were primary school readings!);

- glorifying the heroism of Soviet soldiers and martyrs, as in Boris Polevoi’s Повесть о настоящем человеке (Tale of a True Man), translated into Polish by Jerzy Wyszomirski in 1949 as Opowieść o prawdziwym człowieku; Polish youngsters were also encouraged to read about children participating in the fighting of the Second World War in Valentin Kataev’s 1945 novel Сын полка (The Son of the Regiment), rendered as Syn pulku by Jadwiga Dmochowska in 1950;

- promoting role-models for young people, for instance through Nikolai Ostrovsky’s Как закалялась сталь from 1934 (How the Steel Was Tempered) or Anatoly Aleksin’s 1950 Тридцать один день: Дневник пионера Саши Василькова (Diary of a Young Pioneer) –
Ostrovsky’s text was published in Polish in 1940 as Jak hartowała się stal in Kiev, then printed very often starting in 1950 (until 1952 a translation by Eleonora Słobodnikowa was circulated, then as of 1954 Waclaw Rogowicz’s translation ran at least 11 editions) and Aleksin’s text was translated by Zofia Pomianowska in 1951 as Trzydzieści jeden dni: Dziennik pioniera Saszy Wasilkowa;

- shaping attitudes through adventure novels presenting revolution in an affirmative way, also by the stance taken by main characters. For example, Valentin Kataev’s 1936 novel Белеет парус одинокий (A White Sail Gleams) concerns the aftermath of the 1905 revolution and shows two schoolboys helping a sailor pursued by the police after the mutiny on the battleship Potemkin (an anonymous 1938 Polish translation Samotny żagiel was superseded in 1946 by Melania Kierczyńska’s Samotny biały żagiel). In turn in Anatoly Rybakov’s Кортик (Dirk) Pioneers expose plans of enemies of Revolution (this 1948 book was translated into Polish by Zofia Łapicka in 1950 as Kordzik);

- teaching socialist work ethics through ‘production novels,’ of which an example is Kataev’s 1932 Время, вперёд! (Time, forward!) about shock workers in Magnitogorsk, translated by Helena [Wanda] Grodzieńska and Seweryn Pollak in 1934 as Czasie, naprzód!;

- praising Soviet technological achievements, for instance in texts about cosmonautics.

Importing literary works from the USSR into the Polish curricula created stimuli and a market for new translations. Arkady Gaidar’s famous Timur and His Squad generated as many as three renditions within six years: 1946, 1950, 1952. In certain cases a kind of ‘pedagogical commission’ can be suspected. For instance, there is a minimal time span between Kataev’s Зимний ветер (Winter Wind), written in 1961, the appearance of its translation, Zimowy wiatr by Adam Galis, in the very same year and the book’s inclusion on Polish reading lists in 1962. Moreover, Зимний ветер was far from an obvious choice, since the novel, although continuing Kataev’s A White Sail Gleams, does not share its artistic value.
Naturally, some Russian books read at school were not vehicles of any ideological messages, as exemplified by Vera Panova’s 1955 lyrical novella *Серёжа*. *Несколько историй из жизни очень маленького мальчика* (*Seryozha. A few incidents from the life of a very small boy*). Its translation *Sierioża*, by Janina Dziarnowska, dates from 1956 and, like the original, offers a subtle portrait of a child, set in the reality of the 1950s USSR. Moreover, even in the Stalinist period, Soviet literature did not have a monopoly on teaching values. One important such book, inherited from the pre-war educational canon, was Edmondo DeAmicis’ *Cuore* (*Heart; Serce* in Polish), a school novel and a Bildungsroman with inserted independent stories, each presenting a role-model epitomizing some virtue. This Italian novel written in 1886 has had many surges of popularity in various cultures, perhaps because it is potentially open to very different readings, from a Christian to a socialist one. It disappeared in 1972 from Polish schools, probably due to a change of sensitivity and the aging of the language in Maria Konopnicka’s 1906 translation (although it continued to be reprinted often and was published in 1990 in an edition corrected and edited by Krystyna Dyrka.

**Fulfilling Political Expectations**

A book’s position on reading lists may be secured if it fulfils political or ideological expectations in the way it presents reality or certain questions. The first example is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), an adult book integrated into the young readers’ canon. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel had had several Polish renditions since the 1850s and was explicitly adapted for young readers by Aleksander Arct in 1901, and in the 1920s by an anonymous rewriter whose version ran 15 editions until 1948.

Stowe’s book, under the title *Chata wuja Toma*, tended to reappear in the Polish school canon in the period 1948-1966, despite the fact that it was already then more of historical interest than relevance (by that time legal forms of slavery had been abolished not only in the USA but everywhere in the world), while its antiquated style and sentimentality (asking for a
rewriting rather than a translation proper) could put readers off. Moreover, the officially atheist regime paradoxically fostered reading a book in which the reformist drive grew out of ‘religious passion’ and whose main character is unequivocally a Christian martyr. 29 Let me stress that the religious side was not effectively censored through translation because it is an integral part of the plot, while issues of toning it down and of paratextual manipulations go beyond the scope of the present paper.

If one seeks for reasons to explain the canon-makers’ peculiar partiality for this novel, it becomes apparent that during the cold war Stowe’s book could well serve the aim of presenting the United States in an unfavourable light, and offered a clear analogy for discrimination and segregation, supposedly typical of capitalist countries and impossible under socialism. On closer inspection, it turns out in fact that the years or periods when Uncle Tom’s Cabin was a recommended reading overlap with (or follow, since curricula are prepared in advance) periods of aggravated enmity between the Soviet block and the United States. A fragment was included in a textbook in 1948 and the full text was read in 1949, when the political atmosphere was defined by the Truman doctrine, the rejection of Marshall plan, the first Berlin crisis, the arms race and the production of atomic bomb by the USSR. The book’s reintroduction to the curricula in 1953 can be associated with the Korean War (1950-1953). The later intermissions (1955-1957, 1959) correlate with political détentes. While 1960 may have been the last time its school use was reintroduced by the authorities, the book returns nonetheless on the lists for four more years in 1962 – that is after the building of the Berlin Wall and in the year of the Cuban crisis. Stowe’s anti-slavery appeal disappeared from the reading lists in Poland just after the decolonisation of most of the Third World and following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the USA.

In 1952, the novel’s centenary was marked by the first full, critical Polish edition, in a translation by Irena Tuwim and Julian Stawiński, while two new rewritings followed in the
1960s. What confirms an ideological bias behind this ‘boom’ in the socialist period is the fact that the authorities and the pedagogues were convinced that Stowe’s text had little artistic value, judged it unreadable in its original shape, and criticised it as maudlin, schematic, verbose and religiose. Still, they found it iconic for the struggle for equality and “unfortunately still topical,” and therefore kept it in the canon apparently out of political expediency.

On the whole, English and American writers were deemed proper and useful for discussion in a socialist classroom if they offered social criticism. Hence, in the 1960s and early 1970s Ethel Lillian Voynich’s The Gadfly (1897) was included in Polish schools under the title Szerszeń as an optional reading. What legitimised Voynich in a socialist syllabus was her profile as a leftist writer, while the novel recommended itself by the topic, Risorgimento, the revolutionary struggle of the Italians in the 1830-1840s, and by its anticlerical tone. Additionally, in this case, the Polish post-war reception may have reflected the reception in the Soviet Union, where Gadfly (as Овод) enjoyed immense popularity with readers, sold millions of copies, was staged and twice made into films (1955, 1980), but was also cherished by the authorities, and included in the curricula. The canonisation relied on ideological rather than artistic criteria and the novel and its author are now largely forgotten.

It should be noted, however, that the two books discussed in this section had been translated into Polish long before 1945 (Maria Kreczowska’s regularly reprinted rendition of Gadfly dates from 1911), and were initially read as relevant for their universal and humanitarian values. Their reception in the second half of the 20th century evidences how the socialist canon recycled earlier pedagogical ideas.

Translated texts so far discussed in this section gained their position on the reading lists by fulfilling ideological expectations. On the other hand, a foreign book may breach political correctness and therefore be either unwanted or censored. Yoshihiro Ohsawa relates
controversies over Hugh Lofting’s *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*: the episode in which an African prince dreams about becoming white has been judged racist by some readers in 21st-century Japanese reception.32 The notions of political correctness vary in time, of course, and Lofting’s presentation of this character is now censored by the copyright holders even in the original,33 while earlier some lobbies tried to stop the book’s circulation altogether.34

The Polish translation, *Doktor Dolittle i jego zwierzęta*, has not been manipulated in that respect (emphases added):

“White Man, I am an unhappy prince. Years ago I went in search of the Sleeping Beauty, whom I had read of in a book. And having traveled through the world many days, I at last found her and kissed the lady very gently to awaken her—as the book said I should. ‘Tis true indeed that she awoke. But when she saw my face she cried out, ‘Oh, he’s black!’ And she ran away and wouldn’t marry me— but went to sleep again somewhere else. So I came back, full of sadness, to my father’s kingdom. Now I hear that you are a wonderful magician and have many powerful potions. So I come to you for help. If you will turn me white, so that I may go back to the Sleeping Beauty, I will give you half my kingdom and anything besides you ask.”35

Wanda Kragen’s rendition was first published in 1934, at a time when such Polish children’s classics as Julian Tuwim’s *Murzynek Bambo* (*Bambo, the African Child*) and Kornel Makuszyński’s *Przygody Koziołka Matolka* (*Adventures of Matołek the Billy-Goat*) were written, both of which can by today’s standards be criticised on racial issues. Meanwhile, the same text of *Doktor Dolittle i jego zwierzęta* has been reprinted in modern editions without changes and remains a recommended reading. The rationale is easy to guess: it is not a travelogue, not a realistic portrayal of African culture and should not be read as such. Cleansing a fable from a patronising attitude towards the exotic (or is it towards the silliness of the wish?) is essentially the same as purging German fairy tales from severe punishments of the villains—and the latter is contested by contemporary practice and theory (ethics) of translation. As Mark West observes, censoring every single word means investing books with
too much power and children – with too little trust. This time Polish canon-makers either prove not to be sensitive to the issue or to have taken a reasonable stance: the judgement should be based on literary value and accessibility for the readers (simplicity is part of Doctor Dolittle’s charm), not on alleged racism.

Climate of Opinion towards the Source Culture

The climate of opinion towards the source culture is another important factor in the reception of foreign literature. This has been shown by Nitsa Ben-Ari using the example of the systematic obliteration of references to German culture in Hebrew translations in the early post-Holocaust period. In less traumatic circumstances, immediately after 1989, the general public in Poland turned their backs on the culture of their former oppressor and ‘coloniser,’ revelling in the now suddenly available Western (pop)culture and marginalizing the previous, imposed canon. This influenced the curricula: Russian books disappeared from the reading lists, regardless of their aesthetic value or ideologically neutral message. This happened not simply for political reasons, but due to the society’s (parents’) prejudice against anything Russian.

Admittedly, some examples of Russian literature were retained in the school curricula (notably Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment), and some writers entered the lists thanks to the lifting of the bans on them in the original culture (first Bulgakov, then Solzhenitsyn and Tzvetayeva). Yet this applies to ‘serious’ works, while with regards to juvenile literature translated from the Russian, nothing seems to have been salvaged.

In the three current curricula for the successive nine years of education consulted for the present survey not a single Russian literary text is recommended, while many other, also non-European, cultures are represented. This creates an impression that Russian literature has nothing to offer to children – or at least to foreign children – which is not the case, to name only Alexander Pushkins’ beautiful fairy tales in verse or, for Soviet authors, Nikolai Nosov’s
1954 Приключения Незнайки и его друзей (The Adventures of Dunno and His Friends). The latter, translated into Polish by Janina Lewandowska in 1957 as Przygody Nieumiałka i jego przyjacíł, can be read as a charming fairy story about discovering the world: nature, technology, the functioning of society and economy rather than as a socialist allegory of communal life. While it remains a readers’ favourite in Russia, many Poles (now adult) recall it nostalgically as a rare really attractive book imported from the USSR.  

The role of attitudes toward the source culture as a (non)selection criterion is best illustrated by the telling contrast between fata libelli: Gaidar’s 1940 Тимур и его команда (Timur and His Squad, in Polish Timur i jego drużyna, available since 1946) and Molnár’s 1906 A Pál utcai fiúk (The Paul Street Boys; in Polish Chłopcy z Placu Broni, 1912). For all the differences between the two books, both relate the actions of a gang of boys fighting with another, hostile gang, and underscore the importance of loyalty, trust, courage and self-sacrifice. Both writers project boyish ‘games’ on the context of real war(s). While their ideology or views on nationalism are opposed, both strive to create a figure of a juvenile hero. Both novels were set readings in the Polish People’s Republic. After 1989 Arkady Gaidar’s Soviet tale about Young Pioneers anonymously helping the families of Red Army soldiers was eliminated from the curricula, whereas Ferenc Molnár’s book has not only retained its position up till now but also underwent a new translation in 1989 – the first complete and direct one (Janina Mortkowiczowa’s 1912 shortened text was based on a German version). The new rendition at the same time confirms The Boys’ status and will contribute to perpetuating that status thanks to a modernisation of language – a chance that Timur is not likely to be given soon. The canonical position of the Hungarian book is additionally evidenced by Tadeusz Olszański’s decision to retain the title proposed by the first translator, by which Molnár’s novel is known and recognised in Poland.
The sensibility of young people has changed significantly over the last century, a group of friends is now perceived more as a source of peer pressure than a comforting experience and social bond, while naivety, pure-heartedness and self-sacrifice seem totally alien to modern teenagers, who are resistant to heart-wrenching conclusions such as Molnár’s. Despite this (or maybe because of it), the Polish canon-makers still deem the Hungarian 1906 novel a worthy read and put forward Ernő Nemecsek as a role-model. At the same time they do not see Timur Garaev as such a role-model, despite the fact that his team perform real good deeds, while the Paul Street boys’ world proves to be artificial and their self-absorbed actions futile. It may be argued that Molnár’s book is anti-war and antinationalistic, while Gaidar’s is the reverse, but the political symbolism of either will hardly be transparent to ten- or eleven-year-olds and ultimately the decisive factor is the Russian / non-Russian distinction.

Genre Characteristics

Polish curricula for primary education do not include genres atypical of the native, Polish repertoire. For instance, texts like Alice in Wonderland or Edward Lear’s verse, which have led some scholars to treat English children’s literature in generic rather than national terms, are not on the lists, although, naturally, they enjoy popularity with the readers. There are several arguments for the conservatism with respect to genres. The first objective may be to teach native literature and its conventions. Also, Polish children’s literature is rich and varied in its forms, thus offering ample material to fill the curricula for the youngest readers. Furthermore, as Edward Balcerzan notes, children are not treated as an audience who can appreciate the tension between innovation and tradition, and by extension we could say: between native and foreign conventions.

However, one of the overtly stated aims of modern Polish pedagogy is to encourage an awareness of the traditions and play of children in other countries. Nonetheless, the realisation of this objective only entails reading texts about it, not tasting the kind of texts they use.
Admitting to the classroom examples of children’s literature genres from other cultures and allowing for a comparison with, for instance, native playground rhymes, could be both funny and enlightening for the youngest readers. Why then refrain from it?

If we think about English nursery rhymes, perhaps the reason for not including this genre in the syllabi is the unsatisfactory standard of the Polish editions, exemplified by the following instance:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men  
Cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.  

Humpty Dumpty na murek wlaźł  
i siedział tam, aż spadł zeń raz.  
Królewscy żołnierze nie mogli biedaka  
do kupy poskładać, bo tak bardzo płakał.

Humpty Dumpty clambered up a low wall  
and sat there till he fell down once.  
The king’s soldiers couldn’t pile the poor fellow  
up, because he cried so bitterly.  
(Back translation mine):

The translation, not impressive linguistically or poetically, is also illogical: the futility of putting together Humpty Dumpty, who retains his egg-like appearance in the pictures, is ‘explained’ by his bitter crying (emphasis). Not being an interesting verse in its own standing, it does not really entertain. Neither does it educate, as it does not give the young readers any awareness of the source culture. The foreign origin of the text is concealed by hiding the translator’s name in small print on the back cover of the edition and there is not even a hint that the nursery rhyme form is imported.

Nonetheless, translations better suited for the classroom are available, but not including any texts from the expanding Anglo-Saxon children’s folklore leaves Polish children alone facing a market with which neither they nor their parents can cope, with a mass of translations or adaptations of poor literary quality, hiding their translational nature and thus potentially causing cultural confusion. In the Polish curricula for primary education generic characteristics seem to play a part in the canon-makers’ decisions only as a criterion of exclusion. Including a text into the curriculum to illustrate a certain genre unknown in the
national literature remains a move reserved for the ‘serious’ literature read in secondary schools.

Time of Appearance of the Translation

My survey also suggests that certain translated works, written as if tailored for schools, never enter reading lists because they come too late. They either enter the target culture after some other foreign works, similar in topics and promoted values, have already been absorbed by the target-culture canon or prove not needed in the curriculum because their potential functions (e.g. informative) are already fulfilled by some other translated or original (native) texts.

The writing of Laura Ingalls Wilder may illustrate the first situation. The American TV series Little House on the Prairie loosely based on her 1930s books was immensely popular in Poland in the 1980s and 1990s and the translation of the novels during the period 1990-1995, with a re-edition of one part in 1996 seems to be the result of this success. The books foster the values programmatically sought by the Polish curricula: family love, loyalty in friendship, self-development, responsibility for oneself and for others, and tolerance. At the same time Ingalls Wilder cannot be accused of being overly sentimental or excessively didactic. An added value is the informative potential of the novels as regards the geography and nature of North America and the life, customs and culture of the pioneers ‘moving the frontier west.’ However, the books have not been incorporated into the Polish curricula for which they seem to constitute an ideal fit. A possible explanation is that the niche which Ingalls Wilder could occupy was taken much earlier by another writer, Lucy Maud Montgomery, with her Anne of Green Gables. The first part of the series, Ania z Zielonego Wzgórza, translated in 1911 by Rozalia Bernsteinowa, has been firmly set in the school canon. Apparently there is no room in the curricula for another novel of the same kind from the same continent: about a girl growing up in the late 19th-century North America, be it in Canada or the United States. Furthermore, the fact that Wilder’s series was not embraced by educators probably contributed to its not
having been republished. Ania’s firm position epitomises well that the Polish school canon is fairly static in some respects.

The second situation can be illustrated by the fact that there are hardly any foreign books in the curriculum that describe exotic countries in an attractive but almost popular scientific way. This is perhaps due to the fact that the Polish inventory includes Alfred Szklarski’s series on Tomek Wilmowski, successfully combining adventure with informative potential, as well as works by other authors, relying more on descriptions than riveting plots: Arkady Fiedler’s travelogues from all over the world or Alina and Czesław Centkiewiczowie’s reportages and stories from subpolar zones. In comparison, books with exotic settings by writers such as Emilio Salgari seem oriented much more towards suspense and entertainment than instruction. Being of smaller didactic potential, they are not included into the curricula, although exceptions in this category have been love-of-nature stories by James Curwood and Jack London.

Translation Quality

While translation research has proved that canonisation in the target culture strongly relies on numerous extratextual factors, the way the original is rendered should still remain an issue of interest to Translation Studies scholars. However, the quality of the translation appears to have little influence on the decisions to introduce or discard foreign book from the school canon. On the one hand, the general criteria of readability and correctness in the target language are not sufficient to earn a book a place on the list, since for instance Wilder’s books in Polish comply with both. Presumably, the quality of translation is of little importance until a slot in a curriculum becomes open for other reasons. On the other hand, accuracy with respect to the original is not, for practical reasons, checked for every book translated from any language – and this also influences the texts read in classrooms.
This brings us back to the question of the translator’s presence at school. Significantly, translators are absent from Anna Franaszek’s register. This is apparently so because the authorities who issue directives do not take them into account at all. The authors of the consulted syllabi for primary and junior high school are absolutely silent about translators, even for authors such as Dickens or Shakespeare for slightly older students.\textsuperscript{48} Treating translators as invisible and translation as transparent is not limited to cases when there is one rendition. Even when many translations exist, curricula do not specify whose version should be read. Thus, the choice depends on individual teachers, who may – or may not – arrange with the pupils a common text for interpretation.\textsuperscript{49} The teachers’ awareness of translational issues is, however, not always sufficient.\textsuperscript{50} Yet this awareness is important, given that children’s books tend to generate extended translation series.

For decades the good quality of the rendition (at least in terms of target text correctness) was a prerequisite for a book to become a recommended children’s reading in Poland, because it was also a prerequisite for publication. This has changed under free market conditions, and also due to legal factors, as Anna Moc explains.\textsuperscript{51} New translations of works traditionally treated as part of the canon appear and sometimes numerous renditions of one book compete. The correctness of the new versions is controlled neither by the canon-makers nor by the teachers (a sign not of the trust in translators but of their disregard), yet the label \textit{lektura} remains associated with the titles. For many years, the mark resembling a fan, as illustrated below, functioned as an emblem of the school canon:
This symbol is not used anymore, but publishers still try to emphasise the potential school contexts of their products. In the case of one of the recent translations of Burnett’s *A Little Princess*, in Polish *Mała Księżniczka*, this is achieved by means of an advertisement on the back cover, with the slogan: “Wydawnictwo SARA poleca lektury szkolne” (SARA publishing house recommends required readings). Among the sixteen covers reproduced below it in miniature, there is also, in a self-referring way, the cover for *Mała Księżniczka*. Unlike many of the other fifteen titles, *A Little Princess* is an optional reading, but no such distinction is made in the advertisement. As I have argued elsewhere, there are no literary reasons that would necessitate the emergence of Katarzyna Zawadzka’s translation – it does not significantly (other than quantitatively) contribute to the development of the Polish translation series of *A Little Princess*. Therefore, the publisher’s insistence on the “required reading” status may be interpreted as an effort to legitimise commissioning a ‘superfluous’ new version. That being said, all publishers of new renditions capitalise on the status in the canon which has been earned by previous translators.

Conclusions and Further Research

I have discussed a number of translations from various languages into Polish in relation to the Polish school canon. Examples included texts which have never entered the reading lists, texts firmly established in the classrooms, as well as those subject to vicissitudes – embraced by the school authorities or falling from grace, depending on circumstances. In all the cases I have searched for a rationale, for motivations behind the canon-makers’ decisions and for the reasons that explain the fate of the books under scrutiny. Thus, in the separate sections of the paper, seven types of motivation have been distinguished with respect to the cultural, historical, social and political factors which can exert considerable influence on a text’s canonical or marginal position. It could be ventured that the factors illustrated by the Polish case operate in a more general way.
Foreign literature comprises a fair share of the Polish curricula. Moreover, the composition of the reading lists changes periodically, thus the number of translations that have been “recommended” at some time or another increases. Nonetheless, translators could hardly be called the (co-)makers of the school canon. Educational authorities show apparent indifference to the phenomenon of translation, ignoring the questions of authorship and quality of the rendition.

Some regularities or patterns concerning the position of translated literature on the lists of required readings have emerged. It would be worth contrasting these patterns on a bigger scale with the rules of inclusion of original (native) works into school canons. This could ultimately show whether the same criteria are applied to both groups, or whether they are stricter for translations; whether translations can really rival with the original literature of a given culture or are only allowed to take slots left vacant by it. In other words, is the canon-makers’ attitude to translation indeed that of indifference or perhaps of tacit prejudice? This remains to be investigated.

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КАРЛОВ, Борис. “«Я знаю только то, что ничего не знаю», – сказал Сократ, но он не знал Незнайку: Всё о Незнайке” ['I only know that I know nothing,’ said Socrates, but he did not know Dunno: All about Dunno]. Пять углов [Five angles], no. 19 (1996): 8-9.

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29


* English back translations are provided in square brackets for titles not in English.

1 Translation of the French abstract by Ewa Nojszewska.
2 Personal communication with a graduate of Belarusian schools.
5 Anna Franaszek, Od Bieruta do Herlinga-Grudzińskiego. Wykaz lektur szkolnych w Polsce w latach 1946-1999 (Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa, 2006). In the period covered by this register primary education in Poland lasted 7 or 8 years; see also next note.
6 Jolanta Brzózka et al., Program edukacji wczesnoszkolnej (Warszawa: WSiP, 2012). Teresa Bugajska et al., Program nauczania języka polskiego “Słowa jak klucze” II (Warszawa: WSiP, 1999); Teresa Bugajska, et al., Świat w słowach i obrazach. Program nauczania dla klas 1-3 gimnazjum (Warszawa: WSiP, 1999). The syllabi, authored by teams of experienced teachers, cover successive three-year cycles of education: grades 1-3 and 4-6 of the primary school and the three-year gymnasium (junior high school). What are now the first two grades of gymnasium correspond to the former longer primary education (7th grade in the period lasting 7 years, 8th grade in the period lasting 8 years), hence the use of the third syllabus in the paper aimed at exploring required readings for young audiences.


English titles of books given in this paper are, whenever possible, established ones; titles translated by the present author are distinguished by the use of square brackets. In the case of *Max und Moritz* let us remark that several, variously titled English translations exist.


According to Zohar Shavit and Göte Klingberg, quoted in Oittinen, Translating for Children, p. 92.

Stanisław Frycie and Marta Ziółkowska-Sobecka, Leksykon literatury dla dzieci i młodzieży (Piotrków Trybunalski: Filia kieleckiej WSP, 1999); Nowy słownik literatury dla dzieci i młodzieży, eds. Krystyna Kuliczkowska and Barbara Tylicka (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1984).


Ewa Teodorowicz-Hellman, “Fizia Pończoszanka w tłumaczeniu polskim,” p. 133.

In her register of set readings, Od Bieruta do Herlinga-Grudzińskiego..., Anna Franaszek does not include any item by Lindgren, but apparently due to an oversight. Dzieci z Bullerbyn (transl. Irena Szuch-Wyszomirska, 1957) has been a long-standing required reading (in the first three-year cycle), according to the experience of the present author and of numerous persons of varied age interviewed by her on this issue. This is also substantiated by the presence of the sign Lektura on the half-title page of many editions. The book is currently recommended in the syllabus Brzózka et al., Program edukacji wczesnoszkolnej, p. 78.


33 See Yoshihiro Ohsawa, “‘Censorship’ in Translation,” pp. 36-37.


38 Anna Franaszek does not list Lofting but Polish translations of his books have been regularly reprinted and *Doktor Dolittle i jego zwierzęta* is a recommended reading for second-grade children in a current syllabus: Brzózka et al., *Program edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, p. 76. As for “racism,” the episode may well be interpreted otherwise: the prince is, of course silly in his wish, but he should be pitied for having been driven to such extremity as wanting his face colour changed to fit the expectations of others. It is the Sleeping Beauty and her racial prejudice that deserve the readers’ disapproval.


44 Brzózka et al., Program edukacji wczesnoszkolnej, p. 9 vs. p. 33.


47 Although Wilder started writing her series almost 30 years later than Montgomery, the times described are the same: both series begin with novels set in 1870s.

48 Bugajska et al., Świat w słowach i obrazach, pp. 27, 55.

49 In a sample of 147 young Poles, 60% of the respondents stated that school teachers never drew their attention to any translator, nor suggested any choice with respect to target versions of set readings. The question was part of a survey conducted at the University of Warsaw and on-line, May 2013, see Joanna Bogdanowicz, Postrzeganie zawodu tłumacza.


That native and foreign literatures are not treated as equal by pedagogues can be corroborated by the 1904 views cited by Adamczyk-Garbowska. At the beginning of the 20th century in Poland double standards could be applied to the two groups of books as regards integrity (abridgements), introducing textual changes, underscoring utility vs. artistry. Original literature had – in the country subdued for more than a hundred years at the time – a privileged position in these schemes, whose general aim was to raise youth in an adequately patriotic, national spirit (Adamczyk-Garbowska, Polskie przekłady angielskiej literatury dziecięcej, pp. 148-149).