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## **Graded readers**

An intralingual translation case study

Bachelor's project in Lektorutdanning i språkfag (MLSPRÅK)

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## **Abstract**

This project deals with intralingual translation through the analysis of a graded reader. The source text is *Matilda* by Roald Dahl and the target text is a version of the text monolingually translated for the purpose of aiding second language learning of English. The analysis aims to identify translational shifts and strategies pertaining to information and vocabulary. The patterns of shifts and strategies are then compared to existing research on intralingual translation, resulting in the conclusion that the graded reader seemingly does share some shifts and strategies, as well as translation purpose, with other instances of intralingual translations.

## **Sammendrag**

Denne oppgaven tar for seg intralingual oversettelse gjennom analyse av en gradert (lettelest) lesebok. Kildeteksten er *Matilda* av Roald Dahl og målteksten er en versjon av teksten som er monospråklig oversatt for det formål å fremme læring av engelsk som andrespråk. Analysen har som mål å identifisere oversettelsesforskyvninger og -strategier angående informasjon og vokabular. Mønstrene av forskyvninger og strategier sammenlignes deretter med eksisterende forskning på intralingual oversettelse, hvilket resulterer i den konklusjon at den graderte leseboken tilsynelatende deler noen forskyvninger og strategier, samt oversettelsesformål, med andre tilfeller av intralingual oversettelse.

# 1 Introduction

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Intralingual translation (Jakobson, 1959/2004, p. 139) is a somewhat debated area in the greater field of translation studies, and it has consequently seen relatively little research and attention compared to the better-known field of interlingual translation. The aim of this project is to support existing voices in advocating for the importance of intralingual translation as part of a broad definition of translation studies as a whole. More specifically, this project will concern analysis of a type of text that is a prime example of intralingual translation: graded readers.

A graded reader, sometimes referred to as an easy reader, is a short book written specifically for learners of English as a second language (Vicary, 2013, p. 80). They are usually employed to facilitate language learning through extensive reading, that is reading for pleasure, a didactic approach that has been shown to positively affect language acquisition (e.g. Alsaif & Masrai, 2019; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990). For extensive reading to work well, Tim Vicary (2013) emphasises that “the reading material should be easy” (p. 78). Consequently, to make sure language learners can find reading material appropriate for their reading skills, graded readers come in different levels with varying degrees of language difficulty (Vicary, 2013, p. 80). These books also vary in content. They can be factual texts, original stories, or, as will be the focus of this project, they can be adaptations of existing literary works into the graded reader format, which arguably falls into the realm of intralingual translation.

The source and target texts of this project are two versions of *Matilda* by Roald Dahl. The source text is the original work, written by Dahl and published in 1988. The edition used in this analysis was published in 2013.<sup>1</sup> The target text is a level 3 graded reader version translated by John Escott and published in 1999. The research aim is to identify the different kinds of translational shifts and strategies used in the translation of the source text into the target text, and further to compare these patterns of shifts and strategies to ones found in existing research on intralingual translation. Due to the limited scope of this project, the analysis will only be carried out on the first chapter of each text, and will only examine informational and lexical shifts.

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier editions, one of which is more likely to be the actual source text of the translation, have proved impossible to obtain at this time. Reservations must therefore be made to the effect that changes might have been made. Consequently, there is no way to ensure that all coupled pairs are actual pairs. However, for the purpose of this project, they will be assumed to be.

## 2 Theoretical perspectives and definitions

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Intralingual translation is a debated field of study, and whether it should be seen as part of translation studies is, among some, highly contested. This chapter will therefore provide some theoretical groundwork. First up is a general theoretical approach to translation that allows for intralingual translation to be viewed as part of the field of translation studies. Then follows more specific approaches to intralingual translation, describing it both as a concept of its own and as a part of the larger field of translation.

### 2.1 Skopos theory

Skopos theory argues that translation is a purpose-driven action that turns a source text into a ‘new’ product, that is a target text or, specifically, a *translatum* (Vermeer, 1989/2004, p. 227). The purpose of the target text is at the centre of the theory; it is the intended function of the target text, rather than the context of the source text, that should guide the translation action (Vermeer, 1989/2004, p. 229). Importantly, this definition does not demand that the process is cross-linguistic to qualify as translation. The theory recognizes that there can be other reasons for translating, resulting in other forms of translation, like intralingual ones. An example of one such alternative translation purpose is enhanced understandability for a specific audience within the original language group, leading to translations across for instance dialects or registers.

### 2.2 Approaches to intralingual translation

Intralingual translation has been a part of the general image of translation studies since Roman Jakobson (1959/2004, p. 139) defined it as one of three categories of translation. He describes it as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language” (p. 139), and also calls it rewording. The category has, however, had little attention devoted to it, as interlingual translation usually takes centre stage in translation studies. Some scholars do however expand on this concept through their broad definitions of translation and their approaches will be explored below.

#### 2.2.1 Korning Zethsen’s parameters

In a 2009 research paper, Korning Zethsen makes an argument for the inclusion of intralingual translation in the broader field of translation studies. She demonstrates an open approach to translation, arguing that the field should be treated as a cluster concept with family resemblance as a defining factor rather than a closed concept with strict membership requirements, as per

usual in classical theory of categorization (Korning Zethsen, 2009, p. 799). Based on this perspective, Korning Zethsen presents a relatively open definition of translation:

A source text exists or has existed at some point in time. A transfer has taken place and the target text has been derived from the source text (resulting in a new product in another language, genre or medium), i.e. some kind of relevant similarity exists between the source and the target texts. This relationship can take many forms and by no means rests on the concept of equivalence, but rather on the skopos of the target text.

(Korning Zethsen, 2009, pp. 799-800)

Furthermore, Korning Zethsen presents an attempt at a description of intralingual translation. She defines four key motivation factors, or parameters, noting that the boundaries between them, and the factors themselves, should not be considered complete or closed, and that several factors may be applicable to the same translation (Korning Zethsen, 2009, pp. 805-806). The four parameters are knowledge, or explanatory translations; time, or diachronic translations; culture, or intercultural translations; and space, or reducing/extending translations (Korning Zethsen, 2009, pp. 806-807). Korning Zethsen (2009, pp. 808-809) also notes that there is a tendency for simplification, although this cannot be said for all cases of intralingual translation, and that compared to interlingual translation, there is more freedom in the translation process, allowing for more considerable shifts as long as this is in line with the translation skopos.

A graded reader is a great example of how the proposed parameters can overlap. A graded reader translation is arguably mainly motivated by the parameter of knowledge; a source text is translated into a more comprehensible target text based on the target audience's lack of knowledge of the language and hence lack of ability to comprehend the source text (Korning Zethsen, 2009, p. 806). Additional to knowledge, culture and space may also be seen as motivators for the translation. Culture comes into play as graded readers are translated specifically for teaching of English as a second language. Because of this, readers might not be aware of culture-specific phenomena or terms used in the source text, and these might consequently be subject to shifts. Space is a relevant factor as a language learner might lack the ability or motivation to embark on a full-length text, and so a reduction in the amount of words and information is a necessary means of making the text accessible to the target audience.

### **2.2.2 Gottlieb's taxonomy**

Gottlieb employs an open definition of both text and translation, and on the basis of these definitions, he has created a broad, but detailed taxonomy of translation with the goal of accommodating the complex and polysemiotic textual nature of today's communication (Gottlieb, 2017, p. 46). Text is defined as "any combination of sensory signs carrying



communicative intention” (Gottlieb, 2017, p. 50), meaning that anything conveying meaning can be defined as text independent of type or form of the communication. Translation is defined as “any process, or product thereof, in which a text is replaced by another text reflecting, or inspired by, the original entity” (Gottlieb, 2017, p. 50).

Gottlieb’s taxonomy is detailed, and will not be explained in full here. The focus will be on intralingual translation, which is described as a form of verbal intrasemiotic translation. Intralingual translation can be divided into adaptational translation, where the translator has more freedom, and conventional translation, which is more bound by conventions (Gottlieb, 2017, p. 51). Conventional translation is further divided into six subcategories. Synchronic translation produces a target text within the same register and for the same audience as the source text; diachronic translation provides a target text with an updated language compared to its older source text; dialectal translation takes a text from dialect to ‘standard’ variety or vice versa; diaphasic translation brings the text to a new audience within the language culture; transliteration involves exchanging the letters or font of a text; and lastly, diamesic translation provides written text in coordination with spoken text (Gottlieb, 2017, pp. 59-60).

In light of this taxonomy, a graded reader would best be described as a form of diaphasic translation, as the aim of this type of translation is reaching a different audience within the same language culture than the original text did (Gottlieb, 2017, p. 60). In the taxonomy, this is exemplified with expert-to-layman texts, but graded readers, texts translated to accommodate the specific audience that is English language learners, arguably also fit right into this category.

### **2.3 Previous research**

The research area of intralingual translation is small, and there is not much previous research. However, there is some, and although it revolves around different types of texts than the ones in this project, they present a great opportunity for comparison.

In the same research paper as mentioned above, Korning Zethsen (2009) examines four different intralingual translations of a five-verse extract from the Danish Bible. They are all different in purpose and display different kinds of shifts in comparison to the 1948 authorized version. The family Bible translation has various forms of additions, that is objective and subjective additions as well as subjective comments from the translator; the picture bible for young children has undergone structural changes and content omissions; the authorized version from 1992 is found to have contemporary words, expressions and syntactical structures replace older ones; and the everyday Danish version uses explicitation and replaces some formal and archaic words and phrases with more everyday ones (Korning Zethsen, 2009, pp. 802-805).

The other research paper of relevance is one by Hill-Madsen (2017) on lexical strategies involved in translation between registers, more specifically turning an expert-oriented source text into a target text written in a lay-friendly register (Hill-Madsen, 2017, p. 89). The particular texts used in this case were pharmaceutical product specifications and their derived counterparts, medicinal package inserts (Hill-Madsen, 2017, p. 85). Hill-Madsen defines four main lexical strategies, and they are decrease-in-technicality, decrease-in-formality, non-technical paraphrase and explicitation. Additionally, he mentions other shifts that can co-occur with the main ones, like word-to-phrase expansion, hyperonymy and ‘clause-ification’ (Hill-Madsen, 2017, pp. 92-99).

### 3 Methods

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Graded readers are, to my knowledge, not yet researched from the perspective of translation. Consequently, in order to find terminology to describe the shifts found in the analysis, both literature on graded readers and intra- and interlingual translation has been consulted. The general organization of the observed shifts is based on Simensen’s (1990, p. 11) categorization of control exerted in the graded reader adaptation process. She describes three, which are control of information, of language, and of discourse and text structure. Because of the limited scope of this project, the analysis will only look at two of these, that is control of information and control of vocabulary, a sub-category of control of language.

Control of information refers to changes to the amount of information transferred from source to target text, and according to Simensen (1990, p. 12), it can result in either addition or omission depending of the type of information at hand. The analysis below will also consider the procedures of adaptation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 39) and compensation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 341) in relation to informational shifts.

Control of vocabulary regards lexical shifts, that is, the exchange of a word or phrase for another. The shifts found in this translation can be related to a variety of procedures. The terms used to describe these shifts are mostly taken from the work of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), but some terms from intralingual translation research will also be applied.

Translational shifts must be seen in light of overall translation purpose and strategies. The purpose is making the text more accessible to its target audience, which in this project is young, international learners of English as a second language. Strategies guide what procedures are needed in order to obtain the most functional shifts in accordance with this translation purpose. The strategies that will be looked at below are simplification and domestication

(Venuti, in Munday, 2016, p. 228), and the latter requires some clarification. Some features of the target audience make the application of the term domestication somewhat unconventional. The audience in question is young international language learners, and accommodating this audience means taking into consideration that they could belong to a variety of cultures in addition to the one they have in common, which is child culture. It is also important to note that not all language learners seek to acquire the same variety of English. These factors are important to keep in mind when terms strongly tied to culture are applied, like domestication. Their use in this paper do not solely indicate a shift towards a specific target culture, namely child culture, but also away from the specific source culture in order to make it more universally accessible to its diverse target audience.

The analysis itself is performed by application of Gideon Toury's (2012, pp. 115-116) coupled-pairs method, a process where a source and a target text are mapped onto each other with the goal of determining related segments. These pairs are then analysed to determine the types of shift that occur, if any, and what kind of translation procedures they are related to.

## 4 Analysis

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Although the translational shifts are the main objects of analysis here, it is worth noting that not all of the target text exhibits these shifts. Large parts of the text are direct transfers from the source text. This is also known as *borrowing*, as named by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, pp. 31-32). Having made this clear, this chapter will now explore and give examples of the translational shifts observed in the first chapter of the target text, *Matilda* (Dahl, 1999).

### 4.1 Control of information

In this section, the different forms of informational shifts, that is omission, addition, compensation and adaptation, will be described.

#### 4.1.1 Omission

The omissions found in the translation vary in length and content. The shorter examples of omission are single- or multi-word phrases. These usually contain details that add richness to the language, but are not essential to the understanding of the sentence or the story, like comparisons, descriptions and emphasis. Here are some examples from the source text, where the segments omitted in the target text are underlined:

... and these are of course far worse than the dotting ones. (p. 4)

We've got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen... (p. 6)

The more substantial omissions range in length from a single clause to multiple paragraphs. They also vary in terms of the type of information omitted. Some segments are left out due to the information being less essential to the core storyline. The first large omission is of this type, namely four paragraphs describing how parents and teachers view children differently (Dahl, 1988/2013, pp. 1-3). Other omissions contain details about characters, scenes, events and thoughts as described by the omniscient narrator; they add depth and detail, but the story is still cohesive without them. In this way, omissions help simplify the target text by limiting the load of information to what is strictly necessary.

Among the omissions were also both examples of sensitive language found in the source text. These were “for heaven’s sake?” (p. 6), removed from the end of a sentence that was otherwise kept, and “a flaming book” (p. 6) as part of a larger clause omitted in full (Dahl, 1988/2013). This could be seen as a domesticating move, both because sensitive language is usually avoided in child culture, and because the international nature of the audience makes it difficult to know whether the many possible target cultures will deem the language use inappropriate or not.

#### **4.1.2 Addition**

A different way of modifying the information in the target text is by addition of new information. The example at hand takes the form of explicitation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 342), providing additional information based on an assumption that the reader will struggle to understand the source text segment as it is. This is realized through the use of footnotes. The two authors Ernest Hemingway and Rudyard Kipling are mentioned briefly, and in the target text they each have a footnote attached to them, stating at the bottom of the page that they are famous American and English writers respectively (Dahl, 1999, p. 3).

#### **4.1.3 Compensation**

Not all information seemingly omitted is lost. Compensation here refers to information from omitted segments being repackaged when written into the target text. One example of this is where the source text segment “a son” (Dahl, 1988/2013, p. 4) is translated into “an ordinary little boy” (Dahl, 1999, p. 1) in the target text as compensation for the later omission of the segment where the son is described as a “perfectly normal boy” (Dahl, 1988/2013, p. 5). Another example displays how one source text segment is seemingly omitted and replaced by another containing different information. This new segment is however related to other omitted

information, summarizing it concisely. The example below follows a paragraph that is omitted in the target text about Matilda and how extraordinary she is. This target text segment could be said to act as compensation for the lost information:

ST: ... they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter. (p. 4)

TT: ... they did not realize Matilda was clever – *very* clever. (p. 1)

(Dahl, 1988/2013, 1999)

#### 4.1.4 Adaptation

The procedure of adaptation is an act of exchanging a source text event or feature unknown to the target culture with one that is more familiar (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 39). This procedure occurs once in relation to information. In the source text, Matilda's mother is described as playing bingo while in the target text, she goes to the cinema. As the target audience is young, it is not certain they will know what bingo is. Instead of explaining it, the concept is replaced by cinema, a phenomenon more widely known in child culture. This procedure displays domestication, as it adjusts the text to fit the target culture more closely.

## 4.2 Control of vocabulary

As the target text has language learners with a more limited vocabulary as its audience, not all of the words and phrases used in the source text can be transferred directly. They are instead replaced by similar, but more appropriate ones in accordance with the translation purpose.

### 4.2.1 Frequency

The most frequent vocabulary shift involves exchanging low frequency words for high frequency ones, as they are more likely to already be known by the language learner audience, and so works as a simplifying measure:

The most disgusting (p. 1) → the dirtiest (p. 1)

Far worse (p. 4) → much worse (p. 1)

Lovely (p. 6) → nice (p. 2)

Stunned (p. 9) → very surprised (p. 2)

Lap (p. 9) → knees (p. 3)

(Dahl, 1988/2013, 1999)

### 4.2.2 Adaptation

Adaptation occurs also in form of lexical shifts. This specific example is the term “telly” (Dahl, 1988/2013, p. 6), which is an informal term used in British English<sup>2</sup>, being replaced by the more general “TV” (Dahl, 1999, p. 2). This is a broad application of the term adaptation as this is not

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/telly>

a shift towards a specific target culture, but rather away from the specific source culture. In line with this, the shift is a sign of domestication; instead of a term from a regional variety, the language learner audience is presented with a general term that is more common in most varieties of English, ensuring the understandability of the text to most of the audience.

### **4.2.3 Modulation**

The procedure of modulation, as described by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p. 36), is a result of a direct translation, in this case a direct transfer, being unsuitable or awkward. For instance, the source text word “funny” (Dahl, 1988/2013, p. 1) is being replaced by “strange” (Dahl, 1999, p. 1) in the target text. “Funny” is a polysemic word, meaning that it is associated with several meanings (Taylor, 2012, p. 219). In this context, the adjective is meant to describe something as odd or out of the ordinary, however, for a young language learner with a limited vocabulary, “funny” might be more likely to indicate something amusing. Therefore, “strange” is inserted instead, arguably communicating the intended meaning more clearly. This shift could be seen as another example of simplification.

### **4.2.4 Word-to-phrase expansion and phrase-to-word reduction**

Word-to-phrase expansion is a term used by Hill-Madsen in his 2017 paper on expert-to-layman translation. In this analysis, the example of this procedure is the source text word “librarian” (Dahl, 1988/2013, p. 6) turning into the target text phrase “woman at the library” (Dahl, 1999, p. 2). This is also an example of explicitation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 342), as the target phrase is an explicit statement of what is implicitly known from the source word. In other instances, phrases are replaced by single words as means of simplification:

Devouring one book after another (p. 7) → reading (p. 2)  
Could hardly take her eyes from (p. 9) → watched (p. 3)

(Dahl, 1988/2013, 1999)

## **5 Discussion**

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The above analysis has unveiled a variety of shifts related to the translation purpose of making the text understandable to a young, international language learner audience. In regards to information, there seems to be a tendency towards omission, although sometimes balanced out by compensation. Adaptation and explicitation were found applied to both information and vocabulary, and frequency seems to be the most common vocabulary shift. Most of the shifts examined above point towards two different strategies: simplification, making the text more

understandable to the target audience, and domestication, moving the target text closer to the target culture, that is child culture, and away from the specificity of the source culture.

On the basis of the above analysis, how does a graded reader compare to other intralingual translations? The items of comparison will be the two specific studies presented above, that is Korning Zethsen (2009) on Bible translations and Hill-Madsen (2017) on expert-to-layman translations. Only their results pertaining to informational and lexical shifts will be considered, as these are the topics examined in this project.

The graded reader has shifts in common with three out of four of the translations examined by Korning Zethsen, that is the family picture Bible, the Bible for small children and the everyday Danish version. These three, as well as the graded reader, have varying degrees of the same translation purpose, namely making the texts easier to understand for their target audiences based on said audience's level of knowledge and understanding. Some of the procedures found in common between the graded reader and the various Bible translations were content omission, explicitation and objective addition (Korning Zethsen, 2009, p. 802). Additionally, the procedure Korning Zethsen (2009, p. 805) labels translation into everyday words and phrases could be said to be comparable to the frequency shifts found in the graded reader, as both procedures aim to make the target text language more immediately understandable for its audience.

The expert-to-layman translations examined by Hill-Madsen (2017) at first glance have less in common with the graded reader as factors like topic and target audience are quite different. Despite this, the translation purpose is highly similar, namely enhanced accessibility, and because of this, similarities can be seen between the two. A significant part of Hill-Madsen's (2017, pp. 92-95) study revolves around the rewriting of medical terminology unknown to most laypeople. Although this procedure, decrease-in-technicality, does not directly relate to a graded reader, the intention is similar, as the lexical shifts in both translations are intended to exchange unknown words and phrases with familiar ones. Explicitation is also found in both translations. What is most notably not found in the graded reader is shifts Hill-Madsen (2017, p. 95) labels decrease-in-formality. Both the source and target texts in this project are aimed at children, so shifts in register have not been necessary in the same way that Hill-Madsen discovered it to be in expert-to-layman texts.

The strategy that seems to be the common feature throughout these different forms of intralingual translation is simplification. This finding corresponds to Korning Zethsen's (2009, p. 808) statement that simplification is a prevalent factor in intralingual translation. The strategy found in the graded reader that is not reported on in these other studies is domestication,

indicating that domestication more likely is a feature specific to graded reader translation, or simply specific to this single translation, rather than a general intralingual one.

## 6 Conclusions

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The aim of this paper was to examine a graded reader as a form of intralingual translation, identifying possible informational and lexical shifts and their corresponding strategies. The analysis has uncovered a variety of shifts, the most prevalent ones being omission, compensation, frequency, explicitation and adaptation. The various shifts further indicate two central strategies. One is simplification, the other is domestication, sometimes realized by shifts away from the specificity of the source text, other times by shifts towards the target culture. Further research is however needed in order to establish whether domestication is a common strategy for graded reader translations in general.

Furthermore, the paper sought to compare the findings from the graded reader analysis with previous research on other forms of intralingual translation. The general strategy of simplification is a common feature, and several procedures corresponded in essence despite some differences pertaining to the format and topics of the texts. Connecting this back to Korning Zethsen's (2009, p. 799) usage of the concept of family resemblance, graded readers are arguably well labelled as intralingual translation. This field is however still relatively small, and more research is required in order to further understand the graded reader format and allow for greater generalizations.



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