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Translating crossover picture books

The Italian translations of *Bear Hunt* by Anthony Browne

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Abstract

This chapter sets out to explore the challenges posed by the translation of crossover picture books, that is, works addressing the child and the adult alike. Building on recent research on the translation of picture books and on the aspects related to performativity and read-aloudability in children’s literature, the investigation focuses on the Italian translation (1990) and retranslation (1999) of *Bear Hunt* (1979) by Anthony Browne. The case study shows how the two translators adopted different solutions when tackling the relationship between visual and verbal, the read-aloud situation put on by the adult reading aloud, and the different layers of meaning of Browne’s picture book. Grounded on O’Sullivan’s scheme on narrative communication for translation, the comparative analysis also attempts to account for the differences between the implied child reader and the implied adult reading aloud in the source text and in the target texts.

Introduction

Picture books for preschoolers are complex, multimodal literary artifacts in which pictures and words intertwine to create meaning. This collaboration between two semiotic codes is fundamental because these books are designed to be read aloud: the adult reads the words aloud while the illiterate child looks at the images and listens to the story. Crossover picture books exploit this multiple addressee because they simultaneously address the child and the adult alike, offering manifold levels of meaning. As Beckett points out, “[c]rossover picture books are multileveled works that are suitable for all ages because they invite different forms of reading, depending on the age and experience of the reader” (Beckett 2012, 16). They include a “dual addressee” since both “small children and sophisticated adults” are equally positioned as co-readers (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 21). As crossover picture books also appeal to grown-up readers, they are characterized by intertextual references, complex visual and verbal...
interplay, genre blending, and often deal with challenging adult themes such as death (Beckett 2012). Needless to say, their translation poses many challenges.

The present chapter investigates the Italian translation and retranslation of *Bear Hunt*, a crossover picture book by the British author and illustrator Anthony Browne. The book narrates the story of a bear with a magic pencil who draws his way out of dangerous situations being caused by two hunters chasing him. *Bear Hunt* was first published in 1979 and was translated into Italian in 1990. A retranslation then appeared in 1999.

The analysis sets out to explore the differences between the translation strategies adopted in the Italian translation and retranslation of this crossover picture book, and to better understand how its performative aspect and its multi-layered meanings are rendered. The investigation will also try to account for the possible different images of the child and of the adult in the source and target texts.

### Picture book translation

Picture books for preschoolers rely on the simultaneous presence of two semiotic systems, the verbal and the visual. Their interaction is the *conditio sine qua non* for the construction of the narrative meaning and for the fruition and enjoyment of the genre (see Moebius 1986; Nodelman 1998; Nikolajeva and Scott 2006). As previously mentioned, picture books are intended to be read aloud. Therefore, Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2012, 5) observe that their meaning is also negotiated orally. In this regard, Spitz (1999) emphasizes how the adult reading aloud becomes a sort of mediator and performer. Given this shared ‘collaborative’ reading experience, Spitz goes even further by stating that picture books are similar to scripts or musical scores (*ibid.*, 16) because of the intrinsic potential dramatization the adult adds during narration.

Besides providing pleasure in reading, picture books are also connected with emergent literacy: not only do children come into contact with the book as an object, its reading direction and order, but also with the codes that structure the world of children (Stephens 1992, 8), as well as models of behavior and experiences from the society in which they live (Cardarello 1995, 9). Indeed, as Shavit points out, society requires children’s book writers to be more attentive to their readers than writers for adults, as both the literary and

1 On the translations of Anthony Browne’s Bear series, see also Pedrelli (2015).
the educational system place constraints upon them (Shavit 1983). Society’s notion of childhood – that is, what is believed to be suitable for children – is closely interrelated with the image of the child. As Oittinen claims, “child image is a complex issue: on the one hand, it is something unique, based on each individual personal history; on the other hand, it is something collectivized in all society” (2000, 4). Thus, like all children’s literature, picture books convey a specific notion of childhood, and a related image of the child, which might diverge over time and according to where a certain book is produced (see Shavit 1982; Oittinen 2000; O’Sullivan 2005). Translations are particularly revealing of the differences between the varying images of the child since, as Shavit observes, adjustments in characterization, plot, and language in translations are made “in accordance with what society regards (at a certain point in time) as educationally ‘good for the child’” (Shavit 1986, 171–172).

With regard to the reading-aloud context, the translation of picture books is similar to theatre translation or dubbing (Oittinen 2000). The translator’s intervention is limited to the verbal code because pictures – either a support or a strong paratextual constraint – cannot usually be modified. Likewise, the translator must be aware that the words to be translated are meant to be read aloud and the whole text is somehow meant to be acted as in theatre or film translation. All its oral and aural features, such as songs, alliterations, onomatopoeias, and the overall rhythm have to be taken into account. As Oittinen highlights, “[t]ranslators of picture books translate whole situations including the words, the illustrations, and the whole (imagined) reading-aloud situation” (ibid., 75). Moreover, in crossover picture books, the adult not only plays the role of performer but is also an endorsed addressee together with the child, thus challenging the translator even further.

**The implied aloud-reader**

O’Sullivan’s theoretical framework (2005) provides a basis for identifying diverging child images and translating strategies related to reading-aloud qualities. It stems from Chatman’s scheme of narrative communication (1998) and the further amendments brought about by Schiavi (1996) and Hermans (1996) in order to broaden the picture to include translations. In particular, a real translator – positioned outside the text – establishes the communication between the real author of the source text and the real reader of the target text, transferring the source message thanks to the implied translator, an agency which is encoded in the text. During the translation process, the translator first acts at an extratextual level by becoming the real reader of the source text
because of his/her double competence in the source and target language and culture. S/he identifies the implied reader of the target text and takes on its role so as to decipher and re-transmit the message for the new target readers. By so doing, s/he creates an extra intratextual agency (or TL author), the ‘implied translator,’ who constructs a new implied target reader. Therefore, a new relationship between the readers and the text is created, given the different Weltanshauung and cultural encyclopedia of the author and of the target addressees. Additionally, the author’s voice and the translator’s voice do not always correspond, such that the translator’s voice can reveal itself, for example, in footnotes or in other paratextual elements. According to O’Sullivan, who applies the model to children’s literature, the translator’s voice can also be detected at the narrative level when it does not duplicate the voice of the narrator (2005, 109). Moreover, in children’s literature, which is characterized by asymmetrical communication and influenced by society’s idea of the child, the translator’s conception of the reading child may differ from the author’s supposed child audience, thus leading to amplifying or reductive narration, or to drowning out the voice of the narrator of the source text (ibid., 114–118).

The implied adult reading aloud

Translating picture books is more challenging when the implied reader is what Nodelman (1988) calls an “implied viewer.” The intended child reader is also an implied listener of the adult’s narration, whose performance is also inscribed in the text. Read-aloudability is crucial in many genres of children’s literature and has to be considered when translating, as underlined by Dollerup (2003), Van Coillie (2014a), and Lathey (2006). In particular, Oittinen (2018) stresses its importance in picture books where the adult is expected to perform the text. She also observes that in translated picture books characters are often ‘revoiced.’

Still, if the dual addressee is in fact inherent to picture books, O’Sullivan’s model has to incorporate an implied adult reading aloud (the implied aloud-reader), since the author of the text is aware of the necessity of the adult’s voice. This agency is construed as both an oral performer in charge of staging a dramatization of the text and as an unavoidable mediator with regard to its comprehension and the ideological content expressed in the text. Its intratextual agency obviously acts at the extratextual level, in the voice of the person who reads the story.

The discursive presence of the implied adult reading aloud can be inferred from textual traces, whose function is to render the reading fun and
comprehensible. These stage directions can be visual, determined by the picture/layout, the typography or the punctuation, or they can be verbal, such as lexical, syntactic, phonosymbolic or direct speech instructions (Sezzi 2009). Furthermore, some strategies facilitating the adult mediation are sometimes added in the translation: for example, explicative and cultural facilitations, and reassuring or ideological interventions (ibid.). Hence, the implied adult reading aloud, like the child implied reader, might be different in the source text and the target text, thus conveying not only a different image of the child but also a different image of adulthood.

The analysis of the translations of Anthony Browne’s crossover picture book *Bear Hunt* gives some hints on how the two types of audiences are dealt with in the two target texts. Because one of the picture books under scrutiny is a retranslation, it might shed some light on how the performative aspect is perceived ten years later. As Cabaret (2014, 14) points out: “Retranslations enable a variety of options and experiences as far as orality is concerned, especially with picture books which may also resort to typography, colours and layout to visually guide readers in their reading and (re)interpretation of a text.” The retranslation of fairy tales has pinpointed the importance of this component for texts meant to be read aloud (Van Coillie 2014b). It is thus necessary to investigate the issue of read-aloudability and performance, whilst including those additions that may facilitate the adult in his/her role.

**The Italian translations of *Bear Hunt: Orsetto e i cacciatori* and *Caccia all’Orsetto***

In *Bear Hunt*, published originally in 1979, Anthony Browne elaborates and pays tribute to Crockett Johnson’s *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (Doonan 1996, 232): all the books of the series (*Bear Hunt, A Bear-y Tale, Bear Goes to Town*) revolve around the adventures of a little white bear who has a magic pencil that draws him out of problematic situations and incidents, as everything he draws comes into existence. They are instances of a narrative metalepsis or metafictive picture book, where

Bear functions as both a character constructed within the text and as an authorial figure who actively creates and changes the discourse of the text. By transgressing his narrative function, Bear disrupts the conventional hierarchy of relations between character, narrator and author. (McCallum 1996, 592)
Bear goes back and forth between the fictional world and the author's world every time a problem arises, breaking the boundaries between the two dimensions (Lewis 2001, 85). Furthermore, the picture book also serves “socio-political ends” (Doonan 1996, 232) addressed to the adult (aloud) reader. Besides the more evident criticism of hunting, *Bear Hunt* also shows Browne’s criticism of war. His pacifist message is to be found at a visual level, where there are clear references to World War II. Two hunters, Bear’s antagonists, are driving a green jeep, typical of World War II. On close inspection, we can see that the wheels of the jeep do not touch the ground, as if flying. Also, the symbol of the Japanese flag (the red rising sun) can be seen on the car doors: the hunters’ car hence resembles a World War II Japanese fighter aircraft. Similarly, close to the front wheel, we can see the shark mouth of the US ‘Warhawk’ fighter aircraft. That is, the two hunters are associated and concurrently represent two main World War II opponents. Since the two symbols are depicted on the same vehicle, it can be inferred that there is no good side in a war. The allusion to the war is finally confirmed at the end of the picture book when the protagonist flies away on a white dove.

The setting of the story is a jungle as suggested by the palm trees and the exotic flowers in the background. This jungle is composed of surrealistic details typical of Browne’s style: “plants are wearing white collars and colourful ties, a blob has eyeglasses, fish are swimming through the jungle, and a flower has tennis shoes for leaves” (Cullinan and Person 2005, 123).

In the first Italian translation (henceforth referred to as TT1), published by Mursia Editore as *Orsetto e i cacciatori* [Little Bear and the Hunters] eleven years after the source text, the name of the translator is not mentioned. The title in Italian diverges from the English. The diminutive-affectionate form –etto in Italian is added to make a noun sound smaller or sweeter and it is a typical feature of Italian children’s literature. In this case, the word Orsetto evokes a teddy bear. This change makes the protagonist closer to something all children are familiar with, namely toys, thus associating him with positive experiences and sensations. Interestingly, the focus is different too. In the Italian title, there is no reference made to the fact that the protagonist is the victim of the hunt.

On the other hand, the target title of the 1999 translation, *Caccia all’Orsetto* [Little Bear Hunt] (henceforth referred to as TT2), adheres more closely to the source title even if the name of the protagonist is still translated into the diminutive Orsetto. The book was translated by Giulio Lughi for Einaudi Ragazzi and appeared in a collection of the three books of Bear’s adventures entitled *Orsetto e matita* [Little Bear and the Pencil]. The format is also different from the original: it does not have the square format and the full-page images
of the original. In fact, it is rectangular, thereby affecting the layout in that the images are smaller and framed by the white page.

With regard to the narration, as Lewis points out, Bear continuously crosses the borders between the fictional and the author’s realms (Lewis 2001, 85). Accordingly, at a visual level,

[to] hamper this slippage between realms, whenever his Bear is in the act of drawing, Browne strips away the colourful, surreal jungle that acts as a backdrop to most of the scenes and places the character against a blank, white surface. He thus appears to float in the ether, somewhere alongside his own creator. (ibid.)

Similarly, the verbal narration alternates the simple past account of a third person narrator with its own intrusions by directly addressing the protagonist. For example, the narrator warns him with remarks such as “Look out! Look out, Bear!” or by commenting on his clever solutions to escape the hunters’ traps, such as “Well done, Bear!”, yet without being visually signaled by the traditional quotation marks. When seen within the perspective of the performance and of the reading-aloud situation involved in the genre, these incursions are performance (lexical) instructions that stage-direct the adult aloud-reader and which, together with the pictures, create the reading-aloud situation.

As observed by Toolan, the verbal text for Bear Goes to Town is made of short sentences and is greatly “dependent (…) on the pictures to articulate developments and connections that the text does not spell out. Consequently, a rather high degree of inference-making is required from the reader/listener” (Toolan 2001, 201). Toolan also suggests that this is not generally a problem for children, who love the book despite its difficulties.

When analyzing TT1, this seems to present an enormous challenge – both for the child and especially for the adult reading aloud. This difficulty is detected in the Italian translation when suspension points are added in the very first pages.

ST: One day Bear went for a walk. / Two hunters were hunting. / They saw Bear.

TT1: Un giorno Orsetto stava passeggiando… / Due cacciatori, che stavano cacciando… / …videro Orsetto.

Backtranslation: One day Little Bear was walking… / Two hunters, who were hunting… / …they saw Bear.
Besides the change in the paratactic structure, the Italian translation warns the adult reader that something is to be expected, adding further punctuation instructions and giving the adult aloud-reader clear advice on the text structure. S/he has to build up suspense because the sentence does not end until the following page.

TT2 adopts other strategies:

TT2: Un bel giorno, Orsetto esce a passeggiare. / Ad un tratto arrivano due cacciatori. / I cacciatori vedono Orsetto che passeggia.

Backtranslation: One fine day, Orsetto goes for a walk. / All of a sudden two hunters arrive. / The hunters see Little Bear who is walking.

The concise source text is expanded in TT2 with typical narrative formulas such as Un bel giorno [One fine day] and an adverbial phrase, Ad un tratto [All of a sudden]. This addition makes the clausal relations clearer. This can be ascribed to one of the hypothesized universals of translation, that is, ‘explicitation,’ or the tendency to “spell things out rather than leave them implicit” (Baker 1996, 180; with regard to children’s literature see also Puurtinen 2004 and Ippolito 2013). A subordinate sentence specifying the picture is also added (I cacciatori vedono Orsetto che passeggia [The hunters see Little Bear who is walking]). This is a “verbalization of the pictorial information” (O’Sullivan 2005, 103), which has an explicative function. All of these changes help the adult reader in his/her mediation of the text by providing him/her with a more accessible and livelier text.

The need to support the adult’s performance and enliven the text can also be detected in the fact that the past tense is replaced by the present tense in TT2. As noted by Lathey, “[it is precisely] the visual attributes of the present tense, together with the nature of the interaction between adult reader and child listener, [that] are particularly relevant to the picture book” (Lathey 2006, 136).

The original text moves on by showing one of the hunters’ first attempts to trap Bear in a big butterfly net and Bear starting to draw a stumbling wire to escape. The verbal text reads:

ST: Look out! Look out Bear! / Quickly Bear began to draw.

The two Italian translations are very similar except for the present tense used in TT2. They are, to different degrees, adherent to the ST. Both TT1 and TT2 maintain the recurrent structure of the narrator’s warnings to Bear,
exclamatives directly addressing the protagonist (“Run, Bear, run!”; “Look up, Bear!”; “Clever Bear!”; “Do something Bear!”). Both of them exploit one of the figures of speech typical of children’s literature, the epizeuxis, or the immediate repetition of a word, in this instance for emphasis:

**TT1:** Attento! Attento, Orsetto! / Svelto svelto, Orsetto si mise a disegnare.

**Backtranslation:** Careful! Careful, Little Bear! / Quick quick, Little Bear began to draw.

**TT2:** Attento! Attento Orsetto! Orsetto comincia a disegnare...

**Backtranslation:** Careful! Careful, Little Bear! Little Bear begins to draw.

The double spread that follows shows the hunter who has just stumbled on Bear’s wire. The voice of the narrator intervenes again. In this case, both translations diverge from the original:

**ST:** Well done, Bear!

**TT1:** Ah! Ah! Ben fatto Orsetto!

**Backtranslation:** Ah! Ah! Well done Little Bear!

**TT2:** Sistemato il cacciatore!

**Backtranslation:** The hunter is dealt with!

In TT1 two interjections (phonosymbolic instructions indicating triumph and laughter) are added to enliven the text, whereas TT2 opts for an informal expression. The hunters’ second attempt at catching Bear is with a lace, as depicted in the next double spread. Again, the narrator advises Bear (“Run, Bear, run!”) and he holds his pen to draw a rhinoceros in order to escape.

The fact that the pen is magic is never stated in the ST. Its magic properties and the subsequent solution deriving from Bear using his pen are only inferred. However, in TT1 the inference-making process is assumed to be too challenging for the child to comprehend and too challenging for the adult reader to mediate. The ‘magic’ property of the pencil is hence made explicit in the translation. It is an explicative facilitation accompanied by the addition of the conjunction ‘but.’ As such this is another example of explicitation.
This does not occur in TT2, which opts for the repetition of the sentence as in the first attempt, still with a view to making the text more enjoyable for the children.

ST: Out came Bear’s pencil.

TT1: Ma ecco la matita magica di Orsetto.

Backtranslation: But here comes Little Bear’s magic pencil.

TT2: Orsetto comincia a disegnare...

Backtranslation: Little Bear begins to draw...

Next, one of the hunters tries to catch Bear, pointing a rifle at him. This is depicted in the illustration. The ST seems to create a type of dialogic situation in which it is not the narrator who intervenes within the narration but one of the hunters, who shouts, “Stop!” As in the cases of the narrator’s interventions, there are neither quotation marks nor the name of the speaker. It is also somewhat ambiguous since the only voice heard up to this moment was that of the narrator. However, this exclamative does not have the same repetitive structure as the other narrator’s warnings, in which Bear is always openly addressed. TT1 prefers to translate it as a narrator’s comment. In this way, the translator of TT1 helps the adult reading aloud in the oral rendition of the story by making the narrator speak instead of the hunter, using the interjection Uffa! [What a nuisance!] and commenting: “The hunter again!!”. TT1 opts for a recursive structure without requiring the adult reader to mime a dialogue.

ST: Stop! The hunter’s back...

TT1: Uffa! Di nuovo il cacciatore!!

Backtranslation: What a nuisance! The hunter again!!

TT2: Altolà! Di nuovo il cacciatore!

The second translation replicates this sort of dialogic situation, so that the ‘Stop’ of the hunter is translated with Altolà [Halt], evoking military vocabulary. As TT1, it substitutes the suspension points with exclamation marks.
The next page shows a picture without any verbal text. It depicts the solution drawn by Bear when the hunter points the rifle at him: he folds the barrel of the rifle. Since this cannot be immediately evident and amounts to a relatively long pause for the adult reader, the sort of formula used when Bear is thinking up solutions is repeated in TT1, together with a warning for the hunter.

**ST:**


**TT1:** Ben fatto! Attento, cacciatore!

Backtranslation: Well done! Be careful, hunter!

TT2 follows the source text and no verbal text is inserted.

The hunters’ last attempt is made with a cage and Bear is finally caught. Yet Bear draws a saw, cuts the bars of the cage and escapes. The verbal text of the original repeats the same structure of the narrator’s comments. The two Italian translations enrich the ST with two informal expressions that emphasize Bear’s ability and two interjections. TT2 also involves the child readers with the appellative ‘friend’ for Bear.

**ST:** Clever Bear!

**TT1:** Ah, che furbacchione!

Backtranslation: Ah, what an old fox!

**TT2:** In gamba, eh, l’amico Orsetto!

Backtranslation: On the ball, eh, our friend Orsetto!

In the next double spread, Bear falls down a hole in the ground. He shouts, “HELP,” written in capital letters in the ST. The capital letters, employed to mark the salience of the words and a different pronunciation, are neutralized in TT1. This might be due to the fact that the Italian publisher does not deem the capital letters important (either on account of inaccuracy or inexperience). The dash, which leaves the image to recount the event indicating a pause, is also omitted, being uncommon in Italian. This suggests that probably the adult reader is not thought able to read it properly. Capital letters are kept in TT2, but still without a dash.
ST: HELP – !

TT1: Aiuto!

TT2: AIUTO!

As usual, Bear finds a solution. He draws a dove and flies away:

ST: So Bear escaped… / …and the hunters were left far, far behind.

TT1: E così Orsetto se ne scappò via… / lontano, molto lontano dai cacciatori.

Backtranslation: And so Little Bear ran away… / far, very far from the hunters.

TT2: Così Orsetto se ne va… /…e i cacciatori restano là!

Backtranslation: So Little Bear ran away… / and the hunters stay there.

TT1 is very close to the ST while TT2 adds a final rhyme, perhaps signally a more performance-oriented translation strategy.

Conclusions

Picture books have an intrinsic dual audience. Crossover picture books in particular exploit these different readerships by addressing both the child and adult readers. Thus, two implied readers are created by the author, simultaneously conveying a specific image of the child but also a specific image of the adult. These two images may differ when picture books are translated. This is all the more the case in crossover picture books, which reveal themselves to be fruitful loci for detecting and investigating these changes.

*Bear Hunt* by Anthony Browne and its Italian translations are a case in point. Contrary to Berman’s “retranslation hypothesis” (1990), which states that the first translation is usually more target-oriented than retranslations, the first Italian translation shows a more apparent adherence to the source text. (The past tense of the original text is retained, for example.) However, the seemingly simple short text of the original is considered too difficult for the Italian child. At one point, Bear’s pen is explicitly identified as magic in
the Italian TT1. Later, a dialogue is modified to make the reading of the text more comprehensible. This type of intervention also suggests that the adult reading aloud is not considered capable of coping with this complex situation and of mediating it for the child reader. Similarly, the analysis shows that s/he is also thought not to be able to deal with Browne’s minimal text; it is therefore enlivened with exclamation marks and interjections. That is, the adult is assisted with performing his/her task by using strategies that contribute to a more readable and enjoyable text. Yet, the challenging contrast between the somewhat dry verbal text and the rich pictures of Anthony Browne’s original text – which is instrumental in presenting the theme of the war – is toned down so that even the message for the adult loses its strength.

The second translation is even more performance-oriented while at the same time more trusting of both the adult and child readers’ interpretive skills. Even if there is a verbalization of the visual text at the very beginning, the use of capital letters and the interpretation of the difficult dialogical exchanges between the different voices, as well as the maintenance of the primary inference on which the source text is based, reflect an increasing genre awareness and a confidence in the adult reading aloud. The translator of TT2 is so aware of the reading aloud situation that both rhymes and the present tense are used to make the adult’s reading more vivid. As for TT1, the translator’s choices tended to make the text more traditional for children, once again mitigating the message for the adult.

To conclude, the diverse solutions in the two Italian translations reveal different images of the child and of the adult reading aloud compared to the source text. Both target texts, in different ways and to different degrees, help the adult reader in his/her reading performance of the text for the child. Translation decisions made in TT1 and TT2 suggest efforts to liven up an apparently dry text. However, TT1 also tended to mediate the content, adding a fundamental explicitation that suggested its dual audience was not thought to be capable of dealing with the implicitness of the source text. The strategies aimed at making the text more fun and exciting also appear to have a lightening intent, as they mitigate the disquieting but central theme of war. This calls into question not whether children can deal with such themes, but rather whether adults can.
Bibliography


