
‘If I’ve arksed youse boys once, I’ve arksed youse boys a thousand times!’: Translation Strategies in the German Translation of Phillip Gwynne’s *Deadly, Unna?*

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The primary focus of work in the area of translation studies is to observe the continuum in which a translation takes place; the textual and extratextual constraints imposed on the translator (Bassnet & Lefevere 1998, pp. 123-4) when creating a translation strategy. The following aspects have been cited as most integral to the study of translated children’s literature: (1) the assumption that children’s books build bridges between different cultures; (2) text-specific challenges to the translator; (3) the polysystem theory which classifies children’s literature as a subsystem of minor prestige within literature; and (4) the age-specific addressees either as implied or real readers (Tabbert 2002, p. 303).

The merging of cultural studies with translation studies in the 1970s gave rise to the polysystem theory as a way of viewing the function of literary translation in a certain (cultural) context or system. The final product of the act of translation is the result of the relationship between a ‘source system’ and a ‘target system’ (Even-Zohar 1981). In viewing translation as part of a transfer process, the translation occurs from one language to another, but also from one system to another (Shavit 1986, p.111). Children’s literature exists within this literary polysystem. This article will focus on the key question of how certain Australian cultural signifiers are transferred from the Australian source text to the German target text through the act of translation.

Following Wilhelm von Humboldt’s view that a language is embedded within its speakers (Lefevere 1992, p.40), ‘culture’ can be defined as both ‘knowledge and behaviour’ and ‘expectations and norms’ so that language is judged as an expression of both the culture and the individuality of the speaker who observes the world through the given language (Snell-Hornby 1988, p.40). The translator must be both bilingual and ‘bicultural’ (Snell-Hornby 1988, p.40). In terms of ‘testing’ the translation, it is important to observe the interrelationship between language and culture, cultural values associative with context, the translatability of a culture, meaning, and variability of language and culture.

The traditional principle applied to the translation of children’s literature is that a translator should be free to

alter the content of the source text to such an extent that spelling, idioms, cultural signifiers, language, length, illustrations, names and setting are changed in order to make the translation more comfortable for the foreign child reader. Scholars talk about the translator’s ‘manipulation’ of the target text: changing, enlarging, abridging, deleting or adding material so that the target text reduces the flavour or ‘spirit’ of the original. According to Shavit, these translational procedures are permitted ‘only if conditioned by the translator’s adherence to two principles on which children’s literary translation is based’: (1) adjusting the text to make it appropriate and useful to the child (in accordance with what society regards, at the time, as educationally ‘good for the child’); and (2) adjusting the plot, characterisation and language in harmony with society’s perceptions of a child’s ability to read and understand certain material (Shavit 1986, pp.112-113).

This maxim no longer applies (in the same, rigid form) to modern-day translations. Translators maintain a didactic focus, but there are, generally speaking, fewer major alterations made to the text. For example, the omission of an entire chapter from the target text, as was done in the German translation of Colin Thiele’s *Blue Fin* (1969), would be unlikely to occur these days. So-called ‘deviations’ from the source text still take place, most commonly in the form of ‘local context adaptation’ (Klingberg 1986). A translator will adapt references to the source culture so that they become more familiar to the cultural context of the target reader (e.g. changing ‘footpath’ to ‘sidewalk’ for an American audience). However, the main issue for consideration in contemporary works of translated children’s literature is connected to the translator’s strategy. There seem to be two very clear paths open to the translator upon forming a translation strategy: to domesticate the text (making it easier for the juvenile reader by employing domestically familiar equivalents) or to foreignise the text (deliberately moving the reader closer to the foreign source text’s culture).

Phillip Gwynne’s *Deadly Unna?* (1998) was translated by Cornelia Krutz-Arnold as *Wir Goonyas, Ihr Nungas* (2002). *Deadly Unna?* is the story of an 14 year old white kid called Blacky who lives with his large family in a small South Australian sea-side town. Blacky plays Australian Rules

football in a team made up of both white and black kids. Gwynne's second and third novels, *Nukkin Ya* (2001) and *Jetty Rats* (2004) also appear in German translation. These novels, which are categorised as young adult fiction, are each drawn from Gwynne's teenage experiences in rural South Australia.

Other Australian children's works translated by Krutz-Arnold include Robyn Klein's *People Might Hear You* (1983) as *Niemand darf dich Hören* (1988) and Victor Kelleher's *Brother Night* (1990) as *Bruder Nacht* (1996). Krutz-Arnold won the 'Sonderpreis' of the *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* (Engl. *German Young Adult Literature Prize*) in 2002 for her work as a translator of English-language children's literature into German. This was awarded in the same year that her translation of *Deadly Unna?* (*Wir Goonyas, Ihr Nungas*) was short-listed for the prize.

There are many and varied Australian-specific cultural signifiers found in this particular text. The strong Australian flavour and temperament of *Deadly Unna?* make it a particularly interesting text for analysis. The setting is a small, backwater country-town and draws upon the themes of bush, rural-life, and the sea. For a German audience, these aspects reference the images of Australia that are most commonly beamed across the world. Sport, and all the jargon or 'sports-talk' that accompanies Australian Rules football and cricket is also central to the narrative framework of *Deadly Unna?*. Language plays a key role: Gwynne's narrative relies heavily on the use of colloquial Australian English as well as Aboriginal English. Also, the narrative discourse is often very slangy, colloquial and filled with the youth speak of both Australian English and Aboriginal English speakers. He also uses snippets of Nunga language: the native language of the Nunga people of southern South Australia. Lastly, there is a strong metanarrative of race, which provides a reference to the problematic issue of race in Australian society. This theme provides the main cultural-political context for the narrative.

Firstly, let us observe the source text title. Ironically, the phrase 'deadly unna?' needs to be translated into Standard English: 'deadly' means 'cool/great/fantastic' and 'unna' is a shortening for 'isn't it?'. Therefore, a Standard English

translation could therefore be 'Cool isn't it?' The Translated Text (TT) title is *Wir Goonyas, Ihr Nungas*; 'Goonya' means 'a white person/people' in southern South Australia and 'Nunga' is a self-referential term for the Aboriginal people from the same region. In German, the pronoun 'wir' means 'we' and 'Ihr' describes 'you plural/you all'. Therefore, the TT title back-translates to 'we goonyas (we white people), you nungas (you aboriginals)'. In assessing whether the translated title is an authentic re-presentation of the source text title, one needs to ask what kind of ideas the title leads the addressee (in this case, the German reader) to consider.

The TT (German-speaking) reader could potentially reach the conclusion that (a) the book is about Anglo (white) Australians versus Aboriginal Australians; or (b) have no pre-knowledge about Australia or any of the issues central to the theme of Aboriginality and, therefore (c) simply be attracted to the different-sounding, different-looking (foreign) title. In actual fact, Gwynne has indicated that the text is not to be read from an Aboriginal perspective, but from that of a white person. The use of the pronouns 'wir' and 'Ihr' supplements the foreign elements of the title and allows the text to be received as a 'German' text, keeping it within the realm of the reader's cultural context. In this case, it is likely that the publisher's strategy was to market this book as a distinctly 'Australian' text.

Upon analysis of the main body of text it becomes clear that the primary translation strategy used by the translator is indeed one of foreignisation. It is always helpful to do a quick skim through the target text to see how the names (of characters and place) have been translated. The rationale being that if a translator has modified the names to suit the target audience (i.e. a strategy of domestication) then it is likely that the rest of the translation will follow the same path. In this target text, the names of the characters (e.g. Blacky, Dumbly Red, Pickles, Porky Fraser, Mad Dog) appear the same as in the source text. The place names (e.g. Wangaroo, Tangaratta, the Point, the Peninsula) are also transferred directly into the TT. Based on this observation alone, it is possible to reason that Krutz-Arnold's primary translation strategy is to retain as much of the original flavour of the source text as possible.

After a much closer reading of the source text against the TT, it becomes obvious that the translator has employed the strategy of foreignisation using two methods. The term ‘transference’ (Clyne 1995, p.202) denotes both lexical and semantic transfers of English words into German and takes shape in the unaltered transference of English words into the German language. This is actually quite a common occurrence in German language texts in general. Transference occurs most commonly at the lexical level (i.e. nouns, adjectives/adverbs and interjections), but also at a semantic level, where the meaning of the English word is transferred to existing German ones (Clyne 1995, p.202). The latter will not be discussed in this analysis.

The other method used by Krutz-Arnold to support her strategy of foreignisation is footnoting. As a translation strategy, footnoting is used to explain terminology that is assumed (by the translator or another mediator, such as the publisher) to be unclear to the target reader. When footnotes are employed in a translation, they often describe references that are specific to the source text culture and, as such, are a form of ‘cultural aid’. Footnoting is not commonly used in children’s translations. However, Krutz-Arnold has used footnoting in other translations from Australian English into German, namely Robin Klein’s *I Hate Alison Ashley* (1984) translated as *Ich hasse Alison Ashley* (1987) and Gwynne’s second novel *Nukkin Ya* (2001) translated as *Blacky, Lovely und der ganze Bullshit* (2003). In both of Gwynne’s texts, the footnotes include the confirmation ‘Anm.d. Ü’ or ‘Annehmung des Übersetzers’ (Eng. *Provided by the translator*) thereby marking the footnote as the translator’s personal contribution; the translator (and not another mediator such as the publisher) is thereby authorised as the supplier of the added information.

With adaptations occurring so frequently in translated children’s literature, the strategy of footnoting is favoured because it pushes the reader closer towards the (foreign) source text culture. Brigit Stolt has argued in favour of retaining foreign elements, rationalising that the child is more than able to put up with difficulties and strange, foreign names if the story is a good one, but that ‘the strange milieu’ that accompanies translated texts is precisely what is so important about them (Klingberg et al 1978, p.137). In an effort to limit the frequency of adaptations in the translation

of children’s literature, notes or aids are good options that allow this ‘strange milieu’ to be maintained.

In *Wir Goonyas, Ihr Nungas* most of the footnotes describe Australian-specific words, phrases, references, practices, terminology, persons, and so on. This means that, most of the time, the Australian English word or phrase is transferred directly (unaltered) into the target text (e.g. football, Vegemite, galah, Slim Dusty). There are also instances in which Australian English words or phrases have been transferred with minor alterations (e.g. the word ‘corroboree’ is translated as ‘Korrobori’) or a German equivalent has been used, but a footnote is supplied to provide extra contextual information. For example, the word ‘pastie’ (Gwynne 1998, p.4) is translated as ‘Fleischpastete’ (Gwynne 2001, p.8), which is the German equivalent word for ‘meat pie’. The text follows:

*Often he’d be eating a **pastie** at the same time, a trail of tomato sauce dribbling behind (p.4)*

*Oft Futterte er im Laufen auch noch eine **Fleischpastete****, sodass er eine Spur aus tropfender Tomatensoße hinter sich Herzog (p.8)*

The translator has also provided an explanation of a ‘meat pie’ in a footnote. She explains that ‘meat pies’ are an Australian national food and, with a similar ‘status’ as the German ‘Wurst’ (Engl. *Sausages*). Her explanation is a little odd, given that a ‘pastie’ is, in fact, a vegetarian pastry. Nevertheless, by using a footnote, the translator shows how an equivalent term can be produced within the cultural context of the source text, for the benefit of the target readership.

An additional category must be created for the following two cases of implementing footnotes, which are used to describe terms that have been transferred in their original form into the TT but cannot be described as Australian-specific terms. Firstly, there is a reference to the children’s book-series ‘Biggles’ (p.48); and, secondly, a reference to the sport ‘Netball’ (p.58). While neither term can be described as Australian-specific (the ‘Biggles’ series is British in origin and netball was founded in the US) both are very relevant to the cultural context of Australia. This means that most, if not all Australian readers (depending on the generation to which one belongs) would be familiar

with both 'Biggles' and 'netball'. Rationalising the use of a footnote in both of these cases, one could assume that these examples are best categorised as culturally unrecognisable to target readers and, therefore, in need of some form of extra explanation.

However, the main risk in employing footnotes as a translation strategy is the inconsistent nature of assigning some words a footnote, and not others. For example, the word 'Kookaburra' is transferred into the target text as 'ein Kookaburra' (direct transference of the Australian English form) despite there being a German equivalent: 'Lachender Hans' (Engl. *laughing Hans*) in existence. The translator has opted to transfer the Australian word into the TT and to explain the meaning of the word in a footnote instead of using the German equivalent. But, so that the reader can still comprehend the text, she mentions the German name 'Lachender Hans' in her footnote, as well as giving a meaning behind the word 'kookaburra'. One cannot help but question why the translator would import a foreign word when an equivalent already exists (although one could argue that the equivalent term may be just as unknown in Germany as the imported version).

The decision of when and when not to use equivalents is obviously difficult, particularly when other Australian-specific references, such as 'Milo', are replaced in the TT with German equivalents. This presents an obvious inconsistency: if 'kookaburra' survives in its unaltered form, why not 'Milo'? The trouble with using equivalents is that accurate equivalents do not always exist in the target language. For example, 'Milo' (p.84) is substituted in the target text with the German equivalent 'der Kakao' (p.91), which, in English, back-translates as 'cocoa'. Because 'Milo' and 'Kakao' both represent a chocolate-milk beverage, the equivalent works, because it creates the same effect for the target reader. However, a 'Tim-Tam' (p.35) is translated as 'ein Karamellbonbon' (p.40) which, when back-translated, simply means 'fudge'. In this case, the translation is suggesting something completely different to what is implied by the source text reference. The decision to replace 'Tim-Tam' with a culturally familiar equivalent in the target text has a far greater bearing on the cultural context of the text; the translator has ignored the Australian cultural significance of the Tim-Tam. One could argue

that the 'Tim Tam Slam' (as it has become known), the practice of drinking a hot beverage while sucking through a Tim-Tam with both ends bitten off, can be defined as a cultural practice specific only to Australia. This situates it within the specific cultural context of Australia and, as such, becomes an important cultural signifier in the source text. Indeed, if the word 'vegemite' can be transferred directly into the target text (the translator adds the phrase 'a spread' to make it clear to her readers) one can certainly question the translator's decision to ignore the cultural significance of the Tim-Tam.

But there are some true gems in this translation, one of which is the way the translator has tackled the expression 'arks'. 'Arks' relates to the mispronunciation of the verb 'to ask'. The character of the football coach uses this utterance so frequently that the kids nickname him 'Arks'. The following passage opens the novel:

'If I've arksed youse boys once I've arksed youse boys a thousand times, don't buggarise with the bloody ball on them flanks, kick the bugger up the bloody centre.' (p.3)

One can imagine the translator's reaction upon reading this first passage! But she tackles it sensitively, creatively, and, most importantly, successfully by taking the German noun 'to say' - 'sagen' and morphing it into a non-existent word, 'sarksen' which is as close as one can get to a perfect replication of the Australian English-variation used in the source text. More importantly, the magic of this utterance is captured and the translator is then also able to maintain the cheeky nickname of 'Arks' without the need for any explanation or major alteration to the text. Examples of this kind highlight the art of translation, particularly in tackling aspects of the text such as slang and colloquialisms; all of which can present tremendous difficulties to a translator.

In her translation of *Deadly Unna*? Krutz-Arnold has shown how a strategy of foreignisation can be both supplemented and enhanced by making use of tools such as footnoting. Some translators may question her decision to import so many foreign words into the target text, particularly in light of the traditional (didactic) perspective, but in doing so, one can also argue (quite strongly, in fact) that she has successfully maintained the intense Australian flavour that Gwynne is renowned for. In terms of the text's reception

by German audiences, one can only assume that various factors, such as the established Anglo-American influence upon the German language (particularly as a reaction to the xenophobia of the National Socialist era) as well as the American-English influence in West Germany, and the movement of the lingua franca towards English have already increased the degree of English usage in everyday German-language texts. Furthermore, most German school children learn English; advertising, pop music, computer games, film and television are all cultural mediums that frequently and consistently feed English into the German language. This means that translations, particularly those from English, are likely to reflect these changes in language use so that, in this context, the strategies employed by Krutz-Arnold 'make sense' and it is unlikely that the approach of foreignisation would cause confusion or misunderstanding to German juvenile readers.



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