

Article

Children's Literature in Translation: Towards a Participatory Approach

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Abstract: In the Netherlands and Flanders, more or less a fifth of all children's books are translations. The decision of what gets translated and funded is, for the most part, informed by adults' decisions. This paper offers a first step towards a more participatory approach to the translation of books for young readers by investigating children's understanding of translation processes and the criteria that they put forward as desirable for the international circulation of children's books. It presents the findings from interviews and a focus group talk with child members of the "Kinder- en Jeugdjury Vlaanderen", a children's jury in which the jurors read both original and translated works. While the children did not always realize which books were translated, they did express clear views on their preferred translation strategies, highlighting the potential to learn about other cultures while also voicing concern about readability. They cared less about exporting their own cultural heritage to other countries, and put the focus on the expansion of interesting stories to read as the main benefit of translations. While this project still involved a fairly high level of adult intervention, it makes clear the potential of children to contribute to decisions about the transnational exchange of cultural products developed for them.

Keywords: Children's literature; translation; participatory approach; cultural exchange

1. Introduction

Translations comprise a substantial part of children's reading in many countries. On one hand, they are praised for helping children gain an understanding of other nations and cultures, thus even contributing to world peace ([Lathey 2006](#), p. 2). On the other hand, several literary scholars are critical of the dominance of Anglophone countries in the international children's book market, and of the translations strategies that obscure the foreign elements in a text to facilitate the child's reading ([Shavit 2006](#); [O'Sullivan 2005](#); [Lathey 2010](#)). In the Netherlands and Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), roughly a fifth of children's books is translated, mostly from English ([Van Baelen 2013](#), pp. 29, 35). Translations are highly valued and some receive government support. Translators and foreign publishers can apply for funding with Flanders Literature or the Dutch Foundation for Literature respectively. In its mission statement, the latter explains that it aims to "enhance [...] the quality and diversity in literature and contribute to the distribution and promotion of Dutch and Frisian literature nationally and internationally" and thus to "foster a rich and most diverse literary climate that pays attention to literary heritage and new developments in literature and publishing" ([Dutch Foundation for Literature 2018](#); my translation). Flanders Literature works with similar aims.

When it comes to the translation of children's books in the Dutch-speaking countries, children's voices are not directly or systematically taken into account. By and large, the selection, production and funding of children's books in translation are governed by adults, who make assessments about the target audience's literary tastes, educational needs and cognitive abilities ([O'Sullivan 2005](#); [Oittinen 2000](#)). Previous research has shown that adults can err when assessing children's capacities for

understanding and appreciating texts that include foreign concepts, or that their ideological preferences may differ (Sung et al. 2016; O'Sullivan 2005, p. 94). This paper offers a first step towards a more participatory approach to the translation of books for young readers. While previously, small-scale reader response studies (e.g., Sung et al. 2016; Cámara Aguilera and Faber 2015) have examined children's appreciation and understanding of translations to assess the effect of certain translation strategies, my approach is different: I have deliberately asked for children's opinions about translations and translation strategies. A participatory approach takes into consideration children's own views on the production of the cultural products that they consume, and aims to boost their agency as decision makers in cultural processes and research (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 2016, p. 216). It goes beyond traditional empirical reception studies:

The adult-dominated nature of our field limits children's voices to reader-response research, which usually objectifies young readers. We propose that a new frontier of our field lies in repositioning currently popular theories and approaches to children's texts within a child-centred framework that overtly reflects our acknowledgement of young readers as subjects and agents of change who have the right to co-construct the political, economic and socio-cultural realities they share with adults (Chawar et al. 2018, pp. 111–12).

In particular, this article introduces the results of a small-scale, qualitative empirical research project that explores the awareness of ten- and eleven-year-old readers about translations and their understanding of foreign concepts, and teases out their opinions about translated children's books and their preferences for certain translation strategies that are related to foreign elements in the text. While this project still involved too high a level of adult intervention to qualify as a participatory research project as described by Chawar et al., it makes clear the potential of children to contribute to decisions about the transnational exchange of cultural products developed for them. Making children's voices heard is particularly complex and claims of authenticity are inevitably fraught. As Erica Burman stresses, "conflating compliance with competence and power in developmental or educational assessments" is a common mistake (Burman 2013, p. 230). I follow Spyros Spyrou's advice and consider the participants' responses as "social and co-constructed instead of individual, fixed, straightforward, linear or clear" (p. 152). That being said, some children's opinions returned regularly and were expressed emphatically, even when challenged or when other options were offered. Their engagement in the debates also showed that the topic of translations was of interest to them.

2. Participatory Research and Adult Intervention

Central to participatory approaches that involve children is the idea that "children are the driving force of their own development and develop through their participation in the world around them" (Shier et al. 2012, p. 3). Rather than making decisions on behalf of children, participatory research actively seeks their involvement, and lets them set a research agenda and develop a research strategy. This project started with goals that were set in advance: I wanted to investigate child readers' views on translations, in order to supplement, and perhaps correct, adults' assessment of what children are able and willing to read when it comes to foreign books. An additional aim was to explore to what extent children care about sharing their own cultural heritage with readers in other parts of the world. Inviting this kind of participation can be challenging, and the risk of adult manipulation and tokenism may occur (Hart 1992, p. 8). For this project, I acknowledge a fairly high level of adult intervention. An adult took the initiative and led the interviews and focus group discussion, making use of some prompts to make sure the debate was focused on material that all the participants had access to. The children, their parents and the school director were informed about the methods and purpose of the research: to consult children about their knowledge and views of translations, and, in a later stage, to develop research that would take children's views into account when translation policies for

children's literature were applied and revised.¹ We chose a setting where the children were expected to feel comfortable: the interviews and later focus group discussion were all conducted in the so-called "reading salon" at school, where they had also had meetings with their book club before. I chose not to adopt the "least-adult" or "adult-as-friend" role (Spyrou 2011, p. 154) during the conversations, since I handed out the prompts, asked the questions and sometimes also gave some background information (for example about the percentage of translated books in Flanders and the Netherlands). To some extent, this put the children in a subordinate role. However, I also made explicit that the aim of the research was to see how children felt about translation choices and strategies, putting them in the role of "experts" and leaving room for diverging opinions, which did indeed emerge. From the start, the children's interest in the project was clear, and they expressed their satisfaction at having been able to contribute.

3. The Children's Jury

All five child participants were members of the so-called "Kinder- en Jeugdjury Vlaanderen" (KJV, Children's and adolescent jury Flanders), a literary jury set up by the reading promotion organization Iedereen Leest (Everybody reads). This project is to some extent already participatory in nature: the voluntary members are young readers (age four to 16) who enjoy reading books in their spare time, like debates about books and are interested in exploring new titles. Iedereen Leest has set the division into age groups and organizes the selection of titles. They recruit adult mediators, who nominate titles published in the previous year for the children to read; the books are divided into different age categories, spanning two years each, to ensure that the children's reading is appropriate for their age. For each age category, eight titles are listed, which the members are then invited to read. While some children register as individual members who share their views and vote online, most children will come together in small groups where they participate in (usually adult-led) discussions of the books. These reading groups are mostly set up in libraries, book shops and schools. At the end of the KJV year, in April, the children list their favourite books and submit them online. The winners for each age category receive the Flemish Children's Jury Award in a ceremony that also includes children, and is accompanied by workshops for young jury members, where they can meet some of the authors and illustrators whose work they have been judging. Each year, over 8000 children take part (Iedereen Leest 2018).

For this research project, the KJV selection provided a unique opportunity for discussion with child members. First of all, it provided an interesting selection of books to discuss: the KJV book lists typically consist of a mixture of Flemish, Dutch and translated titles. Second, it was time-efficient: rather than having to instruct children to read books specifically for this project, I could rely on their experience with the books for the jury, which had been concluded a few weeks before the interviews and focus group talk were conducted. Third, the children were already acquainted with each other and well-practiced in sharing their views about books. Fourth, the children's KJV experience allowed them to reflect on translations in conditions that did not interfere with their usual handling of the books. They had read them without having the issues that we discussed in mind. During the KJV debates about the eight titles in which they had already participated, and which had been led by volunteers at their school, the children had talked about the main themes of the books, and had been able to express their likes and dislikes. Neither the origin of the books or the issue of translations had specifically been addressed.

¹ The project is part of an application for a Marie Curie International Network grant. The larger project investigates the transnational dissemination of cultural heritage for children, and involves several studies in which children's participation will be key. The interview was audiotaped, and the subsequent focus group discussion was videotaped. The tapes were transcribed and anonymized—the children's names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms. The school's and parents' permission was secured, and the children were informed that their participation should be voluntary and could be ceased at all times without negative consequences. The treatment of their personal data was GDPR compliant.

The reading list for this age group (10–11 years old) consisted of eight titles published in 2016. Three of them were Flemish. *Alarm op Spitsbergen* (Mayday on Spitsberg) is written by Dixie Dansercoer and Reina Ollivier, and illustrated by Wilbert van der Steen (Dansercoer and Ollivier 2016). This is an adventure story about an international group of children who are invited to a climate summit, set on Spitsbergen, the Norwegian island close to the Arctic Ocean. Co-author Dixie Dansercoer is a Belgian explorer of the Arctic who provided inspiration and a fact check for the story. *Floris Oudbloed: Over een kabeljauw, leugens en de maffia* (Floris Oudbloed: About a codfish, lies and the mafia) is written by Stefan Boonen and illustrated by Tom Schoonooghe (Boonen 2016). The title refers to the protagonist of this adventure novel, a boy who discovers that he is related to the mafia-type Oudbloed family. *Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders* (Astonishing truths and fascinating facts about knights) by Sarah Devos is part of a series of humorous nonfiction titles for children (Devos 2016). The so-called professor Kleinbrein (Smallbrain) introduces the middle ages and knighthood for children. In addition to the three Flemish books, three Dutch titles were listed, which will not be specifically discussed in this article.² Finally, the KJV reading list also contained two translations. *Keverjongen* by M.G. Leonard was originally published in the UK as *Beetle Boy* and translated by Esther Ottens (Leonard 2016). This adventure story is set in London. A boy looking for his father, a scientist who has disappeared from the Natural History Museum, discovers that he has a special talent for communicating with insects. *Stukjes hemelblauw* by Sue Durrant is also a British book (*Little bits of sky*), translated by Nan Lenders (Durrant 2016). This orphan story is also set in London. The protagonists, the siblings Ira and Zac, are placed in a foster home called Skilly and are hoping to be adopted. The interviews and focus group talk mainly focused on these two translated books, as well as on the titles by Flemish authors and illustrators.

The child participants had read all eight books, although some mentioned that they did not finish all of them because of lack of time or interest. This number was small and did not reveal a bias for original works or translations. By the time that I interviewed the children (May 2018), they had cast their votes and the overall winners had been announced. The winner was the Dutch *Alaska*, while the two translations were the runners-up: *Keverjongen* ended second place, and *Stukjes hemelblauw* third.

4. Awareness of Translations

In a first stage, five children (aged 10 to 11, four girls and one boy), were interviewed individually. The aim of this stage was to find out more about their awareness and general appreciation of translations and to assess the possibility of a focus group talk about translations with children in this age group. Do they know what a translation is? Were they aware that they had read translations for the children's jury, or in their other reading? And if so, how did they know? Do they like reading translations, or do they find them more difficult than books originally published in Dutch?

First, the children were asked if they could say in their own words what a translation is or what a translator does. Four children expressed the idea that a translator rewrites a text in a different language; the fifth (Melanie) had only a vague idea: she did not mention the transfer between two languages, but spontaneously referred to dictionaries. She did not realize at first that translators consult dictionaries to look up foreign words for target-language equivalents, but rather thought that they use these dictionaries to look up the meaning of words. After a short explanation, she immediately understood the difference. By the fifth grade (age 10 or 11), children in Flemish schools have started to learn French and, in some cases, English. Learning a foreign language at this stage often involves studying lists of vocabulary and making short translation exercises. Since these children have a basic awareness of what translation involves (or easily grasp it after a short explanation, in the case of Melanie), they can be involved in reflections about translations.

² *Alaska* by Woltz (2016), *Meneer Jules of het einde van alles* (Mister Jules or the end to everything) by Van de Wijdeven and Beck (2016) and illustrated by Françoise Beck, and *Wat niemand ziet* (What no one sees) by Niemeijer (2016).

However, the next part of the interviews made clear it cannot be assumed that children at this age actively pay attention to aspects of translation when reading these books. As Emer O’Sullivan argues, “an awareness of authorship develops quite late, and the realization (not present even in many adult readers) that a translated text is in fact a translation comes even later, if at all” (p. 95). When asked whether they knew that they had read translated books for the children’s jury, two of the children (Sanne, Melanie) said that they had not realized; the others (Nick, Nora, Tanja) said that they had been aware. Their criteria for identifying the translations, however, proved not always reliable (and the same may be true for adult readers, but that lies beyond the scope of this research). All children were asked which titles they thought had been translated and how they knew. The most common parameters for children to identify translations were the setting and the authors’ names. Four of them relied on setting (Nick, Tanja, Melanie, Sanne). In some cases, this helped them make a correct assessment. Tanja, for example, remembered that “Skilly” (the orphanage from *Little bits of sky*) was set in England and thus deduced that the book must have been translated. However, the setting of a book is not always a reliable criterion to identify its origin. Both Sanne and Melanie assumed that *Alarm op Spitsbergen* was a translation because of the Nordic setting, when in fact it was published in Flanders. Four children (Nora, Nick, Melanie, Sanne) relied on authors’ names to identify translations. Again, this sometimes proved helpful, but also led to various mistakes. Sanne correctly identified Sue Durrant as a foreign author, but thought she was Russian. Melanie singled out both foreign authors but thought Durrant was French and Leonard was German.

Nora, Tanja and Nick knew that the paratext of a book can be helpful in identifying a translation. As Nora explained: “Sometimes you can read that in the book: translated.”³ Nora also referred to the names of the characters and to the vocabulary. Sometimes the children relied on other knowledge to make their assessment. Sanne, for example, knew that Rachel Renée Russell’s *Dork Diaries* series is also read in other countries. She claimed she could identify translations because they sometimes contain mistakes, such as the wrong article (de/het), but could not recall any specific titles where such mistakes had occurred. When talking about translations in their reading outside of the children’s jury, four children were able to spontaneously list and identify titles and authors correctly. It was striking, though not surprising, that all were Anglophone: the British authors Roald Dahl (Nora and Tanja) and David Walliams (Tanja), and Anglophone series fiction, such as *Dork Diaries* (Nora, Sanne, Melanie), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Nora) and *Tom Gates* (Sanne).

Even though the children’s parameters for identifying translations were patchy, their interest in translated books, and their ability to recall and reflect on their reading gave me confidence that they were able to make an informed and critical assessment of desirable approaches to the translations and intercultural exchange. Unlike in fully participatory research projects (see [Hart 1992](#); [Chawar et al. 2018](#)), the reflection on translations was not prompted by the children’s spontaneous interest, but rather the result of my (adult) intervention. However, the interviews did make clear that the children cared about translations and that Tanja and Nora in particular enjoyed talking about them and actively asked questions. While the other children expressed their interest in the subject, the two girls spontaneously elaborated on their answers, offering clear views and nuanced reasoning. All five children expressed their appreciation for translations (Tanja called David Walliams her favourite author), and several claimed that they did not find reading translations particularly difficult. Implicit in some of their answers was an interest in intercultural exchange. Nora stressed that translations introduce you to things unfamiliar in Belgium, such as new names, words and cities. Melanie highlighted that the repertoire of books available for reading is increased through translations. Both Sanne and Tanja expressed concern about the quality of translations and potential mistakes. Tanja, moreover, expressed dislike for literal translations: “sometimes small mistakes occur or things

³ All the quotations from the interviews and focus group discussion are my own. Original quote: “Soms staat dat in het boek: vertaald.”

that can be written like that in English, but that are sometimes literally translated into Dutch. That is odd to read. But usually I don't really pay attention."⁴ Within the small group that was interviewed, some children proved more attuned to authorship and translations than others. More importantly, the interviews increased my confidence that this group of children would be interested in a critical reflection on translation strategies and policies in the subsequent step of the project, which was a small focus group discussion.

5. Focus Group Discussion

In addition to the children's critical abilities and general interest in the subject of translated books, the interviews made clear that they often had trouble remembering specific passages, names and titles. This was not surprising since they had read the eight books we were discussing several weeks or even months prior to the interviews. To make sure that communication during the focus group talk was efficient and to ensure that everybody could talk about the same topic, I developed a few prompts for the children to reflect on the translation. Four children participated in the focus group discussion: Tanja, Sanne, Nick and Nora.⁵ As Hogan (2016, p. 246) explains, "The value of group discussions in participatory research with children includes that children are accountable to their peers and engage in dynamic conversations that shape the discussion in ways not possible during one-to-one interviews" (p. 252). This also proved to be case for this group. The downside was that some children dominated the discussion—especially Nick, who had already proved to be a more thoughtful, slower thinker during the interview, intervened less during the debate and only responded when I explicitly asked him for his opinion.

At the start of the discussion, the children were asked if they remembered what a translation was. This time, Tanja gave a long explanation that took into account various aspects of intercultural exchange, including institutional and commercial factors: "A book that is written for instance in English or another language, but if the publishers like it and want to make it available worldwide, they translate it into the languages where they want to sell it. Because of that, people can read it there."⁶ When asked about the tools and skills a translator needs, the children mentioned a dictionary (Nora), the book itself (Sanne), and a good knowledge of Dutch (Sanne, Nora) and the foreign language (Nora). Tanja here repeated her dislike of literal translations, which she had already expressed in the interview. When asked whether a translator of *children's* books needs any additional skills, Nora responded positively: "I think that he should need to get along with children well, because it happens that some things are written in English that children can understand, but that is not really adapted to children and when he then translates that literally, it's not very good for children, and you might write it differently."⁷ This hints at a view of translation that allows for adaptations of the source text to facilitate the understanding of the target audience. Sanne and Tanja endorsed this idea by adding that translators should avoid difficult words (Sanne) and "translate difficult words to children's words so that children understand more" (Tanja).⁸

To test this idea in practice, we discussed the first prompt that was handed to the children: two photocopied pages from *Keverjongen* (pp. 18–19), Esther Ottens' translation of *Beetle Boy*. The children were asked to read the passage and to highlight words they did not know or did

⁴ "dan staan er soms wel kleine foutjes in of dingen die in het Engels wel zo kunnen geschreven worden, maar soms letterlijk worden vertaald in het Nederlands. Dat is raar om te lezen. Meestal let ik daar niet zo hard op."

⁵ Melanie withdrew from the discussion because her parents did not give permission for the focus group talk.

⁶ "Een boek dat bijvoorbeeld in het Engels of in een andere taal geschreven is, maar als de uitgevers dat goed vinden en ze willen dat wereldwijd maken, dan vertalen ze dat in de talen uit de landen waar ze dat willen verkopen. Daardoor kunnen de mensen dat daar lezen."

⁷ "Ik denk dat die wel goed met kinderen overweg kan, want soms staat er in de Engelse taal wel iets dat kinderen wel kunnen begrijpen, maar dat niet echt op kindermaat is geschreven en als die dat letterlijk in zijn hoofd vertaald, is dat niet zo goed voor kinderen en kan je dat anders opschrijven."

⁸ "moeilijke woorden vertalen naar kinderwoorden zodat kinderen dat meer begrijpen".

not understand. Ottens has applied a so-called “foreignizing” translation strategy (O’Sullivan 2005, p. 93; Chesterman 2004, p. 258), which means that the Dutch text contains various British names and concepts that are left untranslated and unexplained. In this case, the foreign concepts were Scotland Yard (p. 18), “Fish-and-chips” (p. 18) and the name Bartholomew Cuttle (p. 19). My expectation here was that the children would mark at least some of these words, either because they were not familiar with the meaning or because the words were hard to read because of the foreign spelling. After all, these children were not yet learning English as a foreign language in school, and while Flemish children are exposed to Anglophone culture a lot, it cannot be assumed that they are familiar with the specifically British notions of Scotland Yard and fish and chips. Strikingly, only one of the children (Tanja) highlighted one of the foreignized words (Fish-and-chips). The rest of the words that the children marked were all Dutch words.⁹ That did not mean that they understood all the foreign concepts, however. When the others were asked if they could explain what “fish and chips” meant, it turned out that they did not quite get the sense either:

Vanessa: Ok, what does that mean, “fish-and-chips”?

Sanne: Fish and crisps.

Tanja: Yes, but that is not an actual dish?

Vanessa: Is it fish and crisps?

Nora: No, it’s definitely fish, but I think it’s fish and potatoes.¹⁰

The Dutch word for “crisps” is also “chips” (similar to American English)—hence the confusion. None of the children knew that chips here refers to fries, and that fish with fries is a typical British dish (it is less common in Belgium). A similar misunderstanding occurred with “Scotland Yard,” which most children could not explain. Nora thought it referred to a person, and Tanja said she had thought the same. Sanne believed it referred to a country (taking Scotland as a clue). Only Nick was able to explain “Scotland Yard” as referring to “the detectives in England, where they investigate all sorts of things.”¹¹ He said that he had learned the concept from books.

The children’s overall experience with Ottens’ foreignizing translation confirms O’Sullivan’s view that “in reading—as in life—children are always being confronted by elements that they do not yet grasp and cannot understand, and so, in the process of learning to read, if it is a successful one, young readers can develop strategies that help them cope with such things: they skip something that is incomprehensible to them or refuse to allow minor disruptions to interrupt the flow of reading” (O’Sullivan 2005, p. 95). This strategy apparently even works when children are specifically asked to mark difficult or incomprehensible words. When the participants were asked whether they were disturbed by the fact that the text contained words they did not know or misunderstood, they disagreed:

Vanessa: Are you bothered that you don’t know this [the sense of the words]?

Tanja: Yes.

Nora: I am not. I just ask my dad, and then my dad says: “Take a dictionary.” If it’s in English, like Scotland Yard, a difficult English word like that, then he explains and if he doesn’t know himself, he’ll simply look it up.

Vanessa: And what about you, Tanja?

⁹ The words that the children marked were the following: Nora: gevoelloos (insensitive), grimas (smirk), vastberadenheid (steadfastness), ernstig (serious), salueerde (saluted), welteverstaan (that is to say), ingelijste (framed), zandkleurige haar (sand-coloured hair), dakraam (roof window), avondhemel (evening sky) Tanja: grimas (smirk), Fish-and-chips welteverstaan (fish and chips that is to say), brok in zijn keel (lump in his throat), avondhemel (evening sky) Sanne: zwerver (tramp), beteuterd (disappointed), grimas (smirk), vastberadenheid (steadfastness), ingelijste (framed) Nick: gevoelloos (insensitive)

¹⁰ Vanessa: Oké, wat wil dat zeggen, “Fish-and-chips”? Sanne: Vis en chips. Tanja: Ja, maar dat is toch geen gerecht? Vanessa: Is dat vis en chips? Nora: Nee, dat is sowieso vis, maar ik denk dat dat vis en aardappelen zijn.

¹¹ “de detectives in Engeland, waar ze allemaal dingen uitzoeken”

Tanja: What was the question again?

Vanessa: If you are bothered?

Tanja: Yes, I am bothered, because if it's a lot of words, I always have to go and ask. I like it better when I can just read on in a book and don't have to go and ask all the time.

Nora: If there are many words, then it's annoying. But if it's just three words in one book ...

Tanja: Then I don't mind either.¹²

Tanja and Nora's conversation is reminiscent of the famous British translator Anthea Bell's views. She wanted "to avoid putting young readers off by presenting them with an impenetrable-looking set of foreign names the moment they open the book ... You must gauge the precise degree of foreignness, and how far it is acceptable and can be preserved" (Bell cited in O'Sullivan 2005, p. 97). Tanja was indeed the only child who had marked a foreign word, and of all the children, she was again the one most concerned with translation strategies. The assignment confirmed her preference for translations that are geared towards accessibility for the target audience. The other children, by contrast, had either glanced over the foreign elements or, in the case of Nora, considered these instances as learning opportunities.

As a consequent step, we then considered different translation strategies for the specific concepts in more detail. The children first filled out the next prompt, which offered an overview of four British names and concepts that appear in *Keverjongen*: Scotland Yard, Fish-and-chips, Natural History Museum and Bartholomew Cuttle. For each, three options were listed for the translation, with an increased degree of cultural context adaptation:

1. A foreignizing translation that left the British concept or name unchanged
2. A translation with some degree of adaptation: extra explanation for Scotland Yard ("the headquarters of the London police"),¹³ a literal translation ("vis met frieten" for fish and chips), and Dutch transliterations for the British names ("Bartholomeus Cuttel"; "het Natuur Historisch Museum")
3. A domesticating translation with a high degree of cultural context adaptation, that replaced the foreign names and concepts with Dutch equivalents: "de politie" (the police) for Scotland Yard, "stoofvlees met frietjes" (beef stew with fries) for fish and chips, and "het Museum voor Natuurkunde" and "Walter Janssens," for the Natural History Museum and Bartholomew Cuttle respectively

Once again, Tanja, who had expressed her irritation with foreign concepts that inhibit the flow of her reading, had a clear preference for adaptation, choosing two literal translations (vis met frieten, het Natuur Historisch Museum), and a naturalizing translation strategy for Scotland Yard (politie). She only wanted to leave the name Bartholomew Cuttle as it was. Sanne had similar preferences (het hoofdkwartier van de Londense politie, vis met frieten, het Museum voor Natuurkunde, Bartholomew Cuttle). Nora, by contrast, stuck with her conviction that foreign words are not an issue, and consistently chose foreignizing translations (Scotland Yard, Fish-and-chips, Bartholomew Cuttle), except for the literal translation of the Natural History Museum (het Natuur Historisch Museum). Nick, who had barely marked any words in his text fragment, sided with her view but did choose a transliteration (Bartholomeus Cuttel).

¹² Vanessa: Vind je dat lastig als je dat eigenlijk niet echt weet? Tanja: Ja. Nora: Ik vind dat niet. Ik vraag dat gewoon aan mijn papa en dan zegt papa: "Neem dan eens een woordenboek." Als dat in het Engels is, zoals "Scotland Yard", zo'n moeilijk Engels woord, dan legt hij dat uit en als hij dat zelf niet weet, gaat hij dat gewoon opzoeken. Vanessa: En jij, Tanja? Tanja: Wat was de vraag ook al weer? Vanessa: Of je dat lastig vindt? Tanja: Ja, ik vind dat wel lastig, want als dat veel woorden zijn, moet ik dat altijd gaan vragen. Ik heb liever dat ik dat boek gewoon kan doorlezen en niet heel de tijd gaan vragen. Nora: Als het er veel zijn, is dat wel vervelend. Maar als dat maar drie woorden in één boek zijn ... Tanja: Dan vind ik dat ook niet erg.

¹³ "het hoofdkwartier van de Londense politie".

In the subsequent discussion, the children further developed their views. Tanja explained why she opted against a level of cultural context adaptation that would completely erase the foreign character of a book:

Tanja: If you change, for example, ‘Fish-and-Chips’ into ‘beef stew with fries,’ then it’s actually something very different from what the author actually wrote. It’s just a small detail, but it’s still something different. So then it’s really a bit wrong. Also with names. I think names should simply remain what they are, because the author wrote it like that. Then it shouldn’t be all changed into a Flemish name.¹⁴

Nora, who had previously defended foreignizing translation strategies and mostly opted for those, acknowledged that she did find the British elements more difficult to understand, but nevertheless preferred them “because that is the real name.”¹⁵ Sanne also raised the issue of consistency. She did not choose “Walter Janssens,” the domesticated translation for Bartholomew Cuttle, because “maybe that character has a child. That would be English then. Then you really have to change everything.”¹⁶ Tanja adds to this: “Or if you change some things and others not, then it gets complicated. ‘Is this an English one or a Belgian one?’ You get confused.”¹⁷ With these deliberations, the children displayed a comprehensive grasp of translation strategies and their consequences. Moreover, while they disagreed on the level of adaptation, their deliberations made clear that they respected the efforts of the author and wanted to retain the qualities of the source text as much as possible. For this reason, all of them rejected domesticating strategies that would obliterate the Britishness of the text. Their opinions slightly differed on the desirable degree of adaption in the form of transliterations and translations of foreign words, but it was clear that the cultural context in which the text originated and the coherence of the text mattered to them.

6. Views on Intercultural Exchange

From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that the children wanted to maintain the British character of *Beetle Boy*. In the final stage of the group discussion, we talked about their reasons for wanting to read foreign books, and their views on exported Flemish books. The overall goal was to learn more about the children’s views about intercultural exchange. This was explored in two stages: their views on the export of Flemish children’s books to other countries on the one hand, and their views on the import of foreign children’s books to Flanders. For the first, I again used a prompt to make sure the discussion was focused on material that all the participants were familiar with. The children each received a photocopied page with the three covers of the Flemish books they had read for the children’s jury: *Alarm op spitsbergen*, *Floris Oudbloed* and *Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders*. They were invited to imagine that they had the power to choose and fund one book for translation. This led to the following ranking (Table 1).

¹⁴ Als je bijvoorbeeld van “Fish-and-Chips” “stoofvlees met frietjes” maakt, is dat eigenlijk iets helemaal anders dan wat de schrijver eigenlijk heeft geschreven. Dat is maar een klein detail, maar het is toch iets anders. Dan is dat eigenlijk wel een beetje fout. Ook met namen. Ik vind dat de namen gewoon moeten blijven hoe ze zijn, want die schrijver heeft dat zo geschreven. Dat moet ook niet helemaal naar een Vlaamse naam veranderd worden.

¹⁵ “want dat is de echte naam”

¹⁶ “Ik heb dat niet gekozen, misschien heeft dat personage een kind. Dan is dat wel Engels. Dan moet je echt alles veranderen.”

¹⁷ “Of als je sommige dingen niet gaat veranderen en andere dingen wel, dan wordt dat ingewikkeld. ‘Is dat nu een Engelse of een Belgische?’ Dan weet je het niet meer zo goed.”

Table 1. Children’s ranking of Flemish books elected for translation.

	Nick	Sanne	Tanja	Nora
1.	<i>Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders</i>	<i>Alarm op Spitsbergen</i>	<i>Floris Oudbloed</i>	<i>Floris Oudbloed</i>
2.	<i>Floris Oudbloed</i>	<i>Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders</i>	<i>Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders</i>	<i>Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders</i>
3.	<i>Alarm op Spitsbergen</i>	None. *	<i>Alarm op Spitsbergen</i>	<i>Alarm op Spitsbergen</i>

Note: * Sanne explained that she had not read *Floris Oudbloed*.

The difference in their rankings can be explained by their literary preferences, and the previous discussion had already shown that the children put a lot of emphasis on a good story in assessing the desirability of a translation. I was curious to hear what other selection criteria they would list besides this and, given the previous discussion, I had expected them to pay more attention to cultural aspects than they actually did. On the one hand, the children’s criteria were didactic: the ability to learn about knights (Nick), the mafia (Tanja) and the impact of global warming (Tanja, in an effort to help Sanne, who found it hard to express why she had listed *Alarm op Spitsbergen* first) and to teach readers to have more respect for the environment (Tanja). On the other hand, their rankings were informed by literary criteria that are typically associated with reading pleasure: suspense (Tanja) and humour (Nora, Tanja). None of the children thus spontaneously named intercultural exchange, although it may be implicit in Nick’s idea that his preferred book teaches children facts about knights. While such a book would not introduce European children to an element foreign to their cultural history, it might do so for children in other part of the world.

The subsequent discussion made clear that the children thought in global rather than European terms when they considered intercultural exchange. I asked them whether they thought any of the three books might teach children abroad something about Flemish culture. Nora imagined that *Floris Oudbloed* would be exported to Africa. Her view of Africa seems to be informed by human aid campaigns that highlight poverty and rural settings: “in Africa, for example, I don’t want to be racist, but in Africa people have far less toys and far clothes. Here you have many buildings and cars.”¹⁸ Nick thought about unnamed countries with different landscapes: “it is set in Belgium and with few hills. For some other countries that is not the case.”¹⁹ His argument may have been inspired by previous comments about *Alarm op Spitsbergen*, a book set in hilly Spitsbergen. Sanne marked *Floris Oudbloed* because Floris is a Belgian name. Tanja was the only participant to consider cultural heritage: “I chose ‘the knights’ [*Wonderlijke weetjes en fascinerende feitjes over de ridders*], because that all happened in the past and now it may be different, but that also happened in Flemish culture of the past. That also has to do with culture, that we do not have anymore, but did before. Then you also learn about that.”²⁰ While the children did not object to books teaching something about Flanders, they did not seem to care about it much:

Vanessa: Would it be important to you, when you choose a Flemish book, that it should also represent something typically Flemish, or does it not matter?

¹⁸ “in Afrika bijvoorbeeld, ik wil niet racistisch zijn, maar in Afrika hebben ze veel minder speelgoed en veel minder kleren. Hier heb je veel gebouwen en auto’s”

¹⁹ “dat is ook in België en met weinig heuvels. In sommige andere landen is dat niet”

²⁰ “Ik heb ‘de ridders’, omdat dat allemaal vroeger gebeurd is en nu is dat wel anders, maar dat is ook vroeger in de Vlaamse cultuur gebeurd. Dat heeft ook te maken met de cultuur, die wij nu niet meer hebben, maar dat was wel vroeger. Daar leer je dan ook veel over.”

Sanne, Tanja, Nora: No.

Tanja: I don't really notice.

Nora: If you should say it should be not Flemish but Belgian culture, then you could say: "I am now going to the *frituur* [Belgian kind of snack bar] and the fries were really delicious." That is from our country.

Vanessa: Would you think that's important or does it not matter?

Nora: It's not important, but that way you would know that it belongs to Belgian or Flemish culture.

Vanessa: Yes, and you would like that?

Nora: I would like that, because then our country would also be named in books, but it is not important.²¹

The children's conversations made clear that they cared more about learning about foreign cultures than teaching other children about their own. Moreover, though asked about Flemish elements and culture (because this includes language), the children automatically zoomed out to think more about elements of landscape, Belgian and Western culture. This complies with Faulks' view of citizenship as "a series of expanding circles" (Faulks 2000, p. 3) rather than as a stable and fixed identity. The children identified their "culture" on multiple scales (regional, national, Western European) and imagined their translation policies accordingly.

7. Conclusions

The small scale of the research presented here has its obvious limits, and the participants, moreover, had a specific profile: all were avid readers who were voluntary members of a book club and thus well practised in thinking and expressing ideas about literature. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn from the interviews and discussion. First, except for one participant, most of the children did not distinguish between original and translated works during the reading process or made false assessments in hindsight. Second, most children did display an interest in reflecting about translations and an ability to do so eloquently and with nuance. Even if they did not all agree on certain points, in particular the desirable level of adaptation for foreign concepts, they were able to reflect on their personal experiences with translated books and assess the implications of certain translation strategies on a more abstract level. Third, all children valued translations because they introduce them to new stories and to other countries even if they clearly felt less pressed to share something of their own cultural heritage with the rest of the world. Their main interest in the intercultural exchange was in the expansion of the number of good stories that are available (both for them and for children in other countries).

As explained above, the current research does not qualify as a participatory research project because of the fairly high level of adult intervention and the short time span. The children's skills and enthusiasm for the topic, however, raise confidence that such an approach would make sense for future research. At the end of the focus group talk, they themselves expressed interest in learning more about the purpose and results of the research, and the short-term project raised their curiosity for research about literature in general. One of the questions they asked me in the final part of the focus group talk is why I did this kind of research and what got me interested in their perspective in

²¹ Vanessa: Zou dat belangrijk zijn voor jou, als je een Vlaams boek kiest, dat dat voor jou ook iets heeft dat typisch Vlaams is of maakt dat niet zoveel uit? Sanne, Tanja en Nora: Nee. Tanja: Mij valt dat niet echt op. Nora: Als je zegt: "Dat moet geen Vlaamse, maar Belgische cultuur zijn". Dan zou je zeggen: "Ik ga nu naar de frituur en de frietjes waren heel lekker." Dat is van ons land. Vanessa: Dat zou je belangrijk vinden of maakt dat voor jou niet uit? Nora: Dat is niet belangrijk, maar daardoor zou je wel kunnen weten dat het van Belgische of Vlaamse cultuur is. Vanessa: Ja, en dat zou je wel tof vinden? Nora: Ik zou dat wel leuk vinden, want dan wordt ons land ook eens genoemd in boeken, maar dat is niet belangrijk.

the first place. I explained to them that I had led KJV discussion groups myself and that I was part of a network that explores cultural transfers in Europe that also aims to give children more agency in intercultural exchanges. I communicated the results of the project to them in a shortened version of this article in Dutch.

Moreover, the following points raised by the children deserve further consideration. Nora mentioned that she would like to know before she started reading whether a given book was a translation or not, in order to anticipate on difficult words. Sanne said it would be handy to know this for a book presentation. More paratextual information, on the cover page rather than in the colophon (Tanja: “But that is really very very small print. I never read that.”), would help the children who are interested in other cultures make this assessment.²² Finally, while the children clearly liked translations from English, and Nora mentioned that you also learn some English from this recurrent exposure, they did say they would like to read translations from other countries and continents (ranging from Germany and France to China and Africa). While their actual experience with such books are limited because of current adult-governed translation policies, the children did express a clear willingness to try a broader spectrum of translations than what is currently offered to them.

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²² “Maar het staat wel in het héél héél klein. Ik kijk nooit naar daar.”

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