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APPROACHES TO THE TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH OUTPUT IN ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA[1]



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Abstract

The last two decades have been instrumental in reviving the interest in children's literature as a legitimate field of academic study, especially when approached from a translatological point of view. In Romania, as well as in the Republic of Moldova, the surge of interest in translated children's literature led to in-depth studies while academic journals have also had pathbreaking special issues. We are going to look into the Romanian and Moldovan research output on this topic (doctoral

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research, books, scientific events, special thematic issues etc.) and the way it relates to and correlates with major worldwide trends in this field.

Keywords: *children's literature, text analysis, translation (meta)criticism, doctoral research, comparatism, descriptivism, multimodality, translatorship, illustratorship, research output*

Introduction

The long and winding road which led to children's literature as a legitimate field of study in its own right has had its highs and lows, yet the last two decades have been instrumental in its academic establishment, due (to a great extent) to translation scholars who chose to focus on it.

In the present paper, we considered looking into the Romanian and Moldovan research output on the topic of children's literature in translation as reflected in four major areas:

1. doctoral research in the field (which inevitably entails publishing articles and books, at some point)
2. books and chapters in books which are not necessarily the product of doctoral research
3. scientific papers which are not connected with PhD research, and which may at times be brought together in thematic issues or collective volumes
4. scientific events or research projects focusing on translated children's literature (because these, too, usually result in written material of some sort).

Looking into the Romanian and Moldovan contribution to the topic at hand is obviously not possible without implicitly assessing the way this research relates to and correlates with major worldwide trends in this field. As a result, we will place this contribution on the larger canvas of European research (with special focus on a Routledge edition published in 2025) after outlining two major stages in the evolution of this sub-field (namely research until 2009 and between 2010 and 2025).

This overview will likely act as a roadmap for future researchers in the field while also offering a foundational understanding of Romanian and Moldovan research in translation at large.

Back-translation into English is always ours.

Research until 2009

As it can be seen from the list presented in the table below, most of the studies published between the 1980s and the first decade of the 21st century dealt with either children's literature or Romanian children's literature, offering a bird's-eye-view of the topic and occasionally paying attention to a particular corpus.

Year	Author	Title	Publisher / Place
1988	Hristu Cândroveanu	*Literatura română pentru copii* [Romanian Children's Literature]	Bucharest: Albatros
1999	Adela Rogojinaru	*O introducere în literatura pentru copii* [An Introduction to Children's Literature]	Bucharest: Oscar Print

2006	Muguraş Constantinescu	*Les contes de Perrault en palimpseste* [Perrault's Tales as a Palimpsest]	Suceava: "Ştefan cel Mare" University Press
2006	Iuliu Raţiu	*O istorie a literaturii pentru copii* [A History of Children's Literature]	Chişinău: Prut
2007	Florica Bodiştean	*Literatura pentru copii şi tineret dincolo de "story"* [Children's and Youth Literature beyond the "story"]	Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă
2008	Mihaela Cernăuţi-Gorodeţchi	*Literatura pentru copii. Sinteză critică* [Children's Literature. A Critical Survey]	Iaşi: Universitas XXI
2009	Diana Vrabie	*Literatura pentru copii. Analize literare* [Children's Literature. Literary Analyses]	Chişinău: Integritas
2009	Olga Morar	*Literatura română pentru copii până în 1940* [Romanian Children's Literature until the 1940s]	Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut

Table 1. *Research between 1988 and 2009*

In her book *Romanian Children's Literature until the 1940s*, Olga Morar provides a brief history of children's literature in Romanian during the interwar period and devotes an entire chapter to translations from other languages. An important aspect covered in Olga Morar's work is the attitude of literary magazines for children towards the act of translation. Magazines such as *Dimineaţa copiilor* [Children's Morning] or *Universul copiilor* [Children's Universe], the activity of which covers a two-decade span in the interwar period, publish texts for children translated from other languages, to which, subsequently, an increasing number of original texts in Romanian were gradually added. In general, the magazines contain constant references to and translations from world literature, predominantly French, followed closely by Italian, German, English (Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain), Spanish, Danish, Swedish (H. C. Andersen and Selma Lagerlöf), but also from Eastern languages such as Chinese.

In the paper "Traduceri din literatura pentru copii" [Translations from Children's Literature] published in the literary magazine *Luceafărul românesc* (s.a., no. 43), Olga Morar notes the rigor with which manuscripts submitted for publication are analyzed, with critical observations published in the "Letters to the Editor" section. These metatextual notes seem to constitute an early stage of a possible manual for translators of children's literature into Romanian, with the aim of educating both the reading public and amateur translators who submitted texts for publication. Here is an example of such a critical observation:

> Aşa cum se întâmplă cu limba română, îşi are şi limba franceză construcţia ei, îşi are particularităţile, proverbele ei etc. De aceea a lua o bucată în limba franceză şi a o tra-

duce cuvânt cu cuvânt, nu înseamnă că ai făcut o traducere bună. Traducerea este bună, atunci când, fără să te ţii de textul francez, cum s-ar spune, ca 'orbul de gard,' ai izbutit să scrii într-o limbă românească aşa de bună, încât cititorii să nu poată bănui măcar că au înaintea lor o traducere. Bineînţeles, o asemenea traducere nu este lesne de făcut. Trebuie să cunoşti cât se poate de bine atât limba franceză, cât şi limba română.

[Just as Romanian has its own structure, so too does French have its own structure, with its particularities, its proverbs, and so on. That is why taking a passage in French and translating it word for word does not mean you have produced a good translation. A translation is good when, without clinging to the French text, so to speak, "like a blind man to a fence," you have managed to write in a Romanian language so good that readers cannot even suspect that what lies before them is a translation. Of course, such a translation is not easy to achieve. One must know both French and Romanian as well as possible.]

As a specific issue within the larger field of Translation Studies, translation for children is therefore relatively recent in Romania. Initially analyzed as a subtype of corpus and focused on an author/a book/a genre, children's books in translation—usually literary works—have increasingly attracted the attention of Romanian researchers, later establishing themselves as an independent subfield of translation studies that deserves to be systematized and developed.

A landmark book could be considered Muguraş Constantinescu[2]'s *Lire et traduire la littérature de jeunesse* (published in Suceava, with a preface by Jean Perrot, a pioneer of children's literature research, and subsequently reedited by Peter Lang in 2013). Muguraş Constantinescu relies on concepts borrowed from literary theory and translation criticism (e.g. reading, rereading, retranslation, writing, rewriting) in order to propose a critical reading of the original text, carried out from the exegete's perspective. Translation thus becomes one of many possible interpretations of a children's masterpiece, which implies and opens up the potential for multiple versions, one for each generation of readers.

Little by little, the issue of translating children's literature has been included in academic curricula (courses in Translation of Children's Literature being introduced into undergraduate and master's programs in translation studies, e.g. at Suceava University: at the undergraduate level in English and French, students are offered a course in Translation of Children's Literature/Books, which analyzes both text-based translation problems and strategies for the promotion/marketing of translated books).

This opening towards translated children's books is most often due to the researchers themselves who publish in the field and who are frequently also experienced translators (Muguraş Constantinescu, for example, translated Perrault's

[2] Muguraş Constantinescu (b. 1951) is a Romanian writer, translator and translation theorist. She is Professor of French Studies at "Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava and editor-in-chief of the academic journal *Atelier de traduction.* She coordinated research projects on literary translation, among which a history of translations in the Romanian language from the 16th century to the present.

tales in their entirety, in a version that preserves the ambiguity of the addressee and the exoticizing elements of the source text).

We thus observe that, in the case of children's literature translation, Irina Mavrodin's[3] concept of *practico-theory* (Mavrodin, 191) is well illustrated in the Romanian context, theoretical reflection being all the more valuable and applicable to the didactics of translation precisely because it rests on a solid practical foundation. Nor should the involvement of translator–translation scholars in promoting translated books and ideas about translation through events organized for the general public be overlooked (such as the FILIT book festival) or in children's book editing and illustration projects (e.g. the *Nordica* collection, *Casa Cărții de Știință* Publishing House).

Research after 2009

After 2009, the pace of publications and events dedicated to the translation of children's literature shows an upward trend, with numerous studies, doctoral theses, monographs, and special issues focusing on this topic. There are, for instance, several PhD dissertations on translated children's literature.

Year	Author	Title	Publisher / Place
2010	Daniela Hăisan	*Proza lui Edgar Allan Poe în limba română* [Edgar Allan Poe's Fiction in Romanian] – chapter on Translations for Children	"Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava
2011	Cristina Groparu-Spiță	*Translating Children's Literature*	"Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați
2016	Iulia Corduş	*La traduction de la terminologie gastronomique dans le contexte du discours littéraire: stratégies et difficultés* [Translating Gastronomic Terminology in Literary Discourse: Strategies and Difficulties] – corpus made up of translated children's literature	"Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava
2016	Ioana-Cecilia Cosor (Botar)	*Strategii de traducere şi adaptare cu aplicație la basmele lui Charles Perrault* [Translation and Adaptation Strategies Applied to Charles Perrault's Fairy-Tales]	"1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia

[3] Irina Mavrodin (1929-2012) was a Romanian writer, translator and translation theorist. She was a Professsor of French Studies at the University of Bucharest and University of Craiova and she published academic research on translation as both process and practice.

2019	Ionela-Gabriela Arganisciuc (Flutur)	*Les contes de Perrault et leurs réécritures: adaptations, traductions, retraductions* [Perrault's Fairy-Tales and Their Rewritings: Adaptation, Translation, Retranslation]	"Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava
2019	Zamfira Lauric (Cernăuţan)	*L'oeuvre de Jules Verne en roumain: adaptations, traductions et rééditions* [Jules Verne's Works in Romanian: Adaptation, Translation, Reedition]	"Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava
2019	Gabriela-Aurelia Panait (Chiran)	*Limba română literară în traducerile succesive din Jules Verne* [Literary Romanian Language in Successive Translations of Jules Verne's Works]	"Ovidius" University of Constanţa
2020	Adela-Mădălina Adam (Măntescu)	*The Translatability of Idioms in Mark Twain's* The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*: A Translational Approach*	University of Bucharest
2022	Mădălina Şraier (Ştefănescu)	*Translating Children's Literature. Roald Dahl's Romanian Translations of* The BFG	"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi
2025	Alexandra Ana Maria Diaconiţa	*Literatura pentru copii în publicaţiile româneşti din perioada interbelică* [Children's Literature in Romanian Interwar Periodicals] – special chapter on translations	"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi

Table 2. *Doctoral Research between 2010 and 2025*

The first dissertation in the list, defended in 2010, though not focused primarily at children's literature, does contain a substantial chapter on Poe's texts translated specifically for children. In the case of the one defended in 2016, the corpus is made up of children's tales. In her doctoral research on *Children's Literature in Romanian Interwar Periodicals* (2025), Alexandra Diaconiţa notes that the delay in the publication of children's books collections, by publishers, was due precisely to the doubtful quality of the translations, in contrast with the ones produces for an adult readership: "Unul dintre obstacolele întâmpinate de editurile vremii consta în critica adusă traducerilor de o presupusă calitate inferioară." [One of the obstacles faced by publishers of the time consisted in the criticism directed at translations deemed to be of allegedly inferior quality.] (Diaconiţa, 2025, p. 8). Both Olga Morar and Ana Maria Alexandra Diaconiţa underline two of the most important guidelines for the two periodicals, a tendency towards ethnocentrism, as well as a heightened focus on the target audience.

As it can be seen in the table above, doctoral research on the translation of children's literature has been flourishing for the past fifteen years and such richness is partly motivated by the growing concern of academics in related themes, reflected in the publication in large numbers of scientific articles, chapters and thematic volumes.

As a case in point, the second volume of the *History of Translations into the Romanian Language*, published in 2022, contains a substantial chapter on translated children's literature (333 pages, 36 co-authors from 6 universities (Bucharest, Timişoara, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi, Galați, Suceava); 36 (source) languages; 3 types of translated children's literature envisaged, namely: crossover literature – major classics of world literature adapted for children; mythology and folklore, and finally texts written specifically for children). The chapter deals with translation not only of prose (which is by far the most common type), but also with children's poetry and drama in translation (as sporadic as they are). Moreover, the co-authors of the chapter never focus solely on textual analysis; they often delve into the paratextual side of the translated books they analyse, and occasionally into the extratextual side as well.

There are several thematic issues dealing with children's literature in translation, such as:

- *Atelier de Traduction* (2007), dealing with general issues;
- *Atelier de Traduction* (2021), on la *littérature verte pour enfants* (not only texts for children dealing with ecological issues but also from an eco-translatological point of view);
- *Atelier de Traduction* (2022) dealing with the history of translated children's literature.

In terms of methodology and approach, most translation studies that have analyzed children's literature in Romania have adopted a historical perspective and the one specific to translation criticism (quantitative and qualitative analyses).

Among the most common aspects discussed are:

- the phenomenon of retranslation;
- the paratext of translations;
- procedures and strategies for translating lexical/morpho-discursive/stylistic particularities;
- types of translation: complete/fragmentary translation/adaptation/retelling, and more rarely parody;
- reworkings of works from general literature.

A special type of research which has started to gain momentum in the field is that of translator's portraits, a distinct biographical genre which stems from the necessity to highlight translators' visibility, especially in the framework of Socio-Translation Studies.

Lately, such portraits have been devised for children's literature, too. See, for example, Alina Pelea's article on "Sarina Cassvan, traductrice de Perrault. Remarques en marge d'un succès d'édition" or Raluca-Nicoleta Balaţchi's communication at a conference on Romanian translators held in Vienna in 2016, in which she

argues that translators *for* children make up a category in its own right, with at least three profiles that can be identified if looked at diachronically. She thus distinguishes between translators for whom translating for children represents a cultural act, translators who see this mission as a creative act, and translators (like Muguraş Constantinescu, Ileana Cantuniari, Ioana Pârvulescu) who deem it conscious insightful translating act, in which the reflection on translation intermingles with the passion and talent for recreating a text addressed to children.

We should also mention, at this point, the publications of Irina Devderea, a researcher from the Republic of Moldova who holds PhD in Translation Studies and was trained at the Suceava school of Translation Studies.

The article "Spiridon Vangheli – l'écrivain qui traduit et qui est traduit" (*Atelier de traduction,* 29/2018, 229–236) is especially relevant in this respect, since here Irina Devderea outlines the translator facets of this well-known Bessarabian children's writer. *Pippi Långstrump*, Astrid Lindgren's masterpiece, received—thanks to the talent of this writer-translator—a Romanian version as early as 1973 (Lumina Publishing House, Chişinău), with an ingeniously devised variant to avoid an awkward confusion, *Pepi Cioraplung*, but it circulated strictly within the Bessarabian space; the translation was made through Russian as an intermediary and was published only before 1989, in the Cyrillic alphabet.

There is a lively, dynamic translation studies field, open to the general public, with book launches and interaction with readers (see, for instance, the series of books called TRADUCTIO – issued by "Ştefan cel Mare" University Press – which consists of translations done by students that are also accompanied by critical studies). In the same period, Lidia Vianu[4] has taken on the noble mission of literary archaeologist and republished, in bilingual format, several texts for children initially translated for the Romanian readership at the beginning of the 20th century: Dickens, Charles 2015(1907), *A Christmas Carol* (O noapte de Crăciun), Grahame, Kenneth, 2015 (1908), *The Wind in the Willows* (Vântul prin sălcii), translated in Romanian by Gabriela Monica Russu and Kipling, Rudyard, 2015 (1932), *Stalky and Co* (initial Romanian title *Stalky şi tovarăşii*). The translations are accompanied by the editor's short critical introductions and contain valuable information regarding the translation history of the volumes. Lidia Vianu bridges the generation gap between past and present audiences and underlines the role of children's literature translations in shaping the character of young Romanian readers and in providing intellectual shelter against the communist ideology before 1989 (Grahame, 2015, pp. 3-4).

As for conferences and scientific events dedicated to translated children's literature, they have been rather scarce, but there is growing interest in this topic. The Faculty of Letters from University of Bucharest has been organizing a workshop on visibility in translation and the last 2 editions (2024 and 2025) have been dedi-

[4] Lidia Vianu (b. 1947) is Professor of English studies at University of Bucharest and director of the online publishing house of the university, Contemporary Literature Press (https://editura.mttlc.ro). She is also a writer, a translator of Romanian literature in English and the founder of the Centre for the Translation and Interpretation of the Contemporary Text at University of Bucharest.

cated to children's literature and its translation. The Romanian Association of Literary Translators has also recently held a workshop on the challenges and strategies of translating children's books.

Research projects are even less numerous. We mention the ongoing project *Creativity and Multimodality in Translated Children's Books in Romania and Moldova since the 1990s*, a joint endeavor of researchers from the University of Suceava (Romania) and University of Bălți(Moldova), which critically investigates the importance of translation for younger audiences in the two countries, targeting especially consumers of illustrated and multimodal books.

Conclusions

Compared with international research on the same type of corpus, studies by Romanian translation scholars dealing with the translation of children's literature in the last 25 years have some points of convergence, the following topics being dealt with consistently:

- translator visibility;
- cultural specificity;
- ideology and censorship;
- retranslation.

We rely on the latest "Bible" of translated children's literature, published by Routledge last year, to also outline the topics less covered by Romanian and Moldovan researchers (among which trasmediality, multimodality, non-fiction children's books).

In conclusion, translation research focusing on children's literature has its beginnings at the turn of the century and its roots in Comparative Literature and Literary History (in Moldova, it focuses mainly on the pedagogical and educational side of this type of fiction), yet it slowly but surely grows towards interdisciplinarity. Recently, researchers' attention has also turned to the study of the translation of books for children in the field of the social and human sciences, especially those of a psychological and didactic nature, focused on the development of emotional intelligence and emotion management (Balațchi, 2025). The preferred research languages are Romanian, English, and French, but the source texts come from a variety of cultures and historical periods (covering the 19th century, the 20th, as well as the 21st).

Past research on translated children's literature was mainly focused on comparative textual analysis. However, contemporary researchers cannot ignore the transformation of the traditional idea of text: as Martha Dvořák notes, "text in the original etymological sense of *textus* (surface, material, base) signifying the concrete bottom or supporting part has mutated – mutated to an immaterial mental state, but also to other forms of material, other cultural media, transforming intertextuality to intergenericity, intersemioticity, or rather, intermediality" (Dvořák, *Crosstalk*, 2012, p. 130). New research is thus needed on the specificity of the field and on text-image interconnectedness, as well as a better correlation with international research in the field.

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