

Illustrations and their role in translation: How do images in children’s literature influence translation decisions and should they be “translated” as well? Case study: Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer German vs Albanian version

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Abstract: This article examines the crucial role of illustrations in children's and young adult literature, focusing on the extent to which visual elements influence translation decisions. It explores the dynamic interplay between text and image, the cultural dimensions of illustrations, and the challenges of adapting visual content across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Using Michael Ende's Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer as a case study—comparing the original German edition with its Albanian translation—the article analyzes how illustrations contribute uniquely to the reading experience of young audiences. It questions whether illustrations should be considered part of the translation process and evaluates the differences observed between the two versions. The analysis sheds light on whether the illustrations were retained, modified, offering a providing an overview based on comparative examples in children's literature.

Keywords: children's literature, translation, illustrations, images, visual adaptation.

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1. The Importance of Illustrations in Children's and Young Adult Books

Illustrations serve as powerful tools in children's literature, shaping not only how stories are perceived but also how they are emotionally and cognitively received. They provide visual cues that support literacy development, enhance narrative comprehension, and foster emotional connections between young readers and the characters (Nodelman, 1988).¹

According to Megan Daley (2019), “Picture books are works of art which should adorn the walls of art galleries and libraries.” In this sense, illustrations are more than embellishments—they are co-narrators. For instance, in works such Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer (translated into Albanian as Xhim Kopsi dhe Lukas Makinisti, the illustrations do not merely complement the story but shape how it is understood. Illustrations can also play a developmental role in building empathy, identity, and a connection to diverse cultures. As Bishop (1990) proposed, children's books should act as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,” allowing

young readers to see themselves and others in literature. In doing so, illustrations are crucial to diversity and representation.²

In children's and young adult literature, illustrations play a key role by enriching the narrative, visualizing the text and creating an emotional connection with readers. They support text understanding, expand the level of action and make complex content accessible, especially for young readers. In works like Michael Ende's Jim Knopf and Lukas the Engine Driver, the illustrations are closely linked to the narrative structure and contribute to the unique atmosphere. Children’s books have the extraordinary power to shape young minds, instill values, and foster a sense of empathy. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of diversity’s crucial role in children’s literature, not only in storytelling but also in the realm of illustration. Here’s a

¹ Nodelman, P. (1988). Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children’s Picture Books

² Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. Perspectives: Choosing Using Books for the Classroom, 6(3)



closer look at why diversity in children's book illustration is not just a trend but a necessity.³

Why are so important the illustrations in childrens literature ?

Reflecting Real-World Diversity

Children's books serve as mirrors and windows for young readers. In other words, they should reflect the experiences of the readers (mirrors) and offer insights into the lives of others (windows). Illustrations play a pivotal role in this process by visually representing characters, settings, and cultures. By incorporating diverse characters and backgrounds in illustrations, children see a world that mirrors the rich tapestry of real-world diversity.⁴

Cultural Representation Matters

Children's literature has the power to introduce young minds to different cultures, traditions, and ways of life. Illustrations that authentically represent diverse cultures help break down stereotypes and promote understanding. When children see characters who look like them or come from backgrounds similar to theirs, it validates their experiences and contributes to a sense of belonging.⁵

Building Empathy and Understanding

Diverse illustrations benefit children from underrepresented groups and play a crucial role in educating all children about the broader world. Exposure to characters of different races, ethnicities, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds fosters empathy and understanding. It helps children develop an appreciation for the rich diversity that exists in our global society.⁶

2. The Power of Illustrations in Children's Literature

Illustrations function as pedagogical tools, aesthetic experiences, and emotional amplifiers. Their role extends beyond visual appeal—they shape how children perceive narrative events, develop reading skills, and internalize values (Lewis, 2001).⁷

Example: F. J. Tripp's Illustrations In Jim Knopf, illustrations contribute significantly to the book's charm. The anthropomorphized locomotive "Emma" is a beloved character made vivid through Tripp's humorous and imaginative style, symbolizing adventure and companionship.

The main purpose of using illustrations in design is to bring your designs to life. They not only communicate your design concept, but they can also inspire emotions, engage your audience, and help your readers understand and retain information better. A good illustration can get your message across quickly, powerfully, and effectively.⁸

³ <https://medium.com/@mooneydesignhouse/the-importance-of-diversity-in-childrens-book-illustration->

⁴ at the same place, ibid

⁵ at the same place, ibid

⁶ at the same place, ibid

⁷ Lewis, D. (2001). Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text. Routledge/Falmer

⁸ <https://www.blackillustrations.com/blog/the-power-of-illustrations-using-illustrations-to-enhance-your-designs>

- **Essential** for understanding and making the book -story unique
- **Helpful** in building connection emotionally and empathy
- **Important** in promoting the culture of the translation, develop imagination
- **Necessary** for cultural adaptation and the society
- **Powerful** in builds language bridges and cultural comparisons

3. Challenges in Translating Illustrations

Cultures perceive visual codes—color, symbolism, and layout—in various ways. Transferring images to different cultural contexts presents difficulties because of this disparity.

varied cultural contexts can lead to varied interpretations of symbols, colors, and visual codes. A few of the pictures' visual depictions include references to European mythologies and cultural quirks, particularly German ones. For instance, a youngster from Europe will be able to identify certain legendary characters or scenes right away, while a child from Asia or Africa won't. In these situations, the translator has to choose between preserving the illustration and changing it to fit the target culture. Lukas the rail driver and Jim Knopf are another example. The german storytelling tradition serves as a strong foundation for Michael Ende's vibrant and hilarious portrayals. An international audience might not understand certain characters or visual references right away. So this is the power of a good translation, to make it acceptable and pleasant for all the young readers despite the differences of the countries.

Example: Jim Knopf Elements of German folklore and societal norms embedded in the illustrations may not resonate globally. Strategic adaptation helps preserve the story's accessibility without compromising its core identity.

4. Should Illustrations “Be Translated”?

Unlike words, images do not carry linguistic meaning, yet they are culturally and semiotically loaded. Therefore, “translating” illustrations often entails interpreting and adapting their implicit meanings for a new audience.

Modes of Illustration Translation in Jim Knopf und Lukas Lokomotivfuhrer:

- **Literal Translation:** Signs or text in illustrations (e.g., train station names) must be translated accurately and seamlessly.

Example: Jim Knopf Station signs or maps bearing German names must be adapted to the target language for clarity, especially if they are plot-relevant. The challenge lies in integrating translated text seamlessly within the visual design.

- **Cultural Adjustment:** Humor, attire, holidays, or landscapes may require visual modifications for cultural resonance. Illustrations might depict culturally bound objects or humor that do not translate well across cultures. In such cases, visual adaptation becomes necessary.

Example: Jim Knopf Depictions of German customs or holiday references may require transformation or annotation to ensure comprehension and relatability among non-German readers.

- **Relationship between Text and Images:** Graffiti, labels, or titles demand typographic adaptation without distorting artistic coherence.

Example: A strong connection between illustration and writing, where the illustration is usually at the top of the page and the text related to the situation below.

5. Case Study: Visual Analysis of Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer

Analysis of the work “Jimmy Buttons and Luke the Engine Man”

(Albas Publishing, translated by Orjela Stefasani, 2024)

Jim Knopf and Lukas the Engine Driver is a children's book by the German author Michael Ende, published in 1960. This book is among the most successful and popular children's books in the German-speaking world. Jim Knopf won the German Youth Book Prize in 1960 and was included in the 1962 Hans Christian Andersen Prize list of honors. Translations are sold in Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the USA, among others.⁹

In Albanian has two versions: (Albas Publishing, translated by Orjela Stefasani, 2024), Dudaj Publishing translated by Sokol Mici)



- **Context and importance of the work**

“Jimmy Buttons and Luke the Engine Man” is one of the most well-known works by Michael Ende, the German author who we also know for his most famous book “Momo” and “The End of Heroes”. This novel, carefully translated by Orjela Stefasani, brings a magical and philosophical world, which through an adventure story invites us to reflect on the meaning of life, time and human relationships.

The work returns with rich illustrations, which make it attractive to a wide audience, especially for adults who seek to rethink classic fairy tales with new eyes.

- **Main theme and messages**

Duration and time: Lukas' train is not just a means of travel; it symbolizes the flow of time and the way we experience it.

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https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Knopf_und_Lukas_der_Lokomotivf%C3%BChrer

Friendship and cooperation: The relationship between Jim and Lukas is a model of cooperation and trust, highlighting the importance of support and respect in life's challenges. The magic of everyday life: In their world, anything can be magical, if we look at it with the right eyes, which also reflects Albanian culture, where folklore and traditions are rich in magical elements.

- **Adaptation to Albanian culture**

Orjela Stefasani's translation manages to preserve the colors and nuances of the language, making the Albanian reader feel close to history. Through a clear and emotional style, she brings the humor and depth of the book, reflecting the optimistic and welcoming spirit of the Albanians.

Contemporary illustrations give the work a visual dimension that suits the Albanian aesthetic, making it easy to identify and enjoy for the reader.

- **Narrative style and structure**

The book's narrative is fluid and carefully constructed, where words and descriptions create a lively and warm atmosphere. The dialogues are simple, but full of meaning, and often loaded with subtle humor that breathes life into the characters and situations.

- **Importance in adult literature**

“Xhimi Kopsa and Lukas Makinisti” in this edition is not just a fairy tale for children, but a work that raises existential questions and highlights the challenges of life with ease and a smile. This makes the book suitable for readers of all ages, especially for adults who seek to find in literature something more than simple entertainment.

The book is a treasure for those who want to travel through the world of magic and reflection, finding in it also the mirror of themselves and society.

6. Comparison: German and Albanian Editions

Aspect	German Edition	Albanian Edition (Albas publishing)	Albanian Edition (Dudaj Publishing)
Style	Black-and-white, classical	Colorful, modern	Black-and-white classical
Character Depiction	Traditional, adjusted over time	Culturally sensitive	Traditional, same as the original
Atmosphere	Slightly dark and nostalgic	Friendly and inviting	Slightly dark
Cultural References	European-rooted	Localized for Albanian readers	European -rooted

The Illustrations in the Original German Edition

Style and Technique

- Black and white illustrations: The images are detailed and expressive, stimulating the reader's imagination.
- Character Portrayal: Jim Button is portrayed as a small, dark-skinned boy with striking facial features, which was adjusted in later editions to deal more sensitively with racist stereotypes.

Exemplary Scenes

- Lummerland: The small island is shown as a cramped space, visually supporting overpopulation and the king's decision to abolish the railway.

Significance of the Illustrations

- Atmospheric Accompaniment: The images enhance the mood of the story, whether it is the idyllic setting of Lummerland or the danger in the Dragon City.
- Character Development: The illustrations visually convey the development of the characters, especially Jim and Lukas.

The Illustrations in the Albanian Edition of Xhim Kopsa dhe Lokomotiva

Style and Technique

- Colorful Illustrations: In contrast to the original edition, the images are colorful and have a more modern design.
- Adaptations: Some cultural elements have been changed to make them more relevant to Albanian audiences.

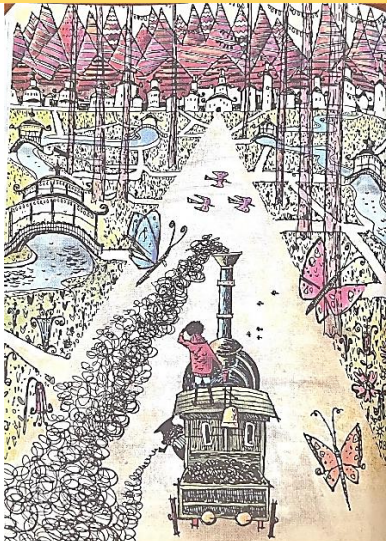

Exemplary Scenes

- Lummerland: The island is depicted in vibrant colors, creating a friendlier and more welcoming atmosphere.

•Significance of the Illustrations

- Cultural Adaptation: The changes in the illustrations reflect cultural differences and make the story more accessible to Albanian children.
- Emotional Impact: The choice of colors and the portrayal of characters influence how readers perceive the characters' emotions.

Analysis as a comparison of two Albanian version translated by Orjela Stafasani (Albas) and Sokol Mici (Dudaj) “Jimmy Buttons and Luke the Engine Man” Michael Ende

	Xhimi Kopsa and Lukas Makinisti (Albas Publishing)	Xhim Kopsa dhe Lukas Makinisti (Dudaj Publishing) same version as german one
1.The role of the illustrations in the work		

2. Illustration style

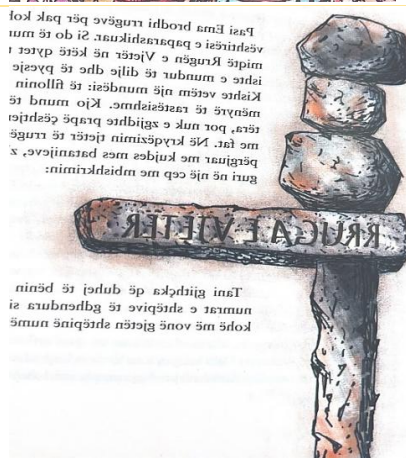


- Xhim, djaloshi im, shiko atje! - dhe tregoi horizontin lindor, drejt te cilit po leviznin me rrjedhën e lumit. Aty sapo doli dielli me një shkëlqim të papershkueshëm, saqe të gjitha valët shkëlqimin si ar i kulturë. Pak më vonë, udhëtarët panë diçka tjetër që ndriçonte dhe shkëlqente në ngjyrë ari në largësi: ishin një mijë çatë e Pingut.



- Xhim, djaloshi im, shiko atje! - dhe tregoi horizontin lindor, drejt te cilit po leviznin me rrjedhën e lumit. Aty sapo doli dielli me një shkëlqim të papershkueshëm, saqe të gjitha valët shkëlqimin si ar i kulturë. Pak më vonë, udhëtarët panë diçka tjetër që ndriçonte dhe shkëlqente në ngjyrë ari në largësi: ishin një mijë çatë e Pingut.

3. Adaptation to Albanian culture



Para Ema prodhimi rrafshë për bak koi këpërçes e pabardhësiar si do të mui midis Rrugës e Vjetër në këtë dajet i iatit e mandat të qitit dhe të baxsit. Kipite veçem një mundësi: të fillonin të mënjanë të rrafshësiar. Kjo mund të tërë bor unë e xhijqitë brabë çepitë me fat. Në kryeqendrin dëgjët të rrafshësiar me kufizet mes parafshësiar x kmi në një cep me wpiësiarim.

Tani gjithçka që duhet të bënin numërat e shifërve të qipërçës si kopë me vone blicën shpërçës numë



EINUNDZWANZIGSTES KAPITEL
in dem Jim und Lukas eine Schule in Küssenerland
kennen lernen

Als Emma eine Weile in den Straßen umhergipert war, tauchte eine unvorhergesehene Schwierigkeit auf. Wie sollten die beiden Freunde in dieser riesigen Stadt jemals die «Alte Straße» finden? Sie konnten ja nicht einfach aussteigen und jemanden danach fragen. Es gab nur die eine Möglichkeit: Sie mussten sich aufs Geratewohl auf die Suche machen. Das konnte allerdings Stunden dauern, aber da half nun einmal nichts. Doch sie hatten Glück. Schon an der nächsten Straßenecke entdeckte Lukas, als er vorsichtig zwischen den Decken hinaussah, an einer Ecke ein Steinchild mit der Aufschrift:

Jetzt brauchten sie nur noch den Hausnummern zu folgen, die über den Eingängen eingemeißelt waren. Kurze Zeit später hatten sie auch schon das Haus Nummer 133 gefunden.
«Hast du Angst, Jim?», fragte Lukas leise.
Jim dachte schnell noch mal an den Scheinreisen

4. Visual aids in understanding the text



Analysis of the illustrations in the Alba edition of “Xhimi Kopsa and Lukas Makinisti”

The Albanian Version (Albas publishing) as a best version based on Albanian young readers

<p>1.The role of the illustrations in the work</p>	<p>They give shape to the magical world of Michael Ende and help the reader experience the story with more intensity and emotion.</p> <p>the illustrations are carefully crafted to reflect the atmosphere and feelings of the characters, making it seem as if the train and the journey are tangible and lively.</p>
<p>2. Illustration style</p>	<p>The illustrations are done in a soft style, with warm colors and flowing lines reminiscent of watercolors or colored pencil drawings. This stylistic choice creates a dreamy and nostalgic atmosphere, which fits well with the philosophical and emotional tone of the book.</p> <p>The characters, especially Jimi and Lukas, have simple but expressive features, which convey their character well — curious, brave and adventurous.</p>
<p>3.Adaptation to Albanian culture</p>	<p>The illustrations retain several elements that reflect Albanian culture, such as the landscapes with the village mountains, the houses with traditional roofs and small details such as handicrafts or local clothing that occasionally appear in the background.</p>
<p>4. Visual aids in understanding the text</p>	<p>Many times, illustrations help reinforce key moments in the story, such as scenes of the train starting the journey, encounters with different characters, or moments of reflection by Jim. This allows the reader to better understand the emotions</p>

Conclusion

Illustrations in children’s literature are not peripheral—they are central to the storytelling process. When translating such works, visual elements must be treated with the same care as linguistic ones. Children's and young adult literature's narrative and emotional terrain are greatly influenced by its illustrations. Visual aspects are considerably more than just ornamental; they are essential to the storytelling process and the way young readers interact with the text, as this article has demonstrated through the case study of Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer and its Albanian translation. The analogy emphasizes how pictures, like words, have cultural meaning and can affect how a tale is interpreted and understood in various language situations. This emphasizes how crucial it is to view images as dynamic elements that add to meaning, atmosphere, and cultural resonance rather than just as static pictures that are a part of the translation process.

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