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## TRANSLATING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: TURKEY AS A CASE STUDY<sup>1</sup>

HANDEGÜL DEMIRHAN

hande.demirhan@uvic.cat

University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia  
& İstanbul Gedik University

### Abstract

Drawing on the translations of sexuality in five Turkish translations of children's literature, this paper starts with introducing the origins, developments, and trends of gender as well as the dilemma between gender pedagogy and taboo issues closely related to the sexuality and body politics in children's literature and its translation in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> Particularly focusing on the context of Turkey where sexuality and body politics have always been controversial issues, the paper intends to shed some light on the matter. Thus, the examination of Turkish translations of children's literature can yield eye-opening outcomes in terms of the understanding of sexuality and the travel of sexual and body-political content from one context to another.

**Keywords:** Gender and translation. Children's literature. Translating sexuality in children's literature. Sexuality in Turkish translations.

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2. 'Translation' is used as an umbrella term for translation versions such as subversions, adaptations and retellings.



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## Resumen

A partir de cinco traducciones al turco de obras de literatura infantil, sobre sexualidad, este artículo presenta los orígenes, desarrollos y tendencias del género sexual, así como el dilema entre la pedagogía de género y los temas tabú estrechamente relacionados con la sexualidad y la política corporal en la literatura infantil y su traducción en diferentes contextos. Particularmente centrado en el contexto de Turquía, donde la sexualidad y la política corporal siempre han sido temas controvertidos, este texto pretende arrojar alguna luz sobre el asunto. En resumen, el estudio de las traducciones al turco de literatura infantil puede presentar resultados reveladores en términos de la comprensión de la sexualidad y el viaje del contenido sexual y político-corporal de un contexto a otro.

**Palabras clave:** Género y traducción. Literatura infantil. Traducir la sexualidad en la literatura infantil. Sexualidad en traducciones al turco.

There is no doubt that gender and translation have become one of the most remarkably studied areas in recent decades. Dating back to the 1980s, the bulk of studies, discussions and debates in translation studies has evolved and become even more passionate with the inclusion of gender studies. From the 1990s onwards, a great interest in gender and translation has paved the way for interdisciplinary studies on sexuality and translation. Taking a closer look into the studies carried out in areas of gender, sexuality, and translation, it is visible that most of the studies, articles, dissertations, and chapters have focused on the translation of adult literature, either prose or poems, along with gender and feminist theoretical perspectives. Children's literature, by default, is considered a minor area, just as the areas of translation and women which were also regarded as secondary in the past. In Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) terms, these areas are regarded as "Other" and pushed to the borders. Nevertheless, the derivative and secondary status of translation in the presence of the source text and of women in the presence of men have changed. Indeed, many things are constantly changing in the are(n)a on the way to more inclusive, multifold and non-hierarchical studies of translation, gender, and sexuality. From a *change-making* perspective, the point of origin of this paper is to make children's literature more visible in literary studies along with its role in gender, sexuality, and translation.

This paper introduces a historical overview and the state of the art of children's literature and its translation by reflecting on the developments and trends of gender as well as gender pedagogy and taboo issues regarding sexuality. Following the historical discussion, the study particularly contextualises Turkey, where sexuality and body politics are taboo issues, and children are considered innocent beings that “need to be protected from other cultures' authorities, propagandas and culture-specific values that are contrary to local sentiments” (Neydim 2006b, my translation<sup>3</sup>). The paper then analyses the translation of sexuality in the Turkish translations of children's literature, providing a discussion under three subcategories related to sexuality: sexual parts; sexual intercourse; and sexualities, practices and sexual orientations.

## 1. Translating gender and sexuality in children's literature

Before a discussion of translating sexuality in the selected Turkish translations of children's literature, it will be relevant to reflect on the history and the current state of gender and sexuality in the translation of children's literature. The historical process intends to comprise different cultures and contexts including Turkey, trying not to abide by the authority but opening a space for an inclusive and pluralist multilogue on the subject.

### 1.1. *Origins, developments and trends*

Gender is defined as a “learned [...] fact of social life” developed along with “conditioning and reinforcement in [...] childhood” (Eisenstein 1985: xvi). Discussing the concept in relation to literature, Iqra Jabeen and Asad Mehmood (2014: 240) indicate that children's literature is effective in “shaping [...] gender identities”. Several studies (Tsao 2008; Epstein 2013) have promoted this argument as well. Gender is regarded as a social and cultural phenomenon that is mostly learned and indigenised in childhood when children's literature comes into play in adopting cultural codes or linguistic representations related to gender and sexuality. As Grenby and Reynolds (2011: 153) propose, children's literature is “culturally coded”.

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3. All translations from Turkish into English are by the author unless otherwise specified.

The codes of gender trace back to the very first epitome of children's book in England, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744), which is mostly noted as the British prototype of children's literature by a majority. The book introduces two letters and each is addressed to different sexes: to girls with 'Pretty Miss Polly' and to boys with 'Little Master Tommy'. Besides the gendered characteristics, many examples of children's books are aimed at differentiating sexes according to the themes of the books, offering adventure stories for boys while offering domestic and family stories for girls.

Children's literature in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially fairy tales such as *Cinderella* (1697), *Snow White* (1812) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1917), displayed gender stereotypes. Many scholars from different cultural contexts (Dworkin 1974; Brugeilles *et al.* 2002; Sezer 2010; Lieberman 2012; Rowe 2012; Zipes 2012a) have emphasised that children's literature is imbued with conventional feminine and masculine roles. Other scholars (Kortenhaus & Demarest 1993; Clark & Fink 2004; Muhlen *et al.* 2012; Jabeen & Mehmood 2014) have further contributed to the field by demonstrating ready-made gender clichés in picture books. In the simplest terms, these stereotypical gender roles or gender clichés are entangled in every niche of children's literature, both textually and visually. John Stephens (1996: 18-19) brings these socially acceptable gender roles to light with a schema in which the characteristics of being strong, active, protective, unemotional, aggressive and rational are associated with masculinity while being beautiful, passive, vulnerable, emotional, submissive and intuitive is attributed to femininity. Besides gender roles and characteristics, some concepts are also stereotypically classified; for instance, affiliating motherhood, marriage and domestic issues with women whereas linking autonomy and outdoor activities with men. Jack Zipes (2012a: 7, original emphasis) states that there were many "dainty and prudish Cinderellas [including Grimm's version] *en masse* in the nineteenth century". Not only *Cinderella* but also *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty* were portrayed as "passive, submissive and helpless" female figures (Lieberman 2012: 191-192). Some scholars (Lieberman 2012: 185; Rowe 2012: 209) argue that these fairy tales contribute to patriarchy and "acculturate women" by "making female subordination".

Gender stereotypes that are widely common in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century children's classics and their translation have become the target of feminist and

gender critics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was when feminist thought became effective in children's literature along with the dissemination of feminist writings such as *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (1970). For instance, Millett's iconic work tackles over-sexualised women in literature and conveys a passionate discussion on gender and body politics. In some of children's books, such as *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980), the issue is discussed through a traditional princess story by touching on the concepts of beauty and body image through the main female character who chooses to dress in an unfancy paper bag rather than as a traditional and elegant princess. Patriarchal ideologies reflected in texts and images in children's literature remained on the agenda of consciousness-raising groups for a time until echoed in action: adapting children's literature and its translation by subverting and rewriting conventional stories and creating new, feminist and gender-friendly versions in which the supreme goal is to subvert feminine and masculine roles. Female characters have become the main protagonists, having power and authority over the course of events. The passive, obedient and vulnerable female representation has been transformed into an active, strong and rational portrayal of women. In brief, the masculine gender roles mainly assigned to male characters have become the main qualifications of female characters. The task of subverting gender-stereotyped stories has been visible in various contexts during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, these consciousness-raising acts and gender-friendly adaptations have been the object of academic writings.

Focusing on feminist fairy tales, Zipes (2012a) examines contemporary versions that reverse traditional gender roles and highlights noteworthy examples in the British and American context: *Sleeping Ugly* by Jane Yolen (1981) and *Transformations* (1971) by Anne Sexton. On the other hand, drawing attention to genders, identities and sexual orientations, Elizabeth Marshall (2004: 260) states that feminist versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* reflect "white, Western, middle class, heterosexual" paradigms of gender. In terms of feminist folk tales, it will be fair to mention some: *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from Around the World* by Ethel Phelps (1981) and an Anatolian folk tale named "Müskürümü Sultan" in which the main female characters have more power than their partners, fathers, and husbands, basically more power than patriarchy (Sezer 2010). For recent

feminist adaptations of fairy tales, the following books are worth studying: *The Adventurous Princess and Other Feminist Fairy Tales* (2019) and *Cinderella and the Glass Ceiling: And Other Feminist Fairy Tales* (2020).

Some feminist and gender trends have also come to light in children's literature and its translation in close relation to studies (compiled in Godayol 2013) revolving around gender and translation from the 1980s onwards. One of the trends has been to make women authors and *écriture (d'enfant) féminine* visible; Maria Edgeworth and Louisa May Alcott are considered two remarkable authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Searching for women's writing, feminist texts, and translating the works of feminists, women writers and scholars has been another trend in the area. However, source texts are not gender-friendly all the time. When translating patriarchal and androcentric children's literature, by revising and adapting the source texts from a gender positive lens, translators' interventions in gendered and anti-feminist ideas has become apparent. These interventions aim to develop "a new language for women" (Flotow 1997: 14-15) to act against conventional and institutionalised language by means of creating wordplay, gender-friendly puns and neologisms. Experimental translation strategies in translating gender, sexuality, body politics, puns and grammatical gendered pronouns in adult literature, discussed by Flotow (1997: 17-23), have also been adapted to the translation of children's literature. However, some strategies such as supplementing source texts with prefaces and footnotes (Godard 1988) have not been preferred as much as others due to the readability issues, bearing in mind that the target readers are children, with a limited reading rate compared to adults.

Following the trends and developments in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-modern feminist and gender thought began to influence the field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This period signifies another era in which subversions and adaptations of gendered children's literature have also been criticised. Many scholars (Stephens 1996; Trites 1997; Paul 2005; Kuykendal & Sturm 2007; Mallan 2009) argue that these feminist versions maintain the gender binary status quo by assigning masculine roles to female characters, replicating and reproducing binary notions of gender by restraining female characters into masculinity as if they have no other options beyond femininity and masculinity. At this point, androgynous and tomboyish characters have come to the

fore as another form of genderism. For instance, Paul (2005) emphasises that switching gender roles does not change the essence of the act and contributes to gender binarism by maintaining a hierarchy between female and male. Attributing masculine roles to female characters, or introducing androgynous characters, still hinges on stigmatised masculine essence. Similarly, Mallan (2009) considers this binarism as a dilemma and all replications and reproductions as a failed performance. The development of subversions and adaptations in the field is considered as a retroaction in which texts and female protagonists could not escape from the clutches of gender dichotomy. Nevertheless, some research in the African context illustrates the situation differently. Emily Zinn (2000) shows that feminist fairy tales and tomboyish female characters are better received in the post-apartheid era than the pre-apartheid era in South Africa. Writing in the same context but particularly focusing on the feminist fairy tale of Ndabaga, Pierre Ruterana (2012) states that children from all genders give a positive response to untraditional, androgynous female characters.

Criticisms towards gender binarism have also paved the way for thinking outside the box and creating something new: gender-friendly language, subjectivity, voice, and agency. Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997) interrelates the power of language and narrative strategies with the autonomy of the feminist character. A relevant example would be the feminist children's *Künstlerroman*, in which a female protagonist gains her subjectivity through her writing; therefore, individuality and writing become interrelated concepts. *Martha Quest* (1952) and *Harriet the Spy* (1964) can be considered as primordial examples of this genre. In search of a breath of fresh air in children's literature, "thinking gender" and producing a new feminist protagonist (Crowley & Pennington 2010: 311) "that stands on its own feet" (Demirhan 2020: 532) have gained prominence. The feminist protagonist celebrating their individuality and nonconformity (Trites 1997) is promoted in the field.

Starting from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, gender-liberated characters have sprouted from all corners of the world, steadily increased in number and culminated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (2014), *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (2015) and *Reaching the Stars: Poems about Extraordinary Women & Girls* (2017) can be considered as remarkable children's stories and poems on gender, identity, and body-positive image. In terms of feminisms,

including postcolonial, women of colour, lesbian, trans and queer, *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* (2018) and *Zenobia July* (2019) are noteworthy examples of the genre. Furthermore, the portrayal of non-nuclear, LGBTQ+ families and histories has appeared in children's books, with *My Two Moms and Me* (2019) and *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* (2018) among the significant works. Nevertheless, the representation of LGBTQ+ themed children's books have also been criticised for including only white and middle-class characters, and not including enough bisexual, trans, and queer individuals (Epstein 2012, 2013).

When it comes to sexuality and gender-based violence, children's literature has become more open-minded and non-rigid. Focusing on sexuality, the following books are important: *Sex is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU* (2015) and *Asking About Sex & Growing Up: A Question-and-Answer Book for Kids* (2009). Gender-based violence and sexual abuse are also discussed in children's books. For instance, *Nein! Hayır!* (2018) is a bilingual book in German and Turkish that teaches children to say no to undesirable situations or proposals directly related to personal space and sexual abuse, while *The Day My Daddy Lost His Temper* (2010) focuses on gender-based violence at home and tries to empower children that have witnessed or experienced domestic violence.

Some recent research is particularly important in the matter of gender, sexuality and identity. Mireia Canals Botines and Chiara Lepri (2018) draw attention to an early picture book, *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (2009), first published in 1959, and illustrate how verbal and iconic language can work together to offer a gender-neutral book. In the context of China, Mingming Yuan (2016) examines gender and translation strategies in the first Chinese translation of *Peter Pan* (1929) and concludes that Peter Pan and other characters are transformed into gender-neutral characters in Chinese translation due to the understanding of childhood and the perspectives on gender in that period. In terms of sexuality and identity, Kerry Mallan (2009) refers to a gender positive genre named *Bildungsroman*, which specifically centres on sexual desire and identity, while Laura Mattoon D'Amore (2017) examines the versions of the American fairy tales that speak of vigilante feminists who are responsible for protecting themselves and other women against physical and sexual violence.



Regarding the transformation of gender and sexuality in children's literature and its translation throughout history, gender- and sexually liberated children's literature not only contributes to the understanding of gender in children in the local context but also opens a new door into the world of children in other contexts through translations of these books.

### *1.2. Gender pedagogy and taboo issues*

While translation makes feminist and gender-friendly children's literature available in other languages and cultures, there are some drawbacks specific to children's literature. Some scholars (Lathey 2015; Kwok 2016; Neydim 2020) shed light on the normative and prescriptive nature of children's literature, which is also seen in translations. In the prescribed frame of the genre, critical questions are asked by authorities or powerholders including teachers, translators, publishers and parents, who can be gathered under the umbrella term 'gatekeepers' since they keep the gates of the area by deciding what to let in or out. The most common questions asked concern the suitability of the material for children: Is this book appropriate for children? Is it good for children? Is there any unfavourable content in the book? However, what is deemed appropriate for children depends on the understanding of childhood in that context. Zohar Shavit (1981: 172) remarks that translators may break the routine and "adjust the text in order to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in accordance to guiding principles with what society thinks is 'good for the child'". These adjustments also rely on the understanding of childhood held by the gatekeepers, informed by their background, ideology and cultural values and shaped by the wider principles of their social context.

In terms of the principles of society, the didactic and moral task of children's literature and its translation has resulted in gatekeepers' abstention from overt representations of sexuality and gender-based violence on the grounds that the genre is built upon the dogma that children are innocent and naive beings who should be protected from the inappropriate and explicit representations of sexuality and violence. It would be interesting to speak of some research focusing on how these forbidden areas are handled covertly. In *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, Zipes (1994) examines 30 look-alike versions of *Red Riding Hood* and concludes

that sexuality and gender-based violence are implicitly conveyed in these stories. On the other hand, in *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose (1984) sheds light on adults' personal and ethical standards and judgements about innocence and sexuality, and most importantly, their authority over children's literature. It seems that *the good and suitable* for child readers may be tackled in many aspects, and gender pedagogy can be part of this debate, especially when discussing gender awareness education concerning taboo issues such as sexuality and gender-based violence. Narratives discussing these taboo issues can also be pedagogical and offer guidance for children while raising awareness on gender-based violence and sexual politics. However, such pedagogical concerns often fall into the clutches of the so-called understanding of innocence and fade away. The dilemma between either holding on to gender pedagogy or taboo issues has become a grey area in the field. Moreover, besides common concerns about patriarchy, particular cultural values and practices about gender and sexuality, issues such as class, religion and female genital mutilation in some contexts make the situation even more complex. Translation of children's literature "provides a glimpse into the experiences and way of life of children from different parts of the world" (Zaghini 2005: 22). Children's literature reflects culture-specific perspectives on childhood, with diverse concerns and taboos, that emerge from obscurity by means of translation.

## **2. Contextualising the Turkish translations of children's literature from a gender and sexuality perspective**

In the context of Turkey, most of the works translated for children have been Western children's classics (Tuncer 1995: 269; Alpöge 2002: 29; Çıkla 2005: 97-98). For decades, translations of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1825), *Andersen's Fairy Tales* (1835), and Perrault's folk and fairy tales have demonstrated gender stereotypes. Although these children's classics were first translated in the 1870s (Neydim 2006a), these versions have been reprinted and read for 150 years. Speaking of various gendered versions in the publishing market, translated children's classics have also been the object of manipulation. Namely, these classics were exposed to political and ideological transformations during a translation project, "100 Temel Eser" [100 Essential Readings], supported by the Ministry

of National Education in 2004 (Neydim 2020: 857). These versions of children's classics have appeared on the lists of over 30 publishers (Neydim 2006b), as well as in the curricula of primary and secondary schools for a long time.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a period when a translational phenomenon occurred in Turkey: the development of translated feminist and gender-friendly children's literature. Considering the dominant position of the conventional, gendered children's books and translations in the publishing market, the development of this genre is considered remarkable. The analysis of this development in the context is reflected in the MSc thesis by Handegül Demirhan (2017), which traces the development of this literature and focuses on its sociocultural, ideological and gender-related aspects to understand why this phenomenon happened at a particular time and with which particular objectives. It not only analyses the Turkish translations carried out from different languages and cultures, but also the agents and the sociocultural context behind the phenomenon. The study shows that the activist and feminist ideologies of the publishers led them to look for alternative, gender-liberated sources of children's literature and ended up translating from other cultures, which resulted in creating a change in the fossilised market full of stereotyped children's books. The motive of the agents was to raise consciousness on gender in children and meet the need for gender-positive children's literature.

The timing was on point since the matters of gender and body politics upsurged in Turkish society during this period. Demirhan's (2017) study also displayed that the gender themes addressed in the selected books for translation are closely related to the ongoing gender politics in 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey. Questioning gender roles, patriarchal oppression, and the elimination of gender-based violence are among the most well-known issues that are tackled, along with a little emphasis on sexuality and body politics. *Not Just Another Princess Story* by Sheri Radford (2014), *Colección Antiprincesas: Frida Kahlo: para chicas y chicos* by Nadia Fink (2016) and *The Trouble with Women* by Jacky Fleming (2016) are among translated books. Despite some discrepancies in the translations, such as softening the parts on sexuality and body, the phenomenon was groundbreaking and contributed to the emergence of local gender-friendly children's literature (Demirhan 2017), as publishers started to release children's books portraying extraordinary women in Turkish history.

More recently, Turkey has seen an upsurge of interest in books focusing on sexuality, body politics and sex education, although sexuality in translation, especially in the translation of children's literature, is still somewhat a taboo issue in the context with little chance of being translated and published without being softened or censored (Demirhan 2017). Given the cultural and pedagogical sensibilities concerning the taboo issue, in general, there is a tendency of softening, censoring or masculinising literature in Turkey when it comes to sexuality (see Cengiz 2017). The issue of sexuality for children in Turkey is only touched on in biology classes, mainly focusing on the reproduction, with no reference to sexual health, sexual abuse or protection (Budak *et al.* 2016: 7, my translation). With parents being reluctant to talk about the subject and the Ministry of National Education curriculum not giving any space to sex education (except some private schools), the limited mention of sexuality both in the family and the school, results in insufficient knowledge of sexuality in children (Budak *et al.* 2016: 5-7, my translation). Although the context has seen a recent change in the rise of sex-positive children's books, diverse sexualities, body politics, and sexual imageries are still considered as *bold* issues in the context, especially when children are at stake.

### 3. Selected Turkish translations of children's literature

The article performs a comparative analysis between five children's books and their translations. Each Turkish translation is also followed by its back translation. The books were selected based on several criteria: targeting the same age group (seven to ten years old), being published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (between 2005 and 2019), and translated from English source texts so as to not have any doubts concerning intermediate language translation.

Author	Title of the source text and translation	Publishing house	Translator	Relevant paratexts	Re-editions
Nicholas Allan	<i>Where Willy went...</i> (2004) (ST1) <i>Veli Nereye Gitti...</i> (2015) (TR1)	Kuraldışı Yayıncılık	Nil Gün	No	No

Peter Mayle	<i>Where did I come from?</i> (2000) (ST2) <i>Ben Nereden Geldim?</i> (2015) (TR2)	Agora Kitaplığı	Osman Akınhay	No	No
Jayneen Sanders	<i>My body! What I say goes!</i> (2016) (ST3) <i>Bu Vücut Benim! Ben Ne Dersem O Olur!</i> (2019) (TR3)	Beyaz Balina Yayınları	Nurten Hatırnaz	No	No
Meg Hickling	<i>Boys, girls &amp; body science: a first book about facts of life</i> (2002) (ST4) <i>Kızlar, Oğlanlar ve Beden Bilimi: Cinsellikle ilgili İlk Sorulara Yanıtlar</i> (2016) (TR4)	Kuraldışı Yayıncılık	Nil Gün	No	No
Joanna Cole	<i>Asking about sex &amp; growing up: a question-and-answer book for kids</i> (1988) (ST5) <i>Cinsellikle İlgili Merak Ettikleriniz: Sorular ve Yanıtlar</i> (2005) (TR5)	Sistem Yayıncılık	Emel Aksay	No	Revised edition published in 2009 by HarperCollins. No change in the title.

Table 1. Selected Turkish translations

### 3.1. Understanding of sexuality and the Turkish translations

In this section, the selected source texts and translations are analysed, and the discussion is compiled under specific themes and issues related to sexuality.

#### 3.1.1. Sexual parts

In most of the children's books about sexuality, with some exceptions, there is a section that introduces fe/male sexual parts either explicitly or implicitly. The illustrations of these so-called private parts are more or less the same in different books; however, the textual content varies. For example,

- (1) ST1: Willy was a little sperm. He lived inside Mr Browne. [...] The egg was inside Mrs Browne... (1;2;8)

TR1: Veli minik bir spermdi. Alper Bey'in içinde yaşıyordu. [...] Yumurta Nihal Hanım'ın içindeydi... (5;6;12)

[Willy was a little sperm. He lived inside Mr Alper. [...] The egg was inside Mrs Nihal.]

In ST1, the word 'inside' depicts the place where eggs and sperm reside, in other words that the book abstains to tell, these places are 'ovaries' in female and 'testicles' in male, respectively. The word remains the same in the translation, instead of using scientific terms for both female and male parts. Apart from the ST1 and TR1, other sources reflect these sexual parts by name. For instance,

- (2) ST2: But the right name for it is penis. Although it's spelled penis, you say pee-nus. (16)

TR2: Ama doğru adı, penistir. Ona bazıları da pipi der. (18)

[But the right name is penis. Some say pee-pee.]

- (3) ST3: People sometimes call our private parts [...] like pee pee. But we should always use the correct names for our private parts. Boys have a penis, testicles, and a bottom. (24)

TR3: İnsanlar bazen özel bölgelerimize [...] isimler takarlar. Ama biz özel bölgelerimiz için her zaman doğru isimleri kullanmalıyız. Erkeklerin penisi, testisleri ve poposu vardır. (24)

[People sometimes give [...] names to our private parts. But we should always use the correct names for our private parts. Men have a penis, testicles, and a bottom.]

- (4) ST4: “My granddad calls it your pee-pee,”

[...]

“Does anyone know the scientific name for a boy’s pee-pee?”

“Penis!” (13)

TR4: “Pipide. Dedem, ona pipi diyor.”

[...]

“Oğlanların pipisinin bilimsel ismini bileniniz var mı?”

“Penis!” (10)

[“On pee-pee. My granddad says it pee-pee.”

[...]

“Does anyone know the scientific name for a boy’s pee-pee?”

“Penis!”]

- (5) ST5: A boy has a penis and two testicles. (25)

TR5: Erkeğin bir penisi ve [...] iki testisi vardır. (25)

[Man has a penis and [...] two testicles.]

In the second source text (ST2), the scientific name for the male sexual part, ‘penis’, is given to the child readers. In addition, the spelling and the pronunciation of the part, ‘pee-nus’, is explained. The translation abides by the source text and keeps the term; however, there is a translation strategy in the second sentence that should be analysed more closely. The word ‘pee-nus’ is translated as ‘pipi’. In terms of pronunciation, ‘pee-nus’ does not make sense to the target reader since the utterance of the ‘penis’ is the same in Turkish. Instead of repeating the term, the translator chooses to omit the English pronunciation and adds a child’s word for the term, which is ‘pipi’. The term articulates as ‘pee-pee’ which is also used as a child’s word for the part. Referring to the child’s language in the translation by consulting on interlingual similarities and the strategy of adaptation is understandable

since many Turkish children are familiar with this expression. From a pedagogical perspective, informing children about both scientific and daily terms can be illuminating in the sense that they can be aware of the scientific meanings and cultural connotations of both terms. The fourth sample (ST4) is a good example of this, offering both terms to the reader and emphasising that ‘pee-pee’ was used in the olden days, in the grandparents’ time, and ‘penis’ is a scientific term. The translator keeps both terms and there is no omission. Indeed, the word ‘pipi’ is emphasised by rendering it twice in the translation. On the other hand, in the third source text (ST3), the scientific terms are given for male sexual parts along with a daily expression of ‘pee-pee’. However, although these scientific names are translated into Turkish literally, the translation of ‘pee-pee’ is omitted. Turkish children come across this term in their daily lives and are thus familiar with the term and its connotations. Although there is no negative sense or foreign meaning for the target reader, the translation decision of the translator seems to cut the term. In the target culture, an open discussion of sexuality with children is still a taboo issue and conversations about male sexual parts continue with the term ‘pipi’ instead, rather than scientific terms such as ‘penis’. The scientific term is considered suitable for adults, whereas the daily term is appropriate for children. From this perspective, it would be more expected for the translator to keep the daily term along with scientific terms. In terms of understanding male private parts, both the source text and translation consider ‘bottom’ as private. On the other hand, the last source text (ST5) only indicates ‘penis’ and ‘testicles’ as private parts and the translator conveys the exact source meaning and wording. Lastly, ST5 and TR5 touch on how, in most cultural contexts, the size of the penis becomes a matter of debate in terms of function and importance. Both the source text and translation emphasise that the size of the male sexual part is not important and the determinant factor, instead, “personality and self-confidence” is more important than “the size of his penis or any other part of his body” (Cole 2009: 28). Growing up in a patriarchal society that gives importance to size, this can be a wise and appropriate answer for children to make them question cultural norms and stereotypes.

When it comes to female sexual parts, the textual content and translations are more complex and there are several issues. For example,



- (6) ST2: She has a little opening called vagina. [...] What the mother has to do is push the baby out through the opening between her legs. (18;42)

TR2: Orada, vajina denilen küçük bir aralık görürsünüz. [...] Annenin yapması gereken, bacakları arasındaki yarıktan bebeği dışarı itmektir. (20;44)

[There, you see a space called vagina. [...] What the mother has to do is push the baby out through the slit between her legs.]

- (7) ST3: Girls have a vulva on the outside and a vagina on the inside. [...] These are the correct names for our private parts. (25, emphasis in the original)

TR3: Kızların vajinası, memeleri ve poposu vardır. [...] Bunlar özel bölgelerimizin doğru isimleridir. (25, emphasis in the translation)

[Girls have vagina, nipples, and a bottom. [...] These are the correct names for our private parts.]

- (8) ST4: Girls' genital area is covered by folds of skin called the vulva. Between the folds at the front of the vulva there is the clitoris, about as big as the end of your little finger. It doesn't have an opening, and it feels tickly if you touch it when you are bathing. (16)

TR4: Kızların genital alanı vulva denilen deri kıvrımlarıyla kaplıdır. Vulvanın ön kısmının kıvrımları arasında küçük parmağın ucu büyüklüğünde klitoris vardır. Banyo yaparken klitorise dokunulursa gıdıklanma gibi his yaratır. (14)

[Girls' genital area is covered by folds of skin called the vulva. Between the folds at the front of the vulva there is the clitoris, as big as the end of your little finger. It feels tickly if you touch it when you are bathing.]

- (9) ST5: Just inside the vagina is the hymen – a thin web of skin that partly blocks the opening. (11)

TR5: Vajinanın hemen ağzında yolu kapatan bir zar (kızlık zarı) bulunur. (13)

[There is a membrane (virginal membrane) just in the mouth of the vagina that blocks the way.]

Here, the discussion may start with the term ‘vagina’ which refers to the inner part of the female sexual organ. In all source texts and translations, except ST1 and TR1, the scientific term for female sexual part ‘vagina’ and its literal translation ‘vajina’ are used, rather than daily or offensive terms such as pussy, cunt or ‘dölyolu’ [sperm path] in Turkish. This can be considered as a positive approach in terms of teaching children body science instead of negative daily language. When it comes to the term ‘vulva’ which refers to the outer part of the female sexual organ, it is only mentioned in ST3, ST4 and TR4. Considering that the term is not even commonly used in adult literature, observing the traces of its references in children’s literature is progressive. The term is mainly considered secondary when compared to ‘vagina’, and in some cases, it stands for the term ‘vagina’ interchangeably. It is promising that ST3 and ST4 reflect the difference and make a room for this term. The translator of ST4 renders all repetitions regarding the ‘vulva’ and transliterates another significant term for female sexuality, ‘clitoris’, as in the source text. However, the translator of the ST3 only retains the term ‘vagina’ and omits the term ‘vulva’ in the translation. As pointed out before, an understanding of sexuality and a misunderstanding about the referral of these two terms to the same part may result in this kind of decision-making. Or, it may be an intentional omission in which the translator does not regard this term as crucial for child readers.

Concerning the ‘vagina’, the term ‘opening’ refers to the scientific term ‘vaginal opening’ which is at the posterior end of the vulva. Only ST2, ST4 and ST5 speak of this term. When it comes to the translations, TR2 translates it in two different ways: ‘aralık’ [space] and ‘yarık’ [slit]; TR5 conveys it as ‘yol’ [way]; and TR4 omits the term completely without offering any translation. The literal scientific Turkish translation for ‘opening’ would be ‘açıklık’ [opening], since it refers to the scientific term ‘vaginal opening’ which can also be literally translated as ‘vajinal açıklık’ in Turkish. The scientific term is not used in any of the source texts and translations. Indeed, the translations convey the meaning ambiguously. In TR2, the wrong word choices, arising from several definitions in the dictionary, make the translation

incomprehensible and even connotated negatively. The term 'aralık' [space] is ambiguous in the Turkish context since it is a general term referring to an area between two things; therefore, the details of that area related to sexuality stay unclear in the visualisation of the child readers. Moreover, the term 'yarık' [slit] misleads the readers since it has a negative connotation in the context. It refers to a 'straight, narrow cut or opening' in something caused by a negative action, sometimes by force. Mistranslating the female sexual part with ambiguity and negativity may result in retaining social bias towards sexuality. When children learning about sexuality and sexual parts in a context in which these are considered taboo issues is confronted with these negative connotations, translations may trigger a retrograde, rather than pedagogical progress. Although TR4 cuts the term, the translator of ST5 conveys the term as 'yol' [way]. Since the term is related to the vagina, which is also a 'muscular canal', the translation offers a connection between 'canal' and 'way' but does not convey the same meaning and impression for target readers.

When it comes to the translation of the scientific term 'hymen', this can be regarded as a touchy subject in the Turkish context since it is also associated with virginity. Even in most of the translations of adult literature, the scientific term is not used, and it is translated as 'kızlık zarı' [virginal membrane] or 'bekâret zarı' [chastity membrane], directly used to refer virginity. The translation of *Virgin: The Untouched History* by Emek Ergun (2008) is one of the significant examples of a feminist translation that deliberately prefers to translate the term as 'himen' [hymen] without any cultural reference to virginity. The translator must be aware that the subject and its cultural connotations become a burden for women in the context. In ST5, 'hymen' is depicted as a 'thin web of skin' rather than a 'membrane' and without any reference to virginity. However, in the translation (TR5), the scientific term is not preferred, and it is rendered as a 'zar' [membrane] with an explication as 'kızlık zarı' [virginal membrane] in parentheses. The word 'membrane' can be acceptable as an alternative term since it somewhat fits the anatomical definition of the texture of the skin; however, the extra information given in the parentheses becomes problematic. In matriarchal societies, virginity is not something looked for or demanded from women. In these cultural communities, girls are given the same sexual freedom as boys. However,

patriarchal societies like Turkey have some demands from the female body, with virginity as one of the patriarchal trappings of the context, closely associated with marriage and religion. Virginity has a moral, religious, and cultural connotation and this understanding is still valid in most regions of Turkey. Women are thus exposed to control mechanisms of patriarchy: their sexuality is suppressed and their bodies are regarded as a property of flesh under the man-made concept of virginity. This brutal understanding of virginity and associating a person's first sexual intercourse with the socially invented idea of marriage and religious thought marks a choice between feeling possessed or freeing herself of virginity. The patriarchal context becomes a sexual destiny that women have to overcome to accomplish their sexual freedom. This problematic issue can be somewhat resolved by using the scientific term in the translation, 'himen', which is a literal translation from English and does not evoke something related to virginity or other relevant cultural connotations.

### 3.1.2. Sexual intercourse

Although all sources narrate the sexual act from a heterosexual perspective, the source texts and translations (ST3 and TR3 do not touch on the issue) reflect clear differences in the understanding of heterosexual intercourse. For instance,

(10) ST1: That very night Mr and Mrs Browne joined together. (13)

TR1: O akşam Alper Bey ve Nihal Hanım bir araya geldi. (17)  
[That night, Mr Alper and Mrs Nihal came together.]

(11) ST2: By this time, the man wants to get as close to the woman as he can, because he's feeling very loving to her. And to get really close the best thing he can do is lie on top of her and put his penis inside her, into her vagina. (21)

TR2: O zaman erkek, kadına karşı büyük bir sevgi hissettiği için, olabildiğince daha yakın olmak ister. Yakınlaşmanın en iyi yolu da erkeğin kadının üstüne çıkması ve penisin kadının içine, vajinasına girmesidir. (23)

[At that time, the man wants to get as close as possible to the woman since he feels very loving to her. The best way to get close is him getting on top of her and put the penis inside woman, into her vagina.]

- (12) ST4: When two adults want to make a baby, [...] the father must use his penis to put them in the mother's vagina. [...] That's called 'having sex'. (21)

TR4: İki yetişkin insan, bebek yapmak istediklerinde, [...] Baba, bu hücreleri annenin vajinasına bırakabilmek için penisini kullanmak zorundadır. Buna 'seks yapmak' deniyor. (18)

[When two adult people want to have a baby, [...] the father must use his penis to release these cells into the mother's vagina. That's called 'having sex'.]

- (13) ST5: Having intercourse is also called making love because a man and a woman usually feel so loving toward each other when they do it. They hug, kiss, and stroke each other's bodies. (48)

TR5: Cinsel ilişkiye aynı zamanda "sevişmek" de denir, çünkü bunu yaparken kadın ve erkek birbirlerine karşı derin bir sevgi duyarlar. Kucaklaşırlar, öpüşürler, birbirlerini okşarlar. (44)

[Sexual intercourse is also called "making love" because while doing this, women and men have a deep love for each other. They hug, kiss, caress each other.]

The act of sexual intercourse is depicted in many forms. In ST1, it is portrayed as an activity where a wife and a husband are 'joined together'. The book illustrates a bed, and an imaginary wife and husband moving under the blanket since human bodies are not illustrated openly. The expression 'joined together' does not evoke something directly related to sexual intercourse in the minds of children since it is also used for 'gathering' and 'coming together'. In the translation, the expression is rendered as 'bir araya gelmek' [coming together] which also makes no sense to the target reader regarding sexual intercourse. A husband and wife may join or come together for coffee, dinner or sex. The act of sexual intercourse here could be detailed and clarified for child readers. Also, related to sexuality, the 'egg' is portrayed as a beautiful, lovely and soft 'treasure' or 'prize' that a sperm should win.

The function of the egg is depicted and translated as a passive cell whereas the sperm is portrayed as an active cell. In ST2, the story of ‘getting close’ is told from a male perspective: ‘the man wants’, ‘he’s feeling very loving’. In such a male gaze, ‘the best thing he can do’ is to ‘lie on top of her’. Here, the source text establishes a hierarchy between the partners and the ‘things’ that partners can do. The translator conveys this act as ‘kadının üstüne çıkmak’ [getting on top of her] which evokes a negative imagination in children that the man intentionally makes his weight felt on the woman, and misleads the reader about the pressure and force due to the wrong word choice. Also, ST2 defines making love as the penises rubbing up and down into the vagina and how penetration feels good. This understanding of making love degrades the act into penetration by assigning a more mechanical function and the male perspective on it. On the other hand, ST5 uses the term ‘having intercourse’ and ‘making love’ when discussing the sexual act. The author’s perspective can be considered as feminist and gender-friendly since the feeling and actions are attributed to both partners without hierarchy. Moreover, ST5 emphasises that the act is also called ‘making love’ since it involves the feeling of love, and ‘hug’, ‘kiss’ and ‘stroke’ are used, rather than a mechanical penetration. The translation renders the act as ‘cinsel ilişki’ [sexual intercourse] and ‘sevişmek’ [making love], which makes sense in the Turkish context. The translator also intensifies the feeling of love by using the adjective ‘derin’ [deep]. When it comes to the other activities during sexual intercourse such as hugging, kissing, and touching, although the source text prefers to use ‘stroke’, the translator translates the word as ‘okşamak’ [caressing]. The term ‘stroke’ has several meanings including ‘touching gently’ and ‘hitting by force’. To give the same positive feeling and meaning, the translator’s choice is understandable since ‘okşamak’ directly refers to ‘touching someone’s body gently’ in close relation with expressing love. Finally, ST4 introduces the term ‘having sex’ apart from making love. The translator literally translates this term as ‘seks yapmak’ [having sex] instead of ‘sevişmek’ [making love]. In the Turkish context, these two expressions may have similar connotations; however, the root of the latter stems from the word ‘sev’ [love], which exactly catches the feeling of making love.

### 3.1.3. *Sexualities, practices, and sexual orientations*

When the patterns related to sexuality and its practices are observed, it is noticed that the discussion about sexual parts and sexual intercourse is only carried out from a heterosexual perspective. Rather than talking about sexualities or different practices and sexual orientations, most of the source texts and translations focuses on heterosexuality.

In the selected translations, only ST5 and TR5 open the issue for discussion. The source text allocates a chapter not only to masturbation as a sexual practice (Cole 1988) but also to diverse sexualities mainly focusing on homosexuality. In the Turkish context, it is interesting that these chapters are not censored. Keeping an explicit chapter on homosexuality in the translation of a children's book can be considered a progressive act. Although the context may see some LGBTQ+ characters in children's books, translating homosexuality openly as a part of sexuality is something that should be applauded. In the source text, the chapter named "What Is Homosexuality?" not only gives definitions of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality but also discusses the main questions surrounding homosexuality such as: Is it a sickness? Can homosexuals choose not to be homosexuals? Can you tell if someone is homosexual just by looking? The chapter posing questions and answers is translated into Turkish without omission, providing a positive attitude towards sexualities in that all these questions are answered with "no" in the source text and the translation.

## 4. Final remarks

At the macro level, the historical discussion and the state of the art in the academic literature revolve around gender stereotypes, feminist and gender-friendly translations, feminist and gender trends, criticisms of heterosexual paradigms and gender binarism, and the need for a new language that breaks taboo issues, focuses on gender pedagogy and embraces diverse genders and sexualities. At the micro level, in the particular case study of the paper, 21<sup>st</sup>-century Turkish translations focusing on sexuality are examined considering the cultural context of Turkey.

This article analysed five children's books and their translations under three subcategories related to sexuality: sexual parts; sexual intercourse; and sexualities, practices and sexual orientations. The differences in the understanding of sexuality are not only reverberated in source texts but also in translators' translation strategies. In all these differences, cultural context plays an important role. There is no consistency in the understanding of sexual parts and sexual acts, neither in the source texts nor in the translations. Misunderstanding and mistranslating concepts, omission, and sometimes problematic explications appear in the translations. Unlike older translations about sexuality in the context which are mostly softened or censored (Demirhan 2017), more recent translations have less tendency towards censorship. Nevertheless, mistranslations also occur due to the misunderstandings concerning sexuality or not taking enough notice of cultural connotations. In some cases, the male-perspective and patriarchal language in the source text become stronger in the translation due to the translator's choice of words or expressions. On the other hand, some well-suited preferences in the translations are noticeable. As an overall tendency, translators stay close to the source text and its meanings, rather than considering cultural connotations and touchy issues in the Turkish context.

Since the translated children's books on sexuality are limited in the context, the study may break the ice for further research. A more in-depth analysis of translating sexuality in the Turkish translations of children's literature requires asking further questions such as:

- Which authors/texts were selected for translation?
- Which authors/texts were not selected for translation?
- Who selected the source texts and who published the translations?
- When were these texts translated and for what purpose?
- What were the losses and gains in the translations?

The questions mentioned above can be more illuminating for understanding sexuality and childhood in the local context as well as attitudes towards sexuality closely related to the notion of childhood. Tracing the unique characteristics of these texts and the content they bring to the local context in line with its target audience – child readers, in this case – can offer an



insightful perspective on a particular culture as well as its translational dynamics with other cultures. Ultimately, different cultural contexts reflect different understandings of sexuality and childhood, and these perspectives can come to the surface through translation. Translation reveals and communicates various perspectives on gender, sexuality and childhood, and the translation of children's literature is a significant part of this dialogue.

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## BIONOTE / NOTA BIOGRÁFICA

HANDEGÜL DEMIRHAN is a PhD student in Translation, Gender and Cultural Studies and part of GETLIHC research group (Gender Studies: Translation, Literature, History, and Communication) at the University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia. She is also a teaching assistant in the Translation and Interpreting Studies department and a board member in Gender and Women's Studies Research Centre at İstanbul Gedik University, Turkey. Her main research areas are gender and translation, translation of children's literature, and feminist pedagogy. She is interested in editing and translating children's literature focusing on gender, and her gender-friendly translation of *Pollyanna* (2018) is an example.

HANDEGÜL DEMIRHAN es estudiante de doctorado en Traducción, Género y Estudios Culturales y forma parte del grupo de investigación GETLIHC (Estudios de Género: Traducción, Literatura, Historia y Comunicación) en la Universidad de Vic-Universidad Central de Cataluña. También es asistente de cátedra en el departamento de Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación y miembro de la junta del Centro de Investigación de Estudios de Género y Mujeres de la Universidad Gedik de Estambul, Turquía. Sus principales áreas

de investigación son género y traducción, traducción y literatura infantil y pedagogía feminista. Está interesada en editar y traducir literatura infantil centrada en el género, y su traducción amigable con el género de Pollyanna (2018) es un ejemplo.