

SOCIOCULTURAL REFERENCES IN CONTEXT: THE SCHOOL STORY SUBGENRE

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Abstract

Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* series belongs to a long tradition of school stories in British juvenile fiction. Her books are a rich source of cultural references about a period and a social context, and have been enjoyed by successive generations of readers in ninety languages since their publication. After setting the novels in their historical, educational and social context, this paper examines one of the series of stories, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, and compares it with a Spanish translation, discussing the aspects causing most difficulties for the translator. It is found that the translation has a tendency to misrepresent important cultural references, omitting some aspects and even adding details contrary to the spirit of the original text. The paper concludes that much more care is needed in translating children's fiction, so as not to deny the readers understanding and enjoyment.

Keywords: translation, children's literature, cultural references.

REFERENCIAS SOCIOCULTURALES EN CONTEXTO: EL SUBGÉNERO DE LOS CUENTOS DE INTERNADO

Resumen

La serie *Malory Towers*, de la escritora Enid Blyton, pertenece a una larga tradición de historias escolares dentro de la literatura juvenil británica. Sus obras son una fuente muy rica de referencias culturales acerca de una época y un contexto social, y generaciones de lectores han disfrutado de ellas desde su publicación en noventa idiomas. Después de situar a las novelas en su contexto histórico, educativo y

social, este trabajo analiza uno de los títulos, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, y lo compara con una traducción al español, examinando los aspectos que causan más dificultades para el traductor. Se observa que esta traducción tiende a distorsionar algunas referencias culturales importantes, omitiendo algunas, e incluso añadiendo detalles que contradicen la intención del texto original. Se llega a la conclusión de que es necesario cuidar más la traducción de la literatura infantil para no negarles a los lectores la comprensión y el placer.

Palabras clave: traducción, literatura infantil, referencias culturales.

Introduction

In the eighteenth century, at a time when educational methods and objectives were being questioned, especially with regard to the upbringing of girls, Sarah Fielding published *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (1749). It was the first British novel written expressly for girls, and also the first to be set in a boarding school environment. Before the appearance of novels such as this, children had little choice for reading matter: they had only adult works—*Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*—though they also had access to fables, nursery rhymes, chapbooks and ballads. However, attitudes and values were being challenged in a period of great social, intellectual and political change, and when the London publisher and writer John Newbery realised there was a market for juvenile literature, children were liberated by the introduction of works written especially for them, such as his own first contribution, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744). From this time onwards, children were no longer to be considered merely smaller versions of adults; they were to be instructed, but also entertained according to their interests and needs.

In the following century, Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1850) all prepared the way for two of the major works to establish the boarding school genre: *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes, and Frederic W. Farrar's *Eric or, Little by Little* (1858). Both of these writers developed ideals of principled behaviour and loyalty in a self-contained male world—the

public school—far away from the female influence of home. By the 1880s the boys' public school story was a firmly established part of juvenile fiction. In 1881 Talbot Baines Reed published *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, at first in serialized form in the *Boy's Own Paper*. It was a reaction against the poor quality serial stories which appeared in the weekly "penny dreadfuls" of the time, and which were aimed at working class adolescents. Reed emphasized plot rather than character, with more humour and less didacticism than previous stories (Briggs and Butts 158). The immensely popular story set at St Dominic's established a pattern, with a particular structure, which later writers were to develop. Such stories showed how a limited format, consisting of the closed world of a public school, and a series of recurring elements in the formula, could be exploited successfully.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sarah Doudney published her moralising tale of a girls' boarding-school, entitled *Monksbury College* (1876). From then onwards, girls' school stories also settled into a predictable popular formula. Unlike many of her contemporaries writing in this genre, Angela Brazil (1868-1947) wrote a collection, rather than a series of stories: each of her sixteen school novels stood on its own with different characters in every instalment. Her popular works dealt realistically with the usual concerns of contemporary middle-class adolescent schoolgirls. During the first years of the twentieth century, however, the success of boys' school stories was affected by a series of novels critical of the idealised, false world of public schoolboy heroes (Wells et al. 631). As a consequence, readership of full-length boys' school stories declined during the inter-war years. They were criticized as escapist, formulaic and elitist, but in spite of this, the period still produced important fictional figures full of cultural meaning for subsequent generations of readers.

The genre for girls continued to increase in popularity, and to introduce stories related to Girl Guides, founded in 1910, and schoolgirl 'detectives'. The writers credited with consolidating girls' school stories at this time were Dorita Fairlie-Bruce (the *Dimsie* series), Elsie Oxenham (forty *Abbey Girls* books published between 1920 and 1959), Elinor Brent-Dyer (*Chalet School* series), and Enid Blyton (the *St Clare's* and *Malory Towers* series). The *Malory Towers* series (1946-51) continues to be popular; special interest Internet pages cater to Blyton fans of all

ages and nationalities.¹ Readers' comments and reviews on such sites highlight the values contained in the original stories, and reveal certain nostalgia for the closed world of the boarding school. New editions are regularly published, and demand is so great that in 2008 six sequels to *Malory Towers* were commissioned (Enid Blyton Society).

In the last half of the twentieth century, the gender-specific boarding-school story inevitably evolved into the more common social experience of day-school. Thus there are stories about grammar schools, secondary moderns, primary schools and cathedral choir schools, where characters come to terms with contemporary issues such as racism, sexism and bullying. Their relationship with such issues means that they are more likely to coincide with the educational experience of the majority of modern readers, but at the same time these modern school stories may have a more limited lifespan than the classic school sagas. A curious by-product of the *Harry Potter* series has been a regeneration of school stories, adapting them to a coeducational boarding-school context, with politically correct attention to ethnic variety. J.K. Rowling's stories have even renewed interest in real-life education at a boarding school as an alternative for middle-class families disenchanted with state education in the UK. Boarding-schools have lost their negative image of anachronistic institutions, as can be appreciated in the article by Middleton (para. 1):

Thirty years ago, children went to boarding school in much the same way as convicts went to a penal colony. They didn't so much go, as were sent. Today, that's all changed. Going to boarding school is now a lifestyle choice, not so much on the part of the parents, as of the child.

In the UK state sector there are thirty-five boarding schools which charge only for accommodation, the education being free. Not surprisingly, all are over-subscribed, some with ten times more applications than places. Their success is due to the fact that "the combination of the excellent state-funded education and a stable boarding community enables pupils to make the most of their talents and abilities" (SBSA,

¹ The Malory Towers series comprises six titles: *First Term at Malory Towers*; *Second Form at Malory Towers*; *Third Year at Malory Towers*; *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*; *In the Fifth at Malory Towers*; *Last Term at Malory Towers*. The author intended them to be read consecutively, with the readers maturing as the protagonists also mature, but she also implied that each story was self-contained and as such could be read separately.

para. 2). It could be said, therefore, that the boarding-school story, both classic and modern, is maintaining a prominent position amongst young readers' preferences, and that it is made more relevant than might be expected by real life experience.

Two basic aspects—cultural references and colloquial language—in Enid Blyton's original text, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers* and its translation into Spanish (*Cuarto Curso en Torres de Malory*) will be examined to show how they are often misrepresented to the target reader of the translation. The items chosen are notoriously difficult to translate, but understanding of the terms in question is necessary for the story to be acceptable and enjoyable for young readers of a different linguistic and cultural context.

The *Malory Towers* series was first published between 1946 and 1951. The books follow the school life of Darrell Rivers from first to final year. The six books were originally illustrated by Stanley Lloyd, but from the mid-fifties, the jackets were updated by Lilian Buchanan. The original dust jackets are an interesting source of visual cultural elements, revealing the girl's sports activities, leisure pursuits, classroom behaviour, attitudes, body language and even fashions. Due to lack of space they will not be examined in this paper, but the line drawings contained in both versions will be mentioned in section 2.5 below.

1. Cultural references

A large number of the references dealt with here are obviously part of the academic context, in particular a private boarding-school in post-war Britain. The social level is also necessarily upper-middle class, with its own leisure activities, food, clothes and social markers. It is therefore distant in time, space and social level with regard to the experience of the present generation of young readers. For the purpose of this study, all the occurrences of cultural references likely to be wrongly interpreted or simply not understood were located. Some of them would probably cause comprehension difficulties both for modern native and non-native addressees, while others would possibly only cause confusion for the non-natives. Due to limitations of space only a selection of items will be presented, emphasizing how in many

instances the original meaning has been either deformed or ignored by the translator, giving a distorted image to the Spanish addressee. The terms under discussion have been italicized in both languages, and where appropriate, other possible translations have been suggested, and are highlighted in bold script.

1.1. *School organization and boarding-school.*

She was almost thirteen, and should have gone to Malory Towers two *terms* before... / Tenía casi trece años, y hubiera podido ir a “Torres de Malory” dos *cursos* antes ...

Now it was the *summer term*... / Ahora se trataba del *curso de verano* ...

The translator equates *term* with *year* or *form*, whereas *term* refers to one of the three parts of the academic year: autumn (Christmas) term, spring term and summer term. Moreover, by translating *summer term* as *curso de verano*, the addressee will assume that the pupils are at school because they have failed their exams, have to repeat a course of study, or are taking part in an extracurricular activity.

Miss Potts was the first-form mistress, and also the *house-mistress* for North Tower; the tower to which Darrell belonged, and to which her young sister would go too. / La señorita Potts era la profesora del primer curso, y también la *encargada* de la “Torre Norte”, a la que pertenecía Darrell, y a la que también iría este curso su hermana pequeña.

Malory Towers is a fortress-like structure with a tower at each corner, named North Tower, South Tower, West Tower and East Tower, and accordingly, the pupils are divided into four teams or houses which also take these names. This division of pupils into houses was and still is a common practice in boarding-schools, and is felt to be an important part of education:

A boy's House is very much the focus of his daily life, and provides a community within the school to which he relates particularly closely. ... The House system at Tonbridge retains a traditional strength and encourages the loyalty which grows from security within a close-knit community of manageable size. (Tonbridge para. 1)

As boarders, pupils would eat, sleep, study and have recreational activities in their respective houses, winning or losing points for the

inter-house competitions, and each house would have a tutor or house-master/house-mistress. The house system was a means of instilling team spirit, all important to the Anglo-Saxon cultural ideal of collective effort over individuality. This concept is probably opaque for the modern young Spanish addressee, and referring to a teacher as *encargada* does not help to explain the system. More than a teacher, she might be taken as being a member of the auxiliary staff.

We've all got to work for *School Certificate*. / Tendremos que trabajar de firme para conseguir el *diploma del colegio*.

The School Certificate was an examination in any of a range of subjects taken in British schools between 1917 and 1951 (Summers 1178). This was replaced by the G.C.E. O level examination, later replaced by the G.C.S.E. examination.² Native addressees today would probably assume it was the previous equivalent of the G.C.S.E., while non-natives might think it was a diploma issued only by that school (*del colegio*), with little or no validity outside that context. In other parts of the translation, it is sometimes rendered as *Diploma Escolar*, which is probably more acceptable, since it does not give the impression of depending on that particular school, although the translator could have offered *Certificado Escolar* or even *Graduado Escolar*, both of which would at least offer an approximation.

I know we're supposed to go to *Matron* and give in our health certificate and our term's pocket money. / Sé que hemos de ir a encontrar al *ama* para entregarle nuestro certificado médico y nuestro dinero para gastos.

A matron is a woman in charge of domestic and medical arrangements at a boarding school, while *ama* could be any of several definitions given by the Real Academia Española (RAE), including an owner, a woman in charge of servants, the main servant in a household, or even a wet nurse, none of which give the idea of status possessed by *matron* in English. In Blyton's times, the connotations of *Matron* (with a respectful capital letter) would have been those of a strict figure of authority; there is no implication of this in the Spanish translation.

² G.C.E. "O" level: General Certificate of Education; G.C.S.E.: General Certificate of Secondary Education.

The North Tower fourth-formers went eagerly to their classroom after *Prayers*. / Las de la “Torre Norte” estaban deseando ir a su clase después de las *oraciones*.

Prayers used to be the first communal activity of the morning in British schools, both in the public and private sectors. Now it is usually replaced by Assembly, which, depending on the school, includes some kind of brief religious service, followed by the announcement of information for pupils. Nowadays, pupils may opt out of these daily meetings on the grounds of religious incompatibility. *Prayers* is written with a capital letter, in keeping with its importance in the system at that time.

That’s what comes of going to a good prep school — you always find you’re in advance of the lowest form work when you go to a *public school* — but if you go to a rotten prep school, it takes years to catch up. / Eso es lo que ocurre cuando se va a un buen colegio preparatorio — siempre se descubre que se está más adelantado que el mismo curso cuando se va a un *colegio público*; pero si se ha ido a una mala escuela preparatoria cuesta años alcanzar a las demás.

In Britain, a preparatory or prep school is a private school for children between the ages of 8 and 13, where they are made ready to attend a private fee-paying school for older pupils (referred to as a public or independent school). Unfortunately the translator has fallen into the obvious trap, giving *public school* its literal value. The translation not only gives false information about the contrasting private and state sector options, but could also be confusing for the reader, who will have understood at this point that the girls in this story would never have gone to a state school because they were members of a higher social level.

I shall take my *prep* out into the open air tonight. / Esta tarde voy a estudiar al aire libre.

Only at public (private or independent) schools is homework referred to as *prep*. The speaker shows, therefore, that she belongs to a certain social class and that she knows the appropriate vocabulary in English, but in Spanish she only states that she is going to study. The reader does not know if it is because she is a diligent pupil who spends time after class revising the lessons on her own initiative; the translator could have offered “voy a hacer los deberes” instead of simply “voy a estudiar” in order to complete the sense of the original.

head girl / jefa de clase.

The most important pupil in a British school, chosen for his/her academic merits, sense of responsibility and leadership qualities is the head girl/head boy. In co-educational schools there is both a head boy and head girl. In Blyton's text, there appears to be a head girl in each year group. Perhaps the translation could have made use of the term *delegada de curso*, which would have been more meaningful for target readers, even though it does not have the connotations of merit attached to *head girl*.

half-term / mitad de curso.

Half-term is usually a break of a few days or a week half-way through each term. The translator continues to confuse *term* and *year*. As there were three terms, they could have three of these breaks, but the Spanish version divides the whole school year into just two halves, with only one break of this kind. The girls in Blyton's text are visited by their families, but in state schools students would nowadays go away for a short holiday, or simply stay at home. As the school year, and consequently the individual terms, are longer in Britain than in Spain, break at half-term is necessary, although Spanish school calendars often create (unofficial) breaks of three or four days by linking a public holiday and the weekend, including the working day(s) in between.

The upper-fourth / el cuarto curso (grado) superior.

The numbering system for school classes has changed over the years and the Malory Towers scheme may seem strange to modern readers, both native and non-native. The reader is told that Darrell's younger sister, Felicity, is nearly thirteen and in the first form, while Darrell is fifteen, "going on for sixteen." The following distribution can, therefore, be deduced:

1st form	12-13 years	
2nd form	13-14 years	
3rd form	14-15 years	
Lower 4th	15-16 years	} promotion based on terms, not years
Upper 4th		
Lower 5th	16-17 years	
Upper 5th		

While the first three years, until reaching the minimum school leaving age of fifteen (at the time the story was published), imply promotion each school year, the subsequent groups are promoted on the basis of terms and according to each pupil's performance. The text supplies proof of this on several occasions.

‘I think probably most of you will know that Jean, who passed School Cert last year, has gone up into the next form,’ said Miss Williams. ‘She does not need to work with the School Cert form *this term*. She was head girl of the upper-fourth, and now that she has gone, we must have another’ (Chapter V, emphasis added).

‘Well — Connie thought that if she failed and I passed, I'd go up into the lower fifth *next term*, and she would have to stay down in the upper-fourth and take the exam again *another term*,’ went on Ruth (Chapter XXI, emphasis added).

Present-day numbering systems in the UK have done away with upper and lower divisions, and are based on complete academic years. Year 1 (in Key Stage 1) represents the first year of compulsory schooling, at the age of five, and Year 11 the last, at the age of sixteen (Key Stage 4), though pupils can continue in full-time education for two more years on a voluntary basis. According to this modern scheme, Felicity would be in Year 8, and Darrell in Year 11. However, for translation purposes it may be more appropriate to forget about numbering systems and refer in a more general way to the first or last years of compulsory education/secondary education.

It was doubtful if she would pass, if she *completed* the rest of her *papers* badly / Era dudoso que aprobase si *llenaba* el resto de los *papeles* tan mal.

The *papers* in question are exam papers, but if they are translated as *papeles*, together with the verb *llenar* (*rellenar*, would be more normal), it seems to be more a question of bureaucratic form-filling than actually taking examinations.

I glanced at all the exam papers before sending them *up* / He mirado los exámenes antes de enviarlos *arriba*.

External exams, such as the School Certificate in its day, as opposed to internal exams carried out in individual schools, were and still are evaluated by anonymous correctors employed by the appropriate

examination board.³ If the headmistress speaks, therefore, of having sent the exams *up*, it implies they have been forwarded to London, Oxford, Cambridge, or wherever the board has its headquarters, and not literally *up* (*arriba*), as in the translation, which leads the reader to believe the exams are corrected in the same school on an upper floor.

1.2. Social markers.

It was the day to return to Malory Towers, *her boarding school* / Era el día de su vuelta a “Torres de Malory”, *su internado*.

The use of the possessive adjective *her*, implies normality, in that most girls of Darrell’s social class at the time the text was written would attend a boarding school.

her old governess / *su institutriz*

Similarly, most girls of the upper middle class at that time would have had a governess or two before attending prep school and then boarding school.

The letter was addressed to “*The Honourable* Clarissa Carter.” / La carta iba dirigida a “*La honorable* Clarisa Carter.”

According to Debrett’s (2010), the ultimate authority on the etiquette of forms of address, *the Honourable* classifies the holder of this title as the daughter of a viscount or baron, but the translation leaves the reader in considerable doubt as to the exact social status of Clarissa.

To her surprise she saw *an old car* in the drive, and out of it stepped *a most ordinary-looking* woman. / Con sorpresa, observó que se trataba de un “*Austin*” antiguo, del que se apeaba una mujer *con el aspecto más vulgar del mundo*.

The translator has chosen to add a social marker not present in the original (the make of car), but the result is not more explicit. Whereas Blyton describes the woman as *ordinary-looking*, the translator makes her have *el aspecto más vulgar del mundo*, which is aesthetically and socially quite inferior. What the author meant was that, in contrast to the description of the mother of “the Honourable Clarissa Carter”

³ E.g. Joint Matriculation Board, Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board, Southern Universities’ Joint Board for School Examinations, etc.

(*a charming auburn-haired woman, beautifully dressed*) or Darrell's mother (...*very pretty in a simple grey suit with a little blue blouse*), this woman was not elegantly dressed like the other pupils' mothers (she turns out, in fact, to be an ex-governess who has come to visit her former charge), but she was far from being *vulgar*. At the beginning of the story it is made quite clear that outward appearances are very important at this social level:

Parents mattered a lot when you were at boarding school! Everyone wanted to be proud of the way their fathers and mothers looked and spoke and behaved. It was dreadful if a mother came in a silly hat, or if a father came looking very untidy (Chapter I).

1.3. Food and drink.

In 1949 British children reading Blyton's work were still suffering the effects of Second World War food rationing, which had started in 1940 and continued until 1954, but which in practice still conditioned many family's diets for the rest of the decade. A list of food containing the examples below taken from 'feasts' and picnics in Blyton's story would, therefore, sound wonderful to the children of even the most comfortable families. Modern native addressees would still probably find most of the items on the list attractive and more importantly, they would be able to interpret correctly their ingredients, format, taste and value. In cultural terms, it is significant that most of the items imply both time spent by mothers/carers in preparation, and the importance attached to home-made delicacies, as opposed to today's supply of instant or take-away food. Unfortunately, some of the translations leave much to the imagination of the non-native reader, and therefore do not have the same effect on the addressee. Some explanation would be needed to convince non-native addressees of some of the treats translated rather literally. Suggestions for more intelligible translations are offered in parentheses:

potted meat / carne en conserva (**paté de carne**)
 shortbread / tarta de Manteca (**galletas de mantequilla**)
 tongue sandwiches with lettuce / bocadillos de lengua con lechuga
 (**bocadillos de fiambre con lechuga/ensalada**)
 great chunks of new-made cream cheese / grandes pedazos de queso recién hecho (**queso fresco en trozos grandes**)

a great fruit cake with almonds crowding the top / un gran pastel de bizcocho con almendras (**un gran bizcocho de uvas pasas, adornado con muchas almendras**)

jam sandwiches / pastelitos de mermelada (**sandwiches de mermelada**)

cold ham and tomatoes / jamón frío con tomates (**jamón de York con tomate**)

potatoes roasted in their jackets / patatas asadas (**patatas asadas con piel**)

cold apple pie and cream/ pastel de manzana y crema (**tarta de manzana con nata**)

biscuits and butter / galletas y mantequilla (**galletas saladas con mantequilla**)

big jugs of icy-cold lemonade / grandes jarros de limonada muy helada (**jarras grandes de granizada de limón**)

Food is a cultural element not to be underestimated, since “the semantic fields culture-specific words usually pertain to include the domains of food and drinks, articles of dress, customs, holidays, dances, games, sports, politics and economics” (Neagu para. 4). There can be no doubt that food forms part of our earliest memories and it exerts a powerful influence over our perception of foreign or familiar gastronomy. Cultural embedding of gastronomic references is illustrated by the following example from the text.

Connie and Ruth put their noses in the air and sniffed hungrily.
“The Bisto Twins!” said Alicia / Connie y Ruth alzaron las naricillas en el aire, respirando con fruición. (*Reference omitted.*)

The story introduces Connie and Ruth as non-identical twins, and Alicia as the joker always making humorous comments to her group of friends and classmates throughout the story, but the mention of *The Bisto Twins*, and the effect it produces in the original, is perhaps the most opaque in the whole story. Not surprisingly, it is not translated in the Spanish version. *Bisto* was a brand name for a product to make perfect gravy, invented in 1908. In 1919 the image of the *Bisto Kids* was introduced as an advertising strategy. The *Kids*, or *Twins*, with their cast-off, over-sized clothes and cheeky look, were an instant success and by the 1920s and 1930s they had become cult figures. The introduction of the National Health Service and the promise of a better and more prosperous Britain at the end of the Second World War meant that the *Bisto Kids* began to seem out of place. As a result, their appearance in

advertising was significantly reduced. However, in response to customer feedback, the *Bisto Kids* were given an updated image and made their advertising come-back in 1976, resurrecting the famous “Ah! Bisto!” slogan. This come-back lasted until the mid 1990s, when the protagonists were finally retired in favour of the image of a modern family. According to Jane Cantellow, from the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, “The marvellous thing about the Bisto brand is that it has something that goes very deep. People feel very warmly about it. The trick is to keep the brand fresh and striking a chord with people today” (BBC). The cultural reference contained in this brand name and advertising slogan continues to be familiar for native readers, but only those of a certain age. The translator has probably opted for the most sensible solution by omitting the direct reference. Nevertheless, a humorous comment embedded in the culture common to both narrator and addressee has unfortunately been lost.

1.4. Leisure activities.

Tennis-rackets to carry, and our *riding hats* / Las raquetas de tenis
y las gorras para montar a caballo.

I'll change into my *jodhpurs* quickly / Iré a *cambiar*me en un
momento.

A *talent-spotting* competition / un concurso de *talentos*.

Riding was a characteristic (upper-)middle class activity. Together with swimming and tennis, it was considered a suitably healthy sporting activity for young ladies. However, riding hats all over the world are made of hard, resistant material, which is not reflected in the translation as *gorras*, which sound much too flimsy; a more appropriate rendering would have been *cascos*. Instead of using *pantalones de montar* for *jodhpurs*, the translator has used the ambiguous expression *iré a cambiar*me, (I'll go and get changed) without specifying what clothing is necessary. In the translation of the third example above, it is not absolutely clear what kind of competition is involved. The original refers to the opportunity of performing in public (singing in this case) with a view to being “spotted” and signed up by a professional entertainment agency.

1.5. *Illustrations.*

The English text used in this analysis includes black and white line drawings. There are no credits for these illustrations, but from the dress, hairstyles and body language they would appear to be the original 1949 illustrations. The Spanish version also includes black and white line drawings, and these are credited to José María Bea. However, these illustrations contradict the period, class and general context presented in the story. They are of doubtful quality, and would be more appropriate in modern comic strips or cheap cartoons. If it was an effort to modernise the story through the pictures, a similar process has not been carried out with the written text. Consequently, the Spanish editors have done the story no favour, producing a confusing socio-cultural combination by making the images contradict the text.

2. Colloquial language

Colloquial language becomes dated very quickly, and in the case of Blyton's text over sixty years have passed since it represented the way of speaking of a particular class. The register used is upper-middle class, which is appropriate to the social context of the private school and its clients. There are no girls with regional accents, and the local people of Cornwall have no spoken role in the story, since the plot develops inside the buildings and grounds of the school, with the result that all the characters speak in a uniform way, except the native French teacher, *Mam'zelle*, who deviates from standard English due to interference from her own language. She would have been an essential part of any upper-middle class educational establishment, and the author uses her to provide a touch of humour.

2.1. *Colloquial abbreviations.*

Generations of students commonly elaborate a set of abbreviated forms for words in common use in their immediate context. This jargon is understood by those of the same age group, but it goes out of fashion very quickly, soon becoming incomprehensible to successive generations:

Did you have good *hols*? / ¿Pasaste buenas vacaciones? (*holidays*)

It was a nice <i>dormy</i> / Era un bonito dormitorio	(<i>dormitory</i>)
That French <i>dicky</i> / el diccionario de francés	(<i>dictionary</i>)
Susan's too <i>pi</i> for words / Susana es demasiado recta	(<i>pious</i>)
She was taken to the <i>san</i> / Fue llevada a la enfermería	(<i>sanatorium</i>)

At a distance of over sixty years, native readers today may have difficulty deciphering such abbreviated colloquialisms, and it is therefore reasonable to eliminate these elements in a translation, as the translator has done, since substitution of any current alternative could also date very quickly, and give an artificial impression.

2.2. Colloquial intensifiers.

Most of these intensifiers are still in use today, but mainly among the older generation of upper-middle class people. They have been translated by fairly neutral terms:

I'm <i>jolly</i> lucky / soy muy afortunada
I'm <i>frightfully</i> hungry / Tengo un apetito atroz
Thanks <i>awfully</i> / Muchísimas gracias
We'll feel <i>jolly</i> old before this term's out / nos sentiremos <i>todavía más</i> viejas antes de que termine el curso.

In the last example the translator has taken the liberty of adding a comparative reference not present in the original: "Nos sentiremos *todavía más viejas*" (We'll feel *even older*), while the original only says the equivalent of *we'll feel very old*.

2.3. Social connotations of adjectives.

Favourite adjectives come and go, even within the same generation's lifetime (*fab, groovy, cool, wicked, awesome* ...are typical of the last decades of the twentieth and first years of the twenty-first centuries, but are falling or have fallen quickly out of use, being replaced by others). The examples below are no longer part of current usage among the young. The translator has been unable or unwilling to differentiate between *dreadful, beastly* and *awful*, rendering them all as *terrible*. In other cases, the meaning is adequately rendered. Where appropriate, some alternative translations have been offered:

She's a bit *starchy* — *very prim and proper* / Es un poco *estirada... orgullosa y muy suya* ... (**...tan correcta y formal**)

Oh, dear — yes, I was *dreadful* ... *really awful...* / ¡oh sí, sí, fui *terrible* ... *realmente terrible* ... (**¡Ay! ¡Qué cosa!...fui malísima ... me porté fatal**)

This is a *dreadful* family to collect / ésta es una familia difícil de reunir (**ésta es una familia a la que es difícil reunir**)

It was *dreadful* if a mother came in a silly hat / Hubiera sido *terrible* que una madre se presentase con un sombrero ridículo (**Hubiera sido espantoso/horrible...**)

We get a *wizard* supper the first evening / la primera noche tenemos una cena estupenda.

This *beastly* getting up early / Es *terrible* tenerse que levantar temprano (**Es muy desagradable...**)

“*Smashing!*” said Alicia, which was the favourite adjective of all the first-formers at the moment / “*Fantástico!*” aprobó Alicia, empleando el adjetivo favorito del momento, de las de primer curso.

Miss Grayling's *grand* / la señorita Grayling es *magnífica*.

The last adjective (*grand*) appears to have made a comeback among people who had not even been born when Blyton's protagonists were using it. It is used along with *cool* nowadays to express the positive qualities of a person or thing.

2.4. Social connotations of exclamations.

Exclamations also date very quickly and can sound rather quaint, or even odd, in both languages. The last example in the following list has been translated literally, giving an artificial feeling to words which would have sounded spontaneous in the original context:

Jolly good! / ¡Estupendo! (**¡Bárbaro!**)

Dash it! / ¡Caramba!

Gracious! / ¡Cielos! (**¡Alabado sea Dios!**)

Golly! / ¡Caracoles! (**¡Qué bien!**)

Blow! / ¡Maldición! (**¡Maldita sea!**)

Beasts, all of you! / ¡Sois unas salvajes! (**¡Qué bestias!**)

Good old Malory Towers! / El viejo y querido „Torres de Malory“! (**¡Viva Malory Towers! / ¡Bien por Malory Towers!**)

2.5. Idiomatic expressions.

All of the following expressions are somewhat dated, and may be outside the typical modern native addressee's scope. In (b) the translator has transformed a fit of anger into preoccupation, and in (c) and (d) withholding social contact with a classmate as a means of expressing disapproval has been turned into what seems more like institutional punishment. The translation of the proverb in (e) is more problematic, since the original text means that a person's plight is hopeless once his reputation has been blackened, but the Spanish translation fails to communicate this idea, because it is incomplete, giving only the first part of a well-known saying which is the positive element:

- a) You really are *a mutt* / realmente eres un desastre (**eres un estúpido / eres totalmente incompetente / eres una nulidad**)
- b) Darrell's *in an awful wax* / Darrell está muy preocupada (**Darrell está muy enfadada / fuera de sí**)
- c) A week of being sent to Coventry / Una semana de aislamiento (**Le han hecho el vacío durante una semana**)
- d) She's in Coventry, you know / Ya sabes que está castigada (**Ya sabes que no le hablamos**)
- e) Give a dog a bad name and hang him / Coge fama y échate a dormir (**Coge buena fama y échate a dormir, y coge mala fama y échate a morir**)

2.6. Mam'zelle's English.

The French teacher's variety of English shows certain stereotyped characteristics for foreigners in general and the French in particular. In example (a) she places an emphatic object pronoun in front of the pronoun and verb (*Me, I ... suffered*), by which the author probably tries to indicate interference from French. There are also two instances of the intrusion of the definite article in (a); confusion over a plural noun used incorrectly in the singular, and difficulty in pronouncing /θ/ in (b); and in (c) she uses *measly* as though it were the adjective corresponding to *measles*, but her pupils know that it really means ridiculously small, or insignificant. Her speech causes great amusement to her pupils, but the humour is completely absent in the translation:

- a) “You have *the* palpitations! ... cried Mam’zelle. “*Me*, I once suffered in this way when I was fifteen!”... “*The* brave Gwendoline!” / “¡Tienes palpitaciones!” ... le gritó mademoiselle. “A mi me pasó una vez cuando tenía quince años!”... “¡La valiente Gwendoline!”
- b) I know *nuzzings* more. /No lo sé.
- c) “You have had a bad time with your *measle*?... It’s good no one got the *measle* from you. ... We will have no more *measly* talk,” she said firmly, and wondered why the girls laughed so much at this. / “¿Lo has pasado muy mal con tu sarampión? ... Ha sido una suerte que no contagiaras a nadie ... No se hablará más del sarampión,” dijo con firmeza preguntándose por qué las niñas se reían tanto con eso.

Conclusions

This short story of only 170 pages contains a surprising number of cultural references, of which only a selection has been classified here, highlighting school organisation, social markers, food and drink, and leisure activities, together with aspects of colloquial language. The Spanish translation of Blyton’s story is inadequate in many aspects, since meaningful cultural references have been distorted or omitted. The result is the misrepresentation of a cultural context, making such a work difficult to understand and enjoy as its author intended. Little effort has been made to communicate efficiently the cultural flavour of this example of a particular genre. This lack of attention may be part of a generalized pattern in the translation of juvenile works into Spanish. In the rush to market translations of best-selling original texts, not enough care is taken choosing the right translation strategies. These can range from exoticism (leaving the ‘untranslatable’ elements in the original language) to cultural transplantation (converting the source setting into one recognisable in the target culture), as well as other intermediate solutions. The finished product is bought by a young audience unaccustomed to voicing their discontent with the translation. Moreover, the addressees usually lack the experience and background knowledge to detect where they have been cheated in the translation, and if certain aspects sound strange, it is easy to attribute them to the ‘foreignness’ of the source text. If addressees are likely to be lacking previous contact with the source culture and context, as is the case with

this story, the translator ought to provide compensatory information or adopt adequate strategies.

As shown above, the boarding school in fiction and in real life is enjoying a revival. In spite of criticisms of “its narrow preoccupation with elitist middle-class education, artificiality and lack of realism” the genre has survived the passage of time (Wells et al. 630). A more sensitive translation of stories such as the one examined here would help to make them more appealing to modern readers.⁴

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