



RAINBOW LIBRARY

Intercultural Dialogue in Slovene Books for Children and Young Adults

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Abstract: Throughout its 60 years of development, children's librarianship in Slovenia has constantly striven to create children's departments in public libraries as "places of intercultural dialogue". This is reflected in the library materials as well as in events. The paper focuses on the degree to which the "Rainbow Library" is realized through its reading material, i.e., on evaluating Slovene and translated material from the "multilingual" and "multicultural" point of view. It will analyse the children's books published in Slovenia in the period of the last ten years (2000-2009) and the reading material in foreign languages in the children's department of the Municipal Library Ljubljana, Oton Župančič Library.

Keywords: children's library, reading material, intercultural dialogue

Children's departments of public libraries in Slovenia – throughout, including in the years before the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and before Slovenia's accession to the European Union – have been included in the process of intercultural dialogue. A public library, namely, is a space of information, education, culture, association and intercultural dialogue in the widest meaning of the word. Children's departments, therefore, necessarily include the development of intercultural dialogue, in addition to the aims of a literary, library and reading culture. In the Manifesto of the Slovenian Library Association on the Development of Slovene Libraries and Librarianship, the following is noted about the role of public libraries in national identity and cultural diversity:

Libraries creatively contribute to the establishment, preservation and promotion of the Slovene national identity and its cultural diversity. Consequently, they will take great care to collect, preserve and promote library materials that are the cultural heritage and monument of the country. Through the acquisition policy, which meets the needs of local users and their environment, through the organisation of cultural events for all ethnic communities, and through the popularisation of multicultural creativity, libraries will promote intercultural co-operation and tolerance (Manifesto, 2004).

In 2008 – in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – we prepared a series of special events in children's departments; in particular in the first half of the year when Slovenia held the presidency of the European Union. We relied in this on the guidelines of our country, which understands intercultural dialogue as a process that encourages an open and complex cultural environment for creativity:



In recent years, Europe, with the enlargement of the Union, with increased mobility deriving from the EU single market, old and new migration flows, the ever more important exchange with the rest of the world through trade, education, free time and general globalisation, has experienced important changes. One of them is the mutual influence of different cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups and religions on the continent. Our cultural environment is becoming from day to day more diverse, and this cultural diversity is an economic, social and political advantage that it is necessary to develop further. On the other hand, increased cultural diversity brings social and political challenges. Stereotypes, racism, intolerance, discrimination and violence can threaten both local and national communities. Dialogue between cultures is therefore an indispensable means today for bringing the European nations together, both within themselves and within the cultures that compose them (Intercultural, 2008).

1. Material in the Children's Department of the Oton Župančič Library¹

1.1 Material in Slovene (original Slovene and translated works)

Our Children's departments buy library material, both original Slovene and translated from foreign languages, based on their own judgement. The Centre for Children's Literature and Librarianship endeavours to purchase one copy of all titles of children's books for the archive, even when not made available for loan (mainly because it is a work of poorer quality, because there is an even more recent edition, there are enough copies for loan etc). Each calendar year for 36 years (since 1972), the Centre has also specially prepared a Survey and a Recommended List of children's books. The lists, with bibliographic notes, provide a review of various data: about the author's works, illustrators, translators, publishers, (book) collections, a further review by age level of readers for whom the books are intended, by level of reading difficulty and even purpose. Because the notes are fitted with keywords, a summary by themes, types and genres is possible. Trends in children's books are highlighted and attention is occasionally drawn to certain groups of books.

This paper will only consider the lists of children's books for the period of the last ten years (2000-2009). In this period, the number of titles of children's books increased from year to year: one fifth or less (13 % - 19 %) of titles belong to non-fiction, educational books and four fifths or more (81 % - 87 %) of titles are fiction.

1.2 Translated works for children, review by languages or national literatures

The "rainbow character" of the library, the cultural diversity of the reading material, which in itself allows cultural diversity and cultural dialogue, appears with works translated from various languages or national literatures.

¹ The Pioneer Library in Ljubljana was founded in 1948 and the Centre for Children's Literature and Librarianship within it in 1972. The Pioneer Library functioned as a unit of the Oton Župančič Library until 1.6.2008, when the Ljubljana libraries were brought together in the Municipal Library Ljubljana.



From which languages literary works have been translated depends on historical, social and economic circumstances, through the influence of promotion and advertisements, and purely personal and even chance causes. A review of translated works, of course, also testifies to very serious editorial and publishing decisions.

In the last ten years, around one third or even more (32-39%) of new titles each year are original Slovene and the remaining two thirds or a little less (61-68%) are translations from various languages or literatures. Translated works are mainly from English (United Kingdom, USA, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand), German, French and Italian, with only individual titles from other languages/national literatures.

However, with translations, the national literature from which the work is translated is more important than the language of the original (this applies primarily for English). By far the most translations are from British literature (United Kingdom - 40%), then from German (17%), American (9%) and French (8%). They are followed by translations from Italian, Belgian and Dutch (each 3.5%), and then Canadian literature (3%). Translations from Australian (1.4%), Polish (1.2%), Spanish (0.8%), Irish (0.8%) and New Zealand literatures (0.5%) also appear.

It is interesting that, in the period from 2003 to 2009, there have been almost no translations from the countries of Eastern Europe (from where the majority came prior to 1985, post-war translated children's literature was even based by co-production with these countries). Furthermore, there is very little translated children's literature from the countries of former Yugoslavia: there are only translations into Slovene from Croatian (0.9%), Serbian (0.3%) and Bosnian literature (only 1 title in eight years), and we have recorded no translation from, e.g., Macedonian. It should be stressed that there have only been three titles from Romany literature (despite the topicality of the Rom question) during this time.

From neighbouring countries, in the period in question there have been most translations from Italian (as already said, 3.5%), from Austrian (1.6%), Croatian (as already said, 0.9%) and only 3 titles from Hungarian.

Translations from Nordic literature are represented as follows: from Swedish (1% of titles), from Danish (0.5%), four from Finnish and one title from Norwegian literature (none at all from Iceland).

From numerous, including large national literatures from the remainder of the world, there has been only one title each from African, Asian, Israeli, Japanese and other literature.



1.2 Children's work, review in terms of the content “intercultural dialogue”

Because all works in the reviews and recommended lists are fitted with keywords, the theme that they cover can be seen. From the point of view of the “Rainbow Library”, it is of interest how many in the period covered are fitted with the keywords “multiculturalism” and “tolerance” or, above all, how many works are fitted with both keywords, because they are works that to the greatest extent encourage tolerance among different cultures, i.e., “intercultural dialogue”.

In the period from 2000 to 2004, the keyword “tolerance” appears each year with several (2-4) titles, although in the last three years there have been some more (6-9). The keyword “multiculturalism” first appeared only in 2004, and then appeared in 2-11 works in the following years. “Intercultural dialogue”, as we understand it today, is therefore present in Slovene literature for the young mainly in the period of the last six years (2004-2009).

“Tolerance” is dealt with in works for all ages of children, but most of all in works for pre-school children and the early reading period (from 3 years of age to 3rd year of 9-year primary school); it is therefore mainly in picture books! “Multiculturalism” is dealt with in works for all ages of children except for the youngest (up to 3 years old). Most of these works are found in the group of works for readers from 4th to 6th class of 9-year primary school.

Analysis showed that the most works that contain “cultural dialogue” are in works for children of the second third of 9-year primary school, and then in works for young readers in the last third and in works for readers aged above 14 years (4th reading level). The largest number of these works in the last eight years has been published by Mladinska knjiga and Miš publishing houses.

The most works for children and young people fitted with the keywords “tolerance” and “multiculturalism” have been translated from German (15 titles), English (14 titles) and Swiss (10) literature; the majority of these translations have been published by Mladinska knjiga. They are followed by titles from Dutch (4), Australian (4), Irish (3) and Canadian (3) literature, as well as Belgian, Croatian, Italian, New Zealand and Spanish literature (each 2 titles) and Polish (1 title) literature; thus from national literatures from which we have not previously had many translation. Miš publishing house deserves the most credit for the introductions from these national literatures (Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, Dutch and Belgian).



It should be stressed for comparison that, among original Slovene works in this period (2000-2009), there are 14 titles dealing with “tolerance” and “multiculturalism”, but for “intercultural dialogue” there are actually only three works: Flisar, 2007; Pikalo, 2007; Vidmar, 2003.

In the story entitled *Friends* by Janja Vidmar eight-year old Jakob from a Slovene Christian family and nine-year old Amir from a Muslim family, immigrants from Bosnia, are friends. They talk and even occasionally quarrel a little about God and Allah. They feel the differences between their faiths but when they are enthusiastically kicking a ball: “They play in various positions, shout and, at the same time, are grinning all over their faces. They conclude that God and Allah are super, since as well as people they also made football” (Vidmar, 2003: 18).

The work by Evald Flisar entitled *Pikpokec postane svetovni prvak/Pikpokec becomes world champion* – published in two languages, Slovene and English – calls for tolerance in the widest sense of the word. Pikpokec forces a company of boys to “intercultural dialogue” by beating them in football. He is helped in this by imaginary beings, Hophopki. Pikpokec provides them with data that we experience completely differently in contemporary times, more profoundly than we did in our childhood: “So that they fell into the garden of a house below the castle in Ljubljana, which is the capital of Slovenia, a country in Europe, which is a continent on Earth, which is a planet in the solar system, which is part of the Roman Road, which is part of the universe, which is infinite” (Flisar, 2007: 24).

And in this global, multi-lingual and multicultural environment it is important to *think well and wisely*, as the poem by Matjaž Pikalo with that title encourages us, which was published as a picture book in four languages: Slovene, English, Spanish and Chinese.

2. Material in foreign languages

In addition to material in the Slovene language (original Slovene and translated) children's departments of public libraries also purchase reading material in foreign languages, in order to provide young readers with the possibility of getting to know other literatures and cultures, reading in original languages (and thus also the possibility of perfecting themselves in these languages)... and, not least, in order to enable non-Slovene young readers to read in their mother tongue.



In the children's department of the Municipal Library Ljubljana, Oton Župančič Library, the material for children and young people in original languages is the following: in English 3081 units, then in German 1743 units, in French 349 units, in Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian 401 units, in Italian 149 units, in Spanish 66 units and a few titles each in other foreign languages. There are 1615 foreign citizens who are members of the Oton Župančič Library, who borrow material for children as well as for adults.

3. Conclusion

What is the charm and necessity of multiculturalism and why do librarians constantly strive for intercultural dialogue, so also throughout the period prior to 2008 – the International Year of Intercultural Dialogue?

First of all, because reading material is collected in libraries, which, in all the languages of the world, brings the complete knowledge, experience, wisdom and culture of mankind (science, technology, art, philosophy, morals etc.).

Above all, though, “because in contemporary society, it is from various cultures that a person draws and builds her or his personal culture and is recognised as a PERSON; cultures that have grown over the millennia from roots unknown to us and developed into mighty cultures, as well as into the modern global multicultural environment. Problems of human survival can no longer be solved with closed clans of political, national or religious cultures; it is necessary to unite everything that is good and cultured in the individual and mankind. Precisely libraries are places – as they are defined in international and national documents – in which all good is met without conflict and shared by all without conflict, democratically”. (Zadravec, 2008: 3).

Almost all quality literary works are bearers of culture, cultural tradition and the most important values: Many of them, with a modern reader's perception, could be designated with the keyword “intercultural dialogue”. However, “multiculturalism” and “intercultural dialogue” have become one of the central themes in literature only in recent years, when ever more problems have arisen in multicultural societies. This analysis has thus covered only works contemporary youth literature (from 2000-2009), which are intended to respond to the problems and demands of modern times.

It appeared that “multiculturalism” in reading material is realised to a certain extent in Slovene children's departments. Translations of works from various national literatures in



themselves create the possibility of open dialogue among different cultures, but translations from English and some other large national literatures prevail all too much, and there are too few translations of works from the countries of former Yugoslavia, from the countries of Eastern Europe and the national literatures of Africa, Asia and South America.

In recent years, “intercultural dialogue” covers some quality works translated from German, English and Swiss literature (the majority of these translations published by Mladinska knjiga publishing house), but especially a small number of quality works translated from national literatures from which previously we did not have many translations – these are works from Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, Irish, Dutch and Belgian literatures (most of these published by Miš publishing house).

The results of our analysis can be a call to other publishers to try in practice truly to realise »intercultural dialogue« by publishing quality children's books from »disregarded« languages or literatures.

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