

## TRANSLATING CHILDLIKE LOGIC IN "OSCAR ET LA DAME ROSE" (OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK) BY ÉRIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT

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### Abstract

*This article presents a comparative analysis of the novel "Oscar et la dame rose" by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt and its two translations: the English version by Adriana Hunter (Atlantic Books, 2005) and the Romanian version by Marieva Ionescu (Humanitas, 2012). The study examines how the same narrative, originally written in French, is reconfigured across three linguistic and cultural contexts, producing two mediated transnarrations of a story composed as a series of letters written by Oscar, a ten-year-old boy suffering from leukemia, addressed to God. The aim of the analysis is to identify and interpret relevant textual moments that illustrate the specific challenges involved in translating a discourse structured around childlike logic. This logic is expressed through distinctive behavioral patterns such as play and imitation, metaphorical and imaginative reasoning, and pragmatic deviations from adult communicative norms. Drawing on frameworks from Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the narrative paradigm and translation studies, the article investigates how the translation of a children's text negotiates the balance between linguistic simplicity and psychological and philosophical depth. Special attention is given to the translator's mediating role in preserving the tension between the dual narrative instances: the authorial adult voice implicit in the text and the fictional child narrator's perspective. By comparing selected passages across the three versions, the article highlights how translation choices influence the representation of childlike cognition and emotional authenticity, ultimately influencing the reader's perception of narrative credibility in each target language.*

**Keywords:** imitation, play, translation, childlike logic, narrative voice

### Rezumat

*Acest articol prezintă o analiză comparativă a romanului „Oscar et la dame rose” de Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt și a celor două traduceri ale sale: versiunea în limba engleză realizată de Adriana Hunter (Atlantic Books, 2005) și versiunea în limba română realizată de Marieva Ionescu (Humanitas, 2012). Studiul examinează modul în care aceeași poveste, redactată inițial în limba franceză, este reconfigurată în trei contexte lingvistice și culturale diferite, generând două transnarațiuni mediate ale unei serii de scrisori scrise de Oscar, un băiat de zece ani bolnav de leucemie, adresate lui Dumnezeu. Scopul analizei este de a identifica și interpreta momente textuale relevante care ilustrează provocările specifice ale traducerii unui discurs structurat în jurul logicii de copil. Această logică se exprimă prin comportamente distinctive precum jocul și imitația, raționamentul metaforic și imaginativ, precum*

și abaterile pragmatice de la normele comunicative ale adulților. Pornind de la cadre teoretice oferite de teoria dezvoltării cognitive a lui Piaget, paradigma narativă și repere traductologice, articolul investighează modul în care traducerea unui text pentru copii negociază echilibrul dintre simplitatea glosică și profunzimea psihologică și filosofică. O atenție deosebită este acordată rolului de mediator al traducătorului în păstrarea echilibrului dintre cele două instanțe narative: vocea adultă a autorului, implicită în structura textului, și perspectiva personajului narator copil. Prin compararea unor pasaje selectate din cele trei versiuni, articolul evidențiază modul în care alegerile de traducere influențează reprezentarea cogniției copilărești și a autenticității emoționale, determinând, în final, percepția cititorului asupra credibilității narative în fiecare limbă ținută.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** imitare, joc, traducere, logică de copil, voce narativă

### Introduction

Adults and children do not live at the same rhythm and do not share the same logic. Developmental psychologists, among whom one of the most prominent is Jean Piaget, emphasize that children should not be regarded as miniature adults, but rather as distinct beings who actively construct knowledge and progressively develop cognitive skills, mainly within a vital activity in childhood, which is play.

By distinguishing four major stages of cognitive development from birth to adolescence: namely the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages (Piaget, 1964, pp. 12–13), Piaget argued that knowledge is actively constructed through the child's interaction with the environment. In this process, children progressively form increasingly complex representations of the world, continuously integrating individual mental processes with adaptations to social and collective factors.

Jean Piaget repeatedly suggested that one of the fundamental sources of representation in the child's mind is imitation (Piaget, 1962, p. 2). Imitation plays a crucial role in establishing inter-individual relationships and in facilitating social integration. It is at the origin of the acquisition of elementary human sounds, movements, and gestures, but it also allows the child to internalize behavioral models and response patterns that support adaptive functioning in the world. The theme of imitation, understood as externally guided mimicry of adult life by a child, is also central in "Oscar et la dame rose", which is the focus of analysis in this article.

According to developmental psychologists, systematic imitation contributes to the construction of functional schemas and mental representations that characterize the child's psycho-cognitive development. It also underlies many forms of play, which serve as important mechanisms through which children internalize essential aspects of interpersonal interaction. Up to the stage of concrete operational thinking, the child primarily imitates behavioral models derived from the external world, namely those of adults in their immediate environment or of other children. At this level, cognitive functioning is largely governed by the interest and affective relevance of external stimuli, while

adult reasoning and abstract judgments do not yet have a decisive role in the child's interpretation of reality. Additionally, education specialists note that "children relish playing with logic and content" (Flegar, 2016, p. 75).

From an ontogenetic perspective, social life is essential for the genesis and development of concepts, symbols, and verbal signs in children (Piaget, 1962, p. 68). Through family structures and educational institutions, children are introduced into society, where they develop complex networks of social interactions and adopt culturally situated behavioral patterns (Tyulenev, 2014, p. 14). In becoming members of society, children acquire culture, such as etiquette, axiological frameworks, socially approved behaviors and community rituals, not through genetic inheritance, but through learning processes.

Culture can be understood as a repository of socially acceptable behaviors and validated forms of activity (Tyulenev, 2014, p. 23), which shapes and structures the child's ways of acting, thinking and feeling, thereby integrating individual development into the broader social continuum. The adult guidance and collaboration with the *more capable peers* in Vygotsky's terminology (Vygotky, 1978, p. 86), is indispensable to the socio-cultural initiation of the child, whose worldview is inevitably marked by some shared norms and conventionalized forms of expression. These often take the form of collective clichés or socially pre-structured meanings, which are initially assimilated in an unreflective manner and only later become subject to critical awareness and reinterpretation.

However, when considering children's logic and their ways of perceiving, conceptualizing, and interpreting the world, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of necessary processes of adaptation, reframing and restructuring of initial cognitive frameworks. At the level of intellectual development, verbal capacity and psycho-associative organization, there is a clear and systematic difference between the perspectives of children and adults.

This distinction becomes particularly relevant in the context of children's literature. As noted by R. Pederzoli (2010, p. 127), such literature is characterized by an inherent asymmetry between the adult (author, illustrator, translator, parent, educator) and the child reader. This structural imbalance places the child in a comparatively vulnerable position, raising significant ethical concerns related to representation, agency and interpretative authority. The adult, as the producer and mediator of meaning, holds a privileged position, while the child remains the intended recipient, often with limited capacity to contest or reinterpret the text's underlying assumptions.

In Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's novel "Oscar et la dame rose" (*Oscar and the Lady in Pink*), this asymmetry is partially neutralized through the narrative device of play, which allows the child protagonist to assume a form of imaginative agency. The novel presents a ten-year-old boy suffering from terminal leukemia, who is acutely aware of the imminence of his death. Following the advice of a volunteer caregiver, whom he affectionately names Granny

Rose due to her pink uniform, Oscar engages in a symbolic game that consists of compressing an entire human lifespan into a few remaining days. Through this imaginative framework, each day is equated with a decade of life, enabling the child to experience, in accelerated form, the key stages and social roles associated with adulthood, including adolescence, romantic attachment, marriage and old age.

Using Jean Piaget's constructivist approach, this process can be interpreted as a complex interplay between symbolic play and imitation. On the one hand, Oscar's enactment involves elements of imitation, as he draws upon observed behavioral patterns, reproduces familiar expressions, and aligns his imagined experiences with socially recognizable frameworks. On the other hand, the general structure of the activity is fundamentally governed by symbolic play, insofar as it entails a radical transformation of temporal reality and the creative reconfiguration of life experience to meet psychological and existential needs. The accelerated simulation of a complete life does not aim at faithful reproduction but rather at meaningful reconstruction, allowing the child to assert control over an otherwise uncontrollable situation.

Thus, the novel illustrates how imaginative play can function as a compensatory mechanism that attenuates both existential vulnerability and the structural asymmetry inherent in children's literature. By appropriating adult roles and compressing them into a self-directed narrative, Oscar temporarily reclaims interpretative authority as well as the meaning-making capacity, even though it is ultimately an adult (Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt) who conceives his thoughts and words.

### **Translation and Child-Centered Narrative: Logic, Voice and Authorial Intent**

The issue of the equilibrium between narrative voice and authorial authenticity in children's literature becomes even more complex when considering the transposition of this carefully constructed and delicate asymmetry in translation. In the case of a translated work, the original relational configuration between adult author and child narrator is extended into a more complex, multi-layered interaction that necessarily includes a third agent: the translator. This addition transforms the initial binary (adult-child) dynamic into a triadic structure, in which the translator assumes a mediating role, responsible for rearticulating the text in another linguistic and cultural system while preserving its internal equilibrium.

From this perspective, translation may be understood in terms of Roman Jakobson's concept of interlingual translation, but it also entails elements of intersemiotic sensitivity, insofar as the translator must convey not only linguistic content but also narrative voice, psychological nuance and symbolic structures. The translator is thus required to maintain a form of "complicity" with both the adult authorial intention and the child's narrative perspective, ensuring that neither is distorted in the process of transfer.

The principal challenge lies in preserving the credibility and coherence of the psychologically motivated, imaginatively constructed "simulation play" through which the child protagonist interprets and reorganizes reality. This involves reproducing a narrative voice that is simultaneously naïve and insightful, shaped by culturally mediated representations of adult life yet filtered through a child's cognitive and emotional framework. As a result, the translator must negotiate a series of complex equivalences, often choosing between formal accuracy and functional adequacy, in order to recreate an atmosphere that remains both artistically convincing and developmentally plausible within the target culture.

Such decisions are complex. They require sensitivity to the implicit cultural scripts underlying the representation of adulthood, as well as an awareness of how these scripts are selectively appropriated, simplified or transformed within the child's imaginative universe.

If we return to the logic of imitation, it is fundamentally based on a principle of association or imagined substitution, whereby one concept is replaced by another, one state is projected onto a different yet perceived as analogous state, and a familiar action serves as a model for interpreting an unfamiliar one. Within this framework, the author Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt systematically exploits associative strategies, making extensive use of similes and metaphors that reflect the child protagonist's tendency to concretize abstract notions and to internalize experience by mapping it onto a familiar conceptual matrix and an informal style of language.

A first domain in which this associative logic becomes particularly visible in translation concerns the formation of children's nicknames, which are based on perceptible physical resemblances between patients and objects that motivate their naming. For instance, Oscar, who is undergoing chemotherapy and has lost his hair, is referred to in the original French text as *Crâne d'Œuf* ("egg skull"). In the English translation, this is rendered as *Egghead*, a solution that preserves both formal and semantic proximity and may be considered a successful case of direct translation.

In the Romanian translation, however, *Crâne d'Œuf* is rendered as *Bilă* ("ball"), which constitutes a more oblique translational solution. While it maintains a general semantic association with roundness and head shape, it shifts the original metaphorical basis from "egg" to "ball", thereby replacing the primary material image with a different conceptual referent.

The situation appears more straightforward in the case of other nicknames such as *Bacon*, *Einstein*, and *Pop Corn*, which rely on internationally recognizable lexical items that tend to remain stable across languages. In English, these are preserved as *Bacon*, *Einstein*, and *Popcorn*, respectively. In the Romanian version, however, a notable adaptation occurs in the case of *Bacon*, which is replaced by *Jumară* (a traditional term referring to fried pork rind). This choice reflects a domestication strategy, favouring a culturally embed-

ded and colloquial equivalent that is more immediately accessible to Romanian-speaking readers. The substitution enhances associative proximity by emphasizing the visual and sensory connotations of “burnt” or “crispy” texture, more obvious within the target culture than the borrowed and more formal term *bacon*.

A comparable process of culturally motivated concept substitution can be observed in the translation of the girls’ nicknames. In the case of *Peggy Blue*, the English version preserves the original French form without modification, whereas the Romanian translation *Peggy Albăstrea* introduces a form of creative explicitation. This choice is not merely a lexical adjustment but also a culturally inflected reinterpretation of the character’s physical condition. While the reference to skin discoloration caused by illness is retained through the association with the color blue, the addition of *albăstrea* (cornflower) introduces a layer of symbolic embellishment, drawing on culturally specific associations of femininity, delicacy and floral imagery. In Romanian cultural tradition, the cornflower evokes not only visual beauty but also notions of purity and the vibrancy of rural landscapes, thereby amplifying the affective and aesthetic dimension of the character’s portrait.

Another instance of culturally conditioned associative displacement can be observed in the rendering of *Sandrine la Chinoise*. In Romanian, this nickname is translated as *Sandrine Chinezoaica*, maintaining a relatively direct equivalence motivated by the character’s black, straight wig, which is interpreted as evoking stereotypical visual markers associated with East Asian femininity. In the English translation, however, the nickname is replaced by *Cleopatra*. This substitution reflects a different cultural horizon of reference, in which long, dark, straight hair is more readily associated with iconic cinematic representations of Cleopatra, largely shaped by Hollywood visual culture and its dissemination of classical Egyptian imagery. The shift thus illustrates how translation may activate culturally specific stereotype repertoires that differ across readerships while fulfilling a similar descriptive function.

A similarly child-centered metaphorical logic governs the translation of the main adult caregiver’s nickname. The French *Mamie-Rose* is rendered as *Granny Rose* in English, preserving both the affective dimension of kinship and the metaphorical association with gentleness and care. The Romanian translation, *Tanti Roz*, introduces a subtle semantic and pragmatic shift. While *mamie* and *granny* explicitly encode familial grandmotherhood, *tanti* functions as a more neutral form of address, typically used by children when referring to women without necessarily implying kinship. This lexical choice slightly attenuates the immediacy of the familial bond while maintaining the respectful and affectionate tone of the original relationship.

It is noteworthy that in the Romanian version, this appellative is consistently used, including in the title of the book, whereas the French and Eng-

lish titles (*La dame rose*/*The Lady in Pink*) foreground a more distanced designation. In these latter cases, the nominal structure reflects a more externalized perspective, arguably aligned with an adult narratorial framing rather than the child's intimate mode of address. The Romanian solution, by contrast, reinforces a more colloquial and relational perspective, though with a reduced degree of familial specificity. However, this shift also entails a partial reconfiguration of the perspectival distinction present in the source text: namely, the contrast between the adult authorial framing, which structures the title, and the child narrator's affective and relational mode of address within the narrative. In the Romanian translation, this distinction is less clearly preserved, as the appellative used in the body of the text is extended to the title, thereby reducing the functional differentiation between external (authorial) and internal (narratorial) perspectives.

The logic of comparison and similitude is pervasive in the protagonist's reasoning in "Oscar and the Lady in Pink". Oscar frequently relies on similes in order to render his reflections more concrete and persuasive. At the same time, this associative logic underlies his imitation of adult behaviors and attitudes, as he enacts a form of imaginative identification with adulthood within the framework of symbolic play. A significant component of this imaginative restructuring of reality consists of similes that draw on intertextual references which are widely recognizable and, therefore, relatively stable across languages and cultures, in translation.

A vivid example is the comparison of the doctor to a universally familiar cultural figure:

Fr.: "il a la mine désolée d'un Père Noël qui n'aurait plus de cadeaux dans sa hotte" (p. 5).

Eng.: "he looks so sad, like a Father Christmas who's got no more presents left in his sack" (p. 7).

Ro.: "are o mutră bosumflată, de zici că-i Moș Crăciun, care-a rămas fără cadouri în sac" (p. 14).

While the overall structure and semantic principle of the simile are preserved across the three versions, several noteworthy translational nuances emerge. The English choice *Father Christmas* signals a culturally specific, predominantly British usage, as opposed to *Santa Claus*, which would be more typical in American or globalized contexts. This choice reflects the translator's sensitivity to certain cultural-linguistic conventions.

In the French source text, the noun *hotte* designates a specific type of sack traditionally associated with Père Noël, carrying strong folkloric and cultural connotations. Its rendering as *sack* in English and *sac* in Romanian involves a kind of semantic generalization, as these terms lack the same degree of cultural specificity. Consequently, a subtle layer of imagery linked to traditional representations of the gift-bringer is attenuated in translation.

Equally significant are the shifts observed in the initial descriptive segment of the sentence. The Romanian formulation *o mutră bosumflată* constitutes an effective equivalent for the French *la mine désolée*, not only at the syntactic level but also in terms of expressive force and register. Both convey a vivid colloquial, and affectively charged description. By contrast, the English rendering *he looks so sad* reflects a syntactic modulation accompanied by a degree of expressive neutralization. The more idiomatic and image-rich characterization of the original is reduced to a comparatively plain and less evocative formulation, resulting in a slight loss of stylistic intensity.

A further relevant example may be considered in order to illustrate the functioning of associative logic and its translational implications:

Fr.: "Elle était posée sur son lit, on aurait dit Blanche-Neige lorsqu'elle attend le prince, quand ces couillons de nains croient qu'elle est morte, Blanche-Neige comme les photos de neige où la neige est bleue, non pas blanche" (p. 21).

Eng.: "She was lying delicately on her bed, she looked like Snow White waiting for the prince when those stupid dwarves think she's dead. Snow White like those photos of snow when snow's blue and not white" (p. 33).

Ro.: "Stătea întinsă pe pat, semăna cu Albă-ca-Zăpada așteptându-l pe prinț, când piticii ăia papă-lapte cred că a murit. Firește, Albă-ca-Zăpada din pozele cu zăpadă albastră, nu albă" (p. 43).

The intertextual reference to the universally recognizable figure of Snow White poses no particular difficulty for translators, as it relies on a shared cultural repertoire. However, the reconstructed scenes reveal a number of subtle yet significant translational shifts.

First, the introductory structure varies notably across the three versions. The French formulation *elle était posée sur son lit* adopts a quasi-passive construction that foregrounds the character's passivity, fragility and lack of agency, thereby implicitly suggesting her physical weakness and near-unconscious state. The English rendering, *she was lying delicately on her bed*, while not grammatically passive, conveys a similar stative meaning, emphasizing the resulting position of the body and partially preserving the impression of physical vulnerability. The Romanian version, *stătea întinsă pe pat*, appears more neutral in this respect: although semantically precise, it attenuates the connotation of imposed stillness present in the French original and reduces the implicit suggestion of incapacity.

A second noteworthy aspect concerns the evaluative qualifier applied to the dwarves. In the French text, the colloquial term *couillons*, marked as *très familier* in Larousse dictionary, introduces an affective and humorous dimension, reflecting the child narrator's ironic stance toward the "naïve" characters who fail to anticipate the outcome of the fairy tale. The Romanian equivalent *piticii ăia papă-lapte* constitutes a particularly apt rendering, as it preserves both the informal register and the mildly ironic, child-centered



evaluative tone. By contrast, the English *stupid dwarves* represents a partial semantic equivalent but involves a degree of expressive reduction: it conveys the basic negative judgment while omitting the playful, affectively nuanced quality of the original expression.

Finally, the passage concludes with a form of lexical play involving the alternation of the colors white and blue, creating a quasi-tongue twister that nonetheless carries semantic significance. This wordplay, which reflects the child's perception of reality as flexible and dependent on the perspective of interpretation, proves relatively resistant to translational loss. At both the intralinguistic level (where repetition does not hinder comprehension) and the interlinguistic level, a direct translation suffices to preserve the conceptual and stylistic effect. The oscillation between "white" and "blue" thus remains intelligible and evocative across all three languages, maintaining the original's blend of playfulness and interpretative insight.

These examples illustrate how, even in cases where intertextual references are broadly shared, translation involves subtle recalibrations at the level of cultural connotation, lexical specificity, and expressive register. Such shifts are particularly significant in a child-centred narrative, where meaning is constructed through concrete imagery, emotional immediacy and associative reasoning.

The imaginative reconstruction of reality and Oscar's symbolic "reincarnation" through a compressed life-cycle simulation also constitutes a fertile source of humour and wit. These moments are characterised by optimism, verbal playfulness and emotional ambivalence. In general, humour is quite difficult to translate. This difficulty is amplified in such a delicate narrative context, where Oscar's humorous remarks often carry a latent tragicomic resonance. Nevertheless, the translators make considerable efforts to preserve the emotional spectrum embedded in these passages.

By treating each of his remaining days as equivalent to ten years of life, Oscar recalculates his age accordingly and reflects on the stereotypical clichés associated with each life stage. This mechanism generates a comic effect, as a ten-year-old child adopts and exaggerates the conventional difficulties attributed to adolescence, midlife crisis and old age, projecting them onto his own experience.

A representative example occurs in his account of adolescence, where he ironically reinterprets widely shared cultural clichés associated with this developmental stage:

Fr.: "Aujourd'hui, j'ai vécu mon adolescence et ça n'a pas glissé tout seul. Quelle histoire! J'ai eu plein d'ennuis avec mes copains, avec mes parents et tout ça à cause des filles. Ce soir, je ne suis pas mécontent d'avoir vingt ans parce que je me dis que, ouf, le pire est derrière moi. La puberté, merci ! Une fois mais pas deux" (p. 19)!

Eng.: "Today I went through my teenage years and it wasn't a very smooth ride. What a hassle! I had loads of problems with my friends, my parents and everything because of girls. I'm not sorry to be twenty this evening because I can say, phew, the worst of it's behind me. Puberty, blimey! I wouldn't want to go through that again" (p. 29)!

Ro.: "Astăzi am fost adolescent și n-a prea mers bine. Ce grozăvie! Am avut o mulțime de probleme cu prietenii mei și cu părinții, totul din cauza unor fete. În seara asta, nu-mi pare deloc rău că am împlinit 20 de ani, pentru că mă gândesc că, uf, ce-a fost mai greu a trecut. Pubertatea? Nu, mulțumesc. O dată mi-a ajuns" (p. 38)!

The passage is marked by strong orality, ellipsis, exclamative structures and interjections, all of which contribute to its expressive intensity. From a translational perspective, the challenge lies in preserving the balance between form and meaning, particularly in maintaining the child narrator's humorous yet emotionally charged voice.

The exclamative *Quelle histoire !* is particularly significant. In French, it conveys not only difficulty or inconvenience but also a sense of absurdity or dramatic excess. It suggests that adolescence is experienced as something chaotic, overwhelming and almost theatrical. In the English translation, *What a hassle!* shifts the focus toward surprise, anger and inconvenience (Oxford dictionary), foregrounding the practical burden of the experience rather than its existential or absurd dimension. In the Romanian version, *Ce grozăvie!* introduces a stronger evaluative charge, closer to "What a terrible thing!", thereby intensifying the negative assessment and partially narrowing the semantic complexity of the original expression.

The final sequence concerning puberty also reveals notable translational divergences. The French formulation *La puberté, merci ! Une fois mais pas deux !* is highly elliptical, colloquial, and ironic, combining brevity with aphoristic force. The English version, *Puberty, blimey! I wouldn't want to go through that again!*, expands the utterance syntactically and shifts the perspective toward a more explicit, personal statement, thereby reducing its aphoristic conciseness. Although *blimey* signals informal British usage, it primarily expresses surprise or irritation (Oxford Dictionary) rather than the ironic politeness encoded in the French *merci!*

The Romanian translation, *Pubertatea? Nu, mulțumesc. O dată mi-a ajuns!*, occupies an intermediate position between the source text and the English version. It preserves the interrogative-exclamative structure and maintains the ironic politeness formula *Nu, mulțumesc*, which functionally corresponds to the French ironic *merci!* Moreover, the idiomatic expression *O dată mi-a ajuns!* effectively restores the proverbial finality of *une fois mais pas deux*. In terms of translational strategy, the Romanian version combines semantic adequacy with idiomatic compression, thereby preserving both the pragmat-

ic force and the expressive concision of the original more successfully than the English paraphrase.

Overall, this example illustrates how humor in translation is shaped by competing demands of idiomaticity, emotional tone and narrative voice, requiring different degrees of modulation, explication and pragmatic adaptation across target languages.

In all the chapters in which Oscar engages in the "express adult-life" game, the logic of imitation and simulation is consistently maintained. The "as if" mode persistently prevails over objective reality, and Oscar's assertions about imagined experiences are expressed with such conviction that the logical coherence of the narrative becomes increasingly destabilized. This feature poses a specific challenge for translation, where the maintenance of the "pretend" regime depends on carefully calibrated lexical and stylistic choices.

This dynamic can be observed in several of Oscar's age-related self-commentaries. For instance:

Fr. "C'est dur la trentaine, c'est l'âge des soucis et des responsabilités" (p. 33).

Eng. "The thirties are a tough time, it's all worry and responsibility" (p. 56).

Ro. "E tare greu la treizeci de ani, e vârsta grijilor și a responsabilităților" (p. 69).

The modulation of the qualificative describing the life stage (*la trentaine*) reflects the translators' prioritization of semantic equivalence over formal correspondence. The French evaluative structure *C'est dur la trentaine* cannot be rendered literally without loss of naturalness or affective force. In Romanian, the adjective *greu* is intensified by the adverb *tare*, while in English the affectively marked adjective *tough* is selected to convey the expressive value of *dur*. Both solutions illustrate a shift toward dynamic equivalence, preserving the emotional resonance rather than the exact syntactic configuration of the source text.

A more nuanced case appears in the following example:

Fr. "Aujourd'hui, j'ai eu de quarante à cinquante ans et je n'ai fait que des conneries" (p. 36).

Eng. "Today I've gone from forty to fifty and I've done nothing but make stupid mistakes" (p. 61).

Ro. "Azi am trecut de la patruzeci la cincizeci de ani și n-am făcut decât tâmpenii" (p. 75).

Here, the primary challenge lies in preserving both the childlike logic of temporal compression and the expressive force encoded in the term *conneries*. In the English version, the rendering "stupid mistakes" attenuates the semantic intensity of the original, as it lacks the colloquial and mildly vulgar undertones associated with *conneries*, which conveys not only error but also a sense of absurdity, irritation, or self-reproach. By contrast, the Romanian

equivalent *tâmpenii* more effectively reproduces the affective and stylistic value of the source term, retaining its colloquial register and expressive charge. It thus aligns more closely with the pragmatic force of the original utterance.

These examples suggest that, in translating Oscar's simulated adulthood, maintaining the balance between narrative coherence and expressive authenticity requires not only semantic accuracy but also sensitivity to register, tone and the underlying childlike logic of play that governs the narrative voice.

## Conclusion

This study has explored the complex interplay between child cognition, narrative voice, and translational strategies in "Oscar et la dame rose", with particular emphasis on imitation and symbolic play, both as key features of childlike logic and as structuring principles of the text. Drawing on developmental frameworks proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, it has shown that the child's perception of reality is fundamentally shaped by associative mechanisms, affective relevance and culturally mediated patterns of behavior, all of which are reflected in the narrative construction of Oscar's "express adult-life" simulation.

Within this framework, the novel emerges as a site of negotiated asymmetry, where the inherent imbalance between adult authorial control and child-centered narration is partially attenuated through the imaginative agency afforded by play.

From a translational perspective, this delicate equilibrium proves particularly challenging to reproduce. The shift from a binary (adult-child) to a triadic (author-translator-child) configuration introduces additional layers of mediation, requiring the translator to balance fidelity to the source text with sensitivity to the cognitive, cultural and linguistic frameworks of the target audience. As the analysis has demonstrated, translation choices frequently involve processes of modulation, domestication and expressive recalibration, especially in areas such as nickname formation, culturally embedded references, similes and humor.

The comparative analysis of the French source text and its English and Romanian translations reveals that while both target versions strive to preserve the functional dynamics of the original, they diverge in their handling of affective intensity, register and cultural specificity. The Romanian translation tends, in several instances, to maintain a closer alignment with the expressive and colloquial force of the source text, whereas the English version occasionally exhibits a tendency toward neutralization or explicitation. These differences underscore the extent to which translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but a process of interpretative reconstruction shaped by distinct cultural and stylistic norms.

Ultimately, the study highlights that translating children's literature, particularly texts that simulate child consciousness through adult authorship, re-

quires more than semantic equivalence. It demands a nuanced understanding of developmental psychology, narrative pragmatics and cultural semiotics. The translator must recreate not only what is said, but how it is perceived, imagined, and emotionally experienced by a child, ensuring that the translated text preserves the fragile balance between naivety and insight, play and structure, vulnerability and agency that defines the original work.

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