

“It beseems me not to say”: Irony as a device to design a dual audience in translations for children

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of the definition of irony offered by relevance theory in its capacity as a strategy to address two different audiences in translations for children. Given that one of the main aims of children’s literature is the socialization of the target audience, translations for children are governed by dominant social, cultural and educational norms. To communicate their awareness of those norms, translators not only address child readers but also adult mediators in their translations. They convey their attitudes toward both the text and its new audience with inter- and intratextual jokes going over the heads of the child readers. On the basis of English and Dutch translations of the medieval beast epic *Reynard the Fox*, three ways of using irony as audience design will be demonstrated: (1) irony to expurgate the story, (2) irony to reverse the moral message of the tale, and (3) irony to comment on the discourse surrounding the source text.

KEYWORDS: audience design, children literature, irony, literary translation, relevance theory.

Introduction

In 1852 E.W. Holloway translated Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s version (1794) of the Middle Dutch beast epic *Reynard the Fox* into English. An explanatory preface (probably written by the publisher) claimed that Holloway had translated the poem as faithfully as possible. But it also added that “in several instances he felt himself compelled to alter, or at least to qualify, the sense of the original, as the passages in question, if literally translated, would have been offensive to the taste of his readers, and must necessarily have had the effect of excluding the work from the family circle” (Holloway 1852: XI).

These statements might strike one as contradictory, for they claimed that Holloway adhered to the norm of faithfulness, but at the same time they gave account of his changing of several elements. However, the explicit mention of the family circle implies that Holloway intended his translation – if not exclusively – at least also for children. One might therefore understand Holloway’s decision to deviate from faithfulness when keeping in mind that *Reynard the Fox* is a rough medieval satire, full of references to violence, sex and politics, either explicitly mentioned in no uncertain terms or subtly hidden in language puns, in which the titular, but questionable hero is a thorough scoundrel, a criminal even, who steals, lies, betrays, rapes, abuses and murders to his heart’s content.¹

While translation as such is already governed by a wide variety of norms, the set of norms involved in translating for children is even more complex. On top of source-text related, aesthetical and ethical norms, translation for children is governed by didactic and pedagogical norms. As John Stephens (1992: 8) rightly points out: “children’s fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target

audience”. Consequently, in order to be accepted as literature for children, a translation has to be in accordance with what the target society perceives as appropriate, perhaps even educationally “good” for children (Shavit 1986; O’Sullivan 2000; Desmidt 2006). The definition of “educationally good”, however, changes over time. Research into translations of “classics” and folklore shows how old stories are constantly updated in order to comply with new pedagogical discourses on manners and norms, a practice which is, for example, very convincingly shown by Jack Zipes’ research (1983) into the “repressed history” of the original rather suggestive *Little Red Riding Hood* (see also Stephens and McCallum 1998). Similarly, because of the controversial hero of the story, *Reynard the Fox* has not always been regarded as “educationally good” (Wackers 1995).

The constraints on the translatability of texts originally not specifically intended for children, such as *Reynard the Fox*, into suitable children’s literature, are even heavier. In addition to language, time and educational boundaries, these translations have to cross age boundaries as well. Children’s literature has a rich tradition of “adopting”ⁱⁱⁱ adult books in adapted form, as Hannabus (1996) writes:

Adopting and adapting are complementary aspects of the process of reading provision which takes place in a diverse cultural setting where strict divisions between children’s and adult reading are ultimately impossible to make. (Hannabus 1996: 423)

Therefore, translations of texts originally not specifically intended for children are often referred to as “adaptations”. However, this suggests a strict distinction between the outcome of the two practices – a translation is in a certain way equivalent to the original while an adaptation is not or only slightly equivalent – whereas in fact only a gradual difference exists (Desmidt 2005: 83). To decide where a text should be placed on the scale between “a prototypical translation” and “a prototypical adaptation” (Desmidt 2005: 84), I adhere to a historical approach of the matter. One should determine how, at a certain moment in time, a prototypical translation is defined on the one hand and a prototypical adaptation on the other. But this is not my aim in this paper. Therefore, I have used both the words translation and adaptation for the new versions of the story, depending on how it was defined by the authors or publishers themselves. In the cases where I could not find an editorial characterization of the target text, I use the word “translation” as a concept covering both the versions that are highly equivalent to the original, and the very free rewritings.

Reynard the Fox has gone through the same development which Shavit (1986) described for “classics” such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. However, contrary to those two, the *Reynard* text was read by both adults and children up until the nineteenth century. But as nineteenth- and twentieth-century translations made it into a story meant for children only, the text, like Defoe’s and Swift’s, lost its central position in literature for adults. It became part of a literary heritage that was no longer read by adults but only studied by them, and studied only for its historical value. For children, however, it remained a story that could be read as a “living text” (Shavit 1986: 116). This article demonstrates how the crossing of age boundaries is not a linear process restricted to the transitional phase between the source text and its new version, but involves a seemingly arbitrary, although in fact very meticulously aimed, bouncing between different addressees, which takes place within the new version itself.

Winking over the heads of the child readers

Just as children's books in general, translations for children are characterized by an asymmetrical communication situation, which manifests itself both on the level of the production and on the level of the reception of a text. As Emer O'Sullivan (2005) writes:

Production, publication and marketing by authors and publishing houses, the part played by critics, librarians, booksellers, teachers and others as intermediaries – at every stage of literary communication we find adults acting *for* children. (O'Sullivan 2005: 14, emphasis in original)

Consequently, the implied reader of a translation for children is not only the child reader (i.e. the image the adult translator has of a child reader), but also the adult mediator, who functions as the gate-keeper between the child and the book. Taking these “real-world conditions” into account (cf. Mason 2000: 17-19), the second implied reader manifests itself both in paratexts (prefaces, epilogues) and in the texts themselves; to strengthen the bond between the narrator and the adult readers, translators tend to wink at them over the heads of the child readers. In subtly crafted, implicit inter- and intratextual jokes, perceptions of pedagogical appropriateness go hand in hand with a kind of entertainment that is inaccessible for child readers. These jokes often involve irony. Through irony translators align themselves with adult mediators. In other words, irony is used to design a dual audience.

I have adopted Theo Hermans' (2007) use of the definition of irony offered by relevance theory. According to Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (2004: 621-623) most accounts of irony in the fields of rhetorics and pragmatics consider it as implicating the opposite of what is said. Relevance theory, however, claims this definition of irony to be inadequate. Sperber and Wilson argue that, instead of implicating the opposite of what is said, irony conveys other, dissociative attitudes towards what is said, such as surprise, mock or disagreement. Ironic utterances “achieve relevance by informing the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what so-and-so said, and has a certain attitude to it” (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 238). The key to the relevance definition of irony is the understanding of irony as a specific form of interpretive use of language, that is, as an echoic utterance. It is, as Hermans (2007: 76) puts it, “the interpretive representation of an existing representation”. Ironic utterances are utterances that refer to other utterances with a certain attitude. According to Hermans (2007: 77), it is exactly this interplay between two discourses, one echoing and the other echoed, that makes this concept of irony applicable to translation: “Translation, too, is metarepresentational to the extent that it is recognised as the interlingual representation of another utterance”. He argues in line with Ernst-August Gutt's (1991/2000) understanding of translation as a form of interlingual interpretive use of language, exposing a certain degree of interpretive resemblance to the original which lies in a continuum ranging from no assumptions shared to all assumptions shared (Gutt 1991/2000: 35-46). While both the possibility and the desirability of complete interpretive resemblance (all assumptions shared) have been discussed for centuries, Hermans (2007: 70) argues translation to be more than the interlingual equivalent of direct speech: “It is precisely to the extent that the translator is more than just a soundbox or mouthpiece or animator that the translator's subject-position becomes discernible in translations. This subject-position creates room for the expression of an attitude, a precondition for irony.” In other words, the translator speaks with at least two voices: the voice of the original author and his own voice (see also Hermans 1996; Schiavi 1996). Irony comes into being within the space between those two voices. Through irony, a translator is able to express his attitude towards the text s/he reports, which is the original text.

However, as irony appears to be saying one thing, but actually means two things at the same time – this is what is said, and this is my attitude towards it – it has to be recognized to be effective. Irony needs a knowing audience (cf. Hutcheon 1995). Speakers, or in this case translators, have to give certain signals to listeners or readers. And by choosing the signals, they choose their audiences (cf. O’Sullivan 2000). Thus, irony plays a part in audience design. It can be a functional device to design at least two different audiences for one and the same text: an audience that remains unaware of the translator’s attitude towards the text and an audience that is entrusted with it (Hermans 2007: 79). Consequently, irony can be deployed to exercise power (cf. Fawcett 1995).

I will demonstrate the use of irony in translations for children, drawing on several translations of the Middle Dutch satire *Reynard the Fox*. The cases will show how translators are able to play with the first two receiver groups of a text which Bell (1984) distinguishes as the directly addressed audience (the child “addressees”) and the not directly addressed but known and ratified audience (the adult “auditors”). It will become clear that translators can use irony to design a dual audience for their translations by turning the adult auditors into covert addressees. Recognizing the adult auditors as the discourse community, or referee group (Mason 2000: 6)ⁱⁱⁱ, that has to pass the translation for a version which is suitable for children, they use ironic references to reveal their attitudes towards the text in its capacity as a story for nineteenth and twentieth century child to adult readers on the one hand, while at the same time concealing those attitudes from child readers on the other.

The following two sections deal with translations from the nineteenth and early twentieth century in which verbal irony designs a dual audience through expurgating the text for the child readers, while at the same time adding spice to it for adult readers. The subsequent section will be an example of how a combination of verbal and visual irony reverses the moral of the tale in a recent adaptation. The last section focuses on the way visual irony was used to comment on the discourse surrounding the source text and early adaptations of the source text in relation to its new audience in Dutch adaptations during the first half of the twentieth century.

Irony to expurgate: Reynard’s use of urine

Holloway’s concern about the reading of *Reynard* in the family circle forced him to expurgate from the story several elements that were considered scabrous or indecent. One of those is the fox’s fondness of the use of urine in fights, especially in fights with his sworn enemy, Isegrim the Wolf. Right at the beginning of the story the Wolf files a complaint with the king of the animal realm, Noble the Lion. Reynard has blinded his cubs by urinating into their eyes. In almost all nineteenth and twentieth century children’s translations this passage has been deleted or substituted. However, it was not the poor, innocent cubs, punished for a feud they are only part of by birth, that the translators cared for. They get poison from a bottle thrown into their eyes anyway, or Reynard simply “maltreats” them. It is the socialization of the child readers which the translation producers were really concerned about. Just as all the passages where Gulliver in *Gulliver’s Travels* answers nature’s call are deleted in most children’s versions of the story, every scatological ingredient of the *Reynard* story has also been removed. Jacky Stallcup (2004) claims that the reason for this censoring is that adults do not want to subvert in children’s books what they try to teach them in daily life, which is to keep basic bodily behaviour private:

Gulliver enacts the very behaviours that we exhort children to repress, control, and cover up, and, in so doing, could encourage readers to partake in a sense of freedom in transgression – if adults did not step in to excise such discussions from the text. (Stallcup 2004: 94)

During the last thirty years or so people have been more receptive to the fact that children actually like this kind of subversiveness very much (cf. Lypp 1986). Consequently, the carnivalesque kind of humour occurring in these kinds of passages, combined with a more liberal (sexual) moral, has recently led to versions of the *Reynard* story in which the urine scenes are kept, and even celebrated (cf. Biegel 1972). But not all earlier versions for children simply eliminated or substituted these scenes. Holloway, for example, decided to keep them. He prevented the Wolf from mentioning the urine, though, and just let him allude to it:

And in a cruel, horrid, way,
Which it beseems me not to say,
Blinded my children three.
(Holloway 1852: 2)

The reader who knows the original story will recognize the reference. And even a reader who does not know the original can tell that something apparently filthy is being avoided here. In a crucial scene in the last part of the story, Holloway refers back to this passage. The fox and the wolf are going to fight each other in a decisive battle. The night before this fight Reynard obtains some advice from a she-ape:

Then spoke the dame: “Now list to me,
And thou shalt quel thine enemy; -
Drink plentifully over-night,
For that will aid thee in the fight,

Fly from him, still, against the wind,
And raise the dust, to make him blind (...).”
(Holloway 1852: 53)

Again Holloway chose to give a clear signal, for his asterisks printed in the middle of the dame’s monologue indicate to the reader that some sentences are deleted. Then, about the final duel, he writes:

His bushy tail (‘t was wet no doubt),
And flings the sand and dust about,
With both his hinder feet.
Full oft before, this trick he’d play’d,
And thus in former times had made
The Wolf’s cubs blind, and now their sire,
He sprinkled to his heart’s desire (...).
(Holloway 1852: 75)

Irony takes place at the moments the narrator avoids repeating the words that were uttered in the original text, while at the same time he refers to them for the “knowing” part of his audience. It is conveyed by the insertion of the aside “‘t was wet no doubt” and the reference to Reynard’s blinding of the wolf’s cubs. Reynard seems to blind the wolf by sweeping sand and dust into his eyes. However, the experienced reader will deduct that, hidden by the phrase “sand and dust”, it is actually urine that he splashes into the wolf’s eyes. What Holloway renders here is not only a moral norm regarding the indecency of speaking about these kinds

of things (“it beseems me not to say”), but he also strengthens the bond between the narrator and the “older” or adult readers by winking at them over the heads of the child readers with the intratextual joke in the battle scene. Thus, besides the implicit image of the child as someone who should not be exposed to language related to the use of bodily functions, Holloway designs a dual audience for his translation of *Reynard the Fox* by creating spaces where the information that is conveyed differs according to the knowledge and reading experience of the audience.^{iv}

Irony to expurgate: the case of the castrated nose

A second example concerns the controversial scene of Tibert the Cat. After Reynard is summoned to the court of King Noble the Lion on a charge of theft, murder and rape, Tibert the Cat is called upon to fetch him. Before Tibert, Bruin the Bear had failed to accomplish the same task. Reynard had lured Bruin into a trap using his greed for honey. Because of Tibert’s smartness, the animals are convinced he will not let himself be deceived similarly. But the opposite happens. Reynard lures Tibert to break into the courtyard of a pastor and his family, which he claims to be crawling with mice for Tibert to eat. Tibert gets trapped and, although it is in the middle of the night, Tibert screams so loudly that the pastor and his family all come running out of bed stark naked. They start to hit the cat and in his panic, Tibert attacks the pastor and bites off one of his testicles:

Tibert, that saw that he must die, sprang between the priest’s legs with his claws and with his teeth that he wrought out his right cullion or ballock stone. That leap became ill to the priest. This thing fell down upon the floor. (Caxton 1481, edited by Sands 1960: 68)

This scene gets expurgated from the eighteenth century chapbook versions onwards. In one of the first Dutch translations of *Reynard the Fox*, published in 1834, Jan Frans Willems uses the same strategy as Holloway to expurgate the urine-scenes. He claims it better not to mention what Tibert bit off. If readers want to know the ins and the outs of the matter, they have to take up the Middle Dutch original:

Eensklaps (waar ‘t van pas hem scheen)
Vloog hij op des koster’s been,
Klauwde en beet zo sterk, zo straf,
Dat hij beet...wat beet hij af?
‘k Zal het best hier niet vermelden,
Schoon ‘t noodzaaklijk zij aan helden.
Wie daar meer van weten wil,
Leze in ‘t oirschift met zijn bril!
(Willems 1834, edited by Hellinga 1960: 88)

Suddenly (he thought it right)
He jumped the leg of the sexton,
Clawed and bit strongly, severely,
He bit...what did he bite?
Better not to mention it,
Although it is heroes’ necessity.
Who wants to know more about the matter,
Should read the original wearing glasses!
(My translation)

Nevertheless, in many other versions of the story Tibert does sink his teeth in some body part of the pastor. In some versions the pastor loses his hand. The Dutch rewriter J.A. Slempekens (1929: 54) compensates the elimination of the bitten testicle with a bloody description of the grazing of the pastor’s leg. Both forms of substitution are characterized by Jan Goossens (1988: 111) as metonymical, or figures of contiguity.^v Many versions, however, exploit a zestier metaphor: instead of biting off a testicle, Tibert bites off the pastor’s nose. In his book, *The Castrated Nose*, Goossens (1988: 113-123) explains the tradition of expurgating this scene, even in versions that were not specifically meant for children, by the changing attitude towards bodily behaviour as a result of a process of civilisation. The previously mentioned emphasis on the socialization of the child seems to reflect this historical development: the

reluctance of openly showing bodily behaviour lead to a reluctance to speak about it, which is reflected in translations of the story.

The irony of the matter lies in the choice to let the cat bite the pastor's nose and not his leg, hand or foot. While it expurgates the scene for children, the choice of the nose is a hidden reference to the original scene in which the cat bites off the pastor's genitals, since the nose is often used as a symbol of the male genitals (Goossens 1988: 99-127), something child readers cannot be expected to know about, but adult readers can. Consequently, the child reader is excluded from the irony displayed by the castration of the nose, just as in Holloway's urine scenes quoted earlier. One can assume that if a reader would grasp the references, it would not be the child reader, but an experienced and well-read adult reader, or mediator. Hence, the cryptic metaphor "protects" the children, while entertaining the adults. This way the translators created a sub-audience within the intended and explicitly addressed audience of the translations in order to show their pedagogical attitude towards scabrous elements in relation to children and at the same time prove their ability to amuse adult readers by adding a whiff of hidden spice to their expurgated translations.

Irony to moralize: Reynard the villain

So far, the use of irony described here was limited to verbal aspects. However, many children's versions of the story are illustrated, which means that one has to take into account the meaning of the added visual aspects as well. Most illustrations only serve to demonstrate what was already said in words, but do not seem to add any other meaning. In some picture book adaptations, however, the images can be "read" as more than illustrative. In the next example of irony, the verbal and the visual are combined into a form of dramatic or situational irony – the reader knows more than the characters in the story – which is, at first, only accessible to adult readers who know the original story, but at the end of the story children might grasp it as well.

In this case the moral message of the narrative is at stake. In the original Middle Dutch versions of the *Reynard* story, the fox celebrates a questionable victory. After inflicting great harm on his adversaries, after all his lies and betrayals, his murders and rapes, he either escapes his punishment or he even gets appointed to a high post at court. This was and still is often considered an inappropriate moral message to be conveyed to children. After all, who says that children would not identify with the villainous hero and start imitating his behaviour? Therefore, many nineteenth and early twentieth century translators simply change the ending of the story and punish the fox for his deeds (cf. Anonymous 1875; Louwerse 1897), culminating in the ending of Smythe's translation (1903):

It was almost time to stop, when the Wolf took out his sword. He hit Reynard, and Reynard fell down. The animals all ran to see him. They saw the cut was a bad one, and Reynard was dead. But what was their surprise to see Bunny jump out of the cut. They put his head on and he was alive again. Then the Crow jumped out of the dead Fox and told her story. Then the Wolf said, "I am sorry I ate Billy. But I did not hurt him. I often feel him in me. Cut me in two." They did, and out jumped Billy. Then they put the Wolf together again. And all were happy because Reynard the Fox could not hurt them any more. (Smythe 1903: 122)^{vi}

Smythe's solution provides a clear example of the tendency to affiliate a translated story to an already existing, preferably popular genre within children's literature, in this case the fairy tale (cf. Shavit 1986, O'Sullivan 2000). The same holds for the adaptation of Alan Vaës (1994).

His answer to the controversial triumph of the villainous fox in the original story, however, is more subtle than the former examples and needs some interpretation on the readers' part.

In Vaës' adaptation, the *Reynard* story is embedded in a tale about a young king who struggles with rebellious subjects. Desperate for help, he and his wife ask an old hermit for advice. The hermit comes to court, listens to the king's problem and offers to provide him with an example from which to learn, an example of a king that had to deal with a subject far worse than these rebels. He tells them the story of Reynard the fox. The story is accompanied by large pictures of the king and the queen, the rebels and all the characters of the *Reynard* story, but the wise hermit is only seen from the back with his hood on. However, a first hint of the identity of the hermit is already given at the beginning of the story. When the hermit is called to court, he says to himself: "I never expected I'd ever be invited back to Court" (Vaës 1994: 8). The last image shows how the hermit "turns and heads back to the distant cave in the dark forest", with a big, hairy, red tail escaping from under his cape (Vaës 1994: 63).

In this case verbal irony precedes visual irony and as soon as the latter comes in, the grasping of the irony is no longer restricted to the adult addressee. To deduce from the hermit's aside about being invited back to court that it is old Reynard himself who speaks, the reader needs to know the original story. However, the picture at the end of the story clearly shows the tail of the fox, which the child readers have already seen while reading the embedded story. Thus, in Alan Vaës' version of *Reynard the Fox* child reader and adult mediator share the same reading experience in the end. Although the moral message of the original story is modified, Vaës allows child readers in retrospect to understand what the adult readers had already grasped through the combination of intertextual knowledge and an intratextual verbal aside. Reynard has come to his senses indeed in this version, he is not literally punished. Instead of Holloway's use of irony, which leaves children out of the reading experience of the adults and vice versa, the irony in Vaës adaptation positions this version in the modern tradition of *Reynard* translations, leaving more room for the fox's wickedness, as exemplified in the dark atmosphere of Selina Hastings' picture book (1990). This text ends with Reynard proudly watching his children playing, but at the same time lurking for new victims once more:

That same evening he sat outside the castle walls watching his cubs play in the fading warmth of the setting sun. He knew how worthless was the flattery of the fickle courtiers, but he knew too, that he had only just escaped with his life, and that from now on it would be wise to mend his ways. But even as these thoughts were passing through his head, Reynard's ears were pricked, his yellow eyes already fixed on two plump young creatures making their unwary way along the road to Malepardus. (Hastings 1990: 75-76)

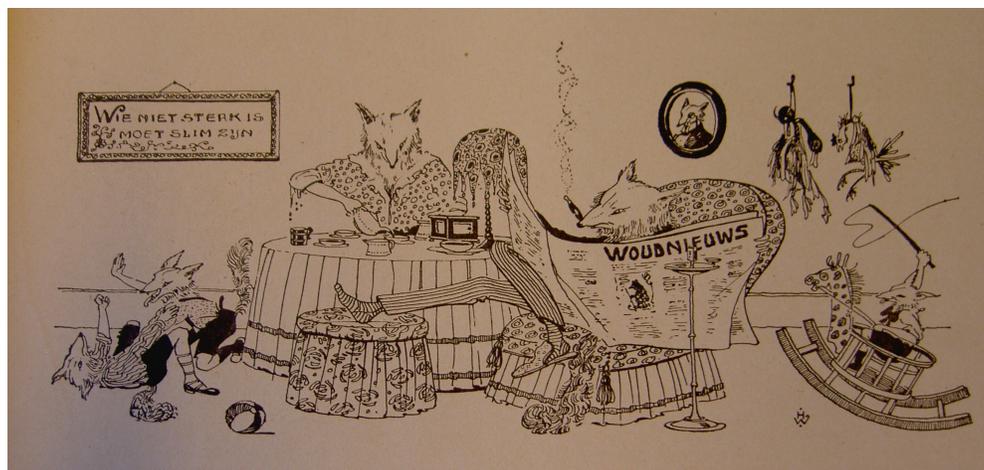
Irony to criticize: Reynard the family man

The last attitude towards the *Reynard* story as a story for children concerns the use of irony to comment on the discourse surrounding *Reynard the Fox*. Even the earliest translators for children realized that honouring an unscrupulous character like Reynard with so many translations for children needed to be justified. They all found different justifications, varying from claiming the story to stem from a shared European cultural heritage (cf. Vedder 1852) to declaring the need to teach children to watch out for shady customers like Reynard (cf. Anonymous 1907; Slempek 1929). The most striking justification, however, originates from the nineteenth century Netherlands. A famous Dutch schoolteacher Jan Ligthart phrased it very clearly in his school edition of the story in 1909. He wrote in his preface: "Reynard, Reynard the fox, is simply a scoundrel. A thorough scoundrel. A low, cunning scoundrel. A

mean and, moreover, a nasty scoundrel” (Kaakebeen and Ligthart 1909: 17, my translation). But then he started to defend the scoundrel: “Reynard has courage” (Kaakebeen and Ligthart 1909: 20, my translation). Otherwise he would not have dared to stand up against the whole world alone. And he has brains. If not, he would not have been able to fight and triumph over his physically and socially stronger adversaries (Ligthart 1909: 21). And above all: “There surely does not exist a better and cozier family man than him” (Ligthart 1909: 27, my translation).

It was not the first time Reynard was being defended by a plea for his skills as a family man, but this mitigation by an influential pedagogue like Ligthart stands at the threshold of Reynard’s rising star as the ideal family man, manifested in the expansion of family scenes in translations for children (cf. Kuhfus 1931). This claim responded to a social movement that had been incorporated in Dutch politics in the nineteenth century in which family life was regarded as the cornerstone of society. In fact, at that time, the Netherlands had a government which advocated social interference very much and inflicted its citizens to an explicit confessional morality offensive. According to the party leader of the Antirevolutionary Party (1879) and prime minister of the government of the Netherlands (1901-1905), Abraham Kuyper (1880), the ideal family consisted of a father who provided enough family income for the mother to be able to stay home and take care of the children. In fact, this is exactly the case in the *Reynard* story. Moreover, Abraham Kuyper claimed the family to constitute the cornerstone of religion, nation and society which, in his view, represented the Holy Trinity. He used the ideal composition of a family as a metaphor for society: not only was family life reflected in society, society was reflected in family life as well (Kuyper 1880: 5). Thus, the story of *Reynard the Fox* was politically and ideologically manipulated: under the guise of making literary heritage accessible for children, Dutch children were taught one of the most prevailing social values of the time (cf. Parlevliet 2008).

At first sight the adaptation of P.A.E. Oosterhoff (1935) seems to adhere to the same bourgeois ideology. The adaptation leans heavily on the large illustrations printed above the text. One of the illustrations shows Reynard among his wife and children, comfortably sitting in an armchair, reading the “wood news” with his feet up. His wife pours him his tea, while his children are playing around them. There is a maxim on the wall with the Dutch equivalent proverb for “If the lion’s skin cannot, the fox’s shall”. It all seems to picture an idyllic family scene. However, next to a portrait of one of Reynard’s ancestors, a dead duck and a dead chicken are pinned to the wall:



(Oosterhoff 1935: 5)

The illustration can be considered a form of romantic irony. It is a reflection on the translation itself and its tradition (i.e. a form of metafiction). It gives ironic commentary on the practice of praising Reynard's qualities as a family man. While it shows a happy family with Reynard as the ideal family father, the dead animals on the wall point to Reynard's controversial methods to provide for the joyful life the Fox family lives. This way, this translation is one of the few versions that has preserved the original genre of the text: the satire. Instead of satirizing medieval society, however, it satirizes a contemporary practice, which is: the absurd tradition of propagating the bourgeois ideology of the happy, homely family through a lying, raping and murdering family man.

Conclusion

The point of departure for this article was the assumption that the concept of irony as developed by relevance theory is applicable to translation because of its presupposition of two discourses: an existing representation and an interpretive representation. However, the multiple uses of irony to design a dual audience for children's translations of *Reynard the Fox* also clearly confirm the existence of a third discourse. Besides revealing the translators' attitudes toward the original text, the analysis of irony in the translations also displays the translators' attitudes toward the new audience, in these cases nineteenth or twentieth century children. Thus, passages where irony comes into play are interpretive representations of both the existing representation of the *Reynard* story and the existing image of the child. Irony is used not only to design a dual audience for the translations, but also to communicate the awareness of the child poetics of the time, which, from a historical perspective, makes the identification of irony in translations for children of considerable worth, for it sheds light on cultural constructions of the child as a reader, child education and children's literature.

As for the story of *Reynard the Fox*, the recent whereabouts of the red rascal confirm the correspondence of the regeneration of Reynard descendants with the evolving image of the child. Modern *Reynard* translations are apt to let child and adult reader shiver together (cf. Biegel 1972; Hastings 1990; Van Daele 1996). Just as Reynard the character keeps himself alive through his cunning use of language, the translators keep *Reynard* the text alive with a constant adaptation of the original plot and language.

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Notes

ⁱ The story of Reynard the Fox can be defined as a satire in which cleverness triumphs over physical strength and social power. The first version of the story was based on the French animal epic *Roman de Renard*. It is called *Van den Vos Reynaerde* [About Reynard the Fox]. It was written down in Middle Dutch in the thirteenth century by a Flemish author known as Willem and, as it was rooted in the oral folklore tradition, it was recorded in verse. In the fourteenth century, this story was picked up by another Flemish writer called Aernout who rewrote the story in prose. He called his version *Reynaert's Historie* [Reynard's History], adding a second part with a similar structure. *Reynaert's Historie* crossed the Channel to Britain in 1481, whereupon William Caxton's translation resulted in the development of an English *Reynard* tradition based on the Middle Dutch version of the story. In 1794 Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote an adaptation of the *Reynard* story in German, which was called *Reineke Fuchs*. This version was, once more, based on the second Middle Dutch *Reynard* story, *Reynaert's Historie*. Hereafter the story travelled through Europe, inspiring authors to produce translations and adaptations, sometimes based on the French, sometimes on the Dutch, often on the German version. The story of the fox also managed to travel to other continents where it left traces in several non-European cultures (cf. Varty 1999; Varty 2000; Parlevliet 2008).

ⁱⁱ By "adopting" Hannabus (1996: 422) means: "when children 'take over' a work (book, cartoon, film or video) and make it their own, so that it becomes generally associated in the public mind as 'a work for children' or 'a work that children are expected to enjoy'".

ⁱⁱⁱ The "referee group" is defined by Mason as: "any third-party group (or discourse community) whose attributes, including their speech/writing style, are valued by either the addresser or the addressee or both. Moreover, the referee group may be a social group to which the addresser (and/or addressee) either belongs (in-group) or does not belong (out-group)" (Mason 2000: 6).

^{iv} See, among others, Rudvin and Orlati (2006) for solutions and implications of translating an original text for a dual readership.

^v A metonym is a figure of speech based on the resemblance or similarity of what is said to what is meant. However, it can also refer to spatial closeness, which it does in the case of the figure of contiguity.

^{vi} In the author's preface Smythe (1903) claimed the moral ending of the original story not suitable for children. Therefore, she gave the story without the ending to a third grade class and asked the children to write their own ending. The majority punished the fox with death. The ending Smythe chose to append to her adaptation was written by an eight-year-old girl.