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LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC SIMPLIFICATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A COGNITIVE-COMMUNICATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK TEXTS

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Annotation: Translating children's literature presents a distinctive set of challenges that differ markedly from those encountered in translating texts intended for adult readers. Because child readers possess developing linguistic competence, limited world knowledge, and constrained working memory capacity, translators of children's books routinely engage in processes of lexical and syntactic simplification. This article examines these simplification strategies through a cognitive-communicative framework, drawing on comparative examples from English source texts and their Uzbek translations. The analysis demonstrates that simplification is not a reductive or deficient translation strategy but a purposeful, reader-oriented adaptation that preserves communicative intent while accommodating the cognitive profile of the target audience. The article discusses lexical substitution, semantic narrowing, syntactic restructuring, clause reduction, and the management of cohesion, illustrating each with authentic examples from English children's literature rendered into Uzbek. It concludes that successful simplification in this genre requires translators to balance fidelity to the source text with sensitivity to the developmental, cultural, and linguistic realities of the target child reader.

Keywords: children's literature, translation studies, lexical simplification, syntactic simplification, cognitive-communicative approach, English-Uzbek translation, readability

Children's literature occupies a unique position within the broader field of translation studies. Unlike texts written for adult audiences, works intended for children are read-and often read aloud-by individuals whose linguistic, cognitive, and cultural competencies are still in active development. This dual readership, in which the text must simultaneously satisfy the child listener/reader and the adult mediator (parent, teacher, or librarian), places particular demands on the translator. The translator of children's literature is not merely transferring meaning from one linguistic system to another; they are recalibrating a text's entire communicative architecture so that it remains accessible, engaging, and comprehensible to a reader whose cognitive apparatus differs substantially from that of the source-text audience. Simplification-understood here as the deliberate reduction of lexical density, syntactic complexity, and informational load-is one of the most consistently observed strategies in the translation of children's literature. It is not a symptom of translational inadequacy but rather a principled response to the asymmetry between the source text's implied reader and the target text's actual reader. This article investigates how such simplification operates at the lexical and syntactic levels in the specific case of English-to-Uzbek translation, a language pair that has received comparatively little scholarly attention despite the growing volume of English children's books being

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translated into Uzbek for the domestic educational and publishing markets. The central argument advanced here is that simplification in children's literature translation should be understood through a cognitive-communicative lens: decisions to substitute a rare word with a familiar one, to break a subordinate clause into two independent sentences, or to reduce a periphrastic construction to a simpler predicate are not arbitrary stylistic choices but are motivated by an implicit model of the target reader's cognitive processing capacity and communicative expectations. This framework allows us to move beyond a purely linguistic description of simplification and toward an explanation of *why* particular strategies are chosen and what communicative effects they are designed to produce. Developmental psycholinguistics has established that children's processing of complex syntax, particularly embedded and multiply subordinated clauses, lags considerably behind their processing of simple coordinate and short declarative structures. Working memory limitations mean that long-distance dependencies-such as those created by relative clauses separating a subject from its verb-impose a heavier processing burden on child readers than on adults. Similarly, children's mental lexicons, while expanding rapidly, are smaller and less abstract than those of adult readers; low-frequency, Latinate, or highly abstract vocabulary items are less likely to be recognized or correctly inferred from context. These cognitive realities form the psychological basis for what Reiss and Vermeer's *Skopos theory* would describe as a translation purpose oriented toward comprehensibility and functional equivalence rather than strict formal equivalence. In the case of children's literature, the *skopos*- the purpose of the translated text- is inseparable from the reader's cognitive capacity to process it. A translation that fails to accommodate this capacity fails, in a meaningful sense, to fulfill its communicative function, regardless of how "faithful" it may be at the level of individual lexical items. Simplification is not solely a cognitive accommodation; it is also a communicative act shaped by pragmatic and cultural considerations. The translator must anticipate what background knowledge the target child reader can be assumed to possess, what registers of language are considered age-appropriate within the target culture, and what stylistic conventions govern children's writing in the target language. In the Uzbek context, children's literature has historically been shaped by an oral storytelling tradition (*ertak* narration), which favors paratactic structures, formulaic openings and closings, and a relatively restricted, high-frequency vocabulary. Translators working from English-a language whose literary children's tradition permits greater syntactic variation and lexical playfulness-must therefore often simplify not only to accommodate cognitive constraints but to align the translated text with target-culture generic expectations. It is important to distinguish simplification from impoverishment. Simplification, properly understood, is a targeted reduction of *surface* complexity that seeks to preserve, and sometimes even enhance, the *deep* communicative and narrative content of the source text. A translator who replaces an embedded relative clause with two coordinated sentences is not omitting information; they are redistributing it into processing units better suited to the target reader. This distinction is central to the cognitive-communicative approach adopted in this article: simplification is evaluated not by how much surface material is removed, but by how effectively communicative equivalence is achieved given the constraints of the target readership. One of the most pervasive lexical strategies observed in English-Uzbek children's translation is the replacement of source-text words with lower text-frequency in the target language by more common, everyday equivalents. English children's authors frequently employ vocabulary that, while accessible to native English-speaking children through exposure and instruction, has no similarly frequent counterpart in Uzbek, or whose direct equivalent belongs to a more formal or literary register. For instance, an

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English text describing a character as *"anxious"* is commonly rendered in Uzbek not with the more formally precise *"tashvishli"* in its full semantic complexity, but with the everyday expression *"xavotirlangan"* or, in simpler passages, the more colloquial *"qo'rqib turgan"* ("feeling scared"), which is more accessible to young readers despite being semantically narrower than "anxious." This illustrates a recurring pattern: precision is sacrificed for accessibility, with translators favoring words that a child reader in the early stages of literacy will recognize instantly rather than words requiring inferential or contextual decoding. A related strategy is semantic narrowing, whereby a specific or technical term in the source text is replaced by a broader, more general (hyperonymic) term in the target text. English children's books often name specific species of plants, animals, or objects with some precision (e.g., "sparrow," "oak," "mug"), while Uzbek translations frequently generalize these to superordinate categories more familiar to the target audience, such as "qush" (bird), "daraxt" (tree), or "piyola" (cup/bowl)-the latter substitution also reflecting a culturally appropriate object more familiar in Uzbek households than the source-culture "mug." This narrowing serves two simultaneous functions: it reduces the lexical burden on the child reader, and it performs a form of cultural domestication, replacing source-culture-specific referents with target-culture-appropriate ones. The cognitive-communicative approach frames this as a dual optimization—minimizing processing cost while maximizing referential familiarity. English children's literature is often rich in idiom, wordplay, and figurative language, particularly in texts by authors such as Roald Dahl, A. A. Milne, or Dr. Seuss. Idiomatic expressions such as *"raining cats and dogs"* or *"a piece of cake"* have no direct lexical equivalents in Uzbek and, if translated literally, would produce either nonsensical or confusing images for a young reader unfamiliar with the source culture's idiomatic conventions. Translators typically resolve this through one of three simplification strategies:

1. **De-idiomatization**, in which the figurative expression is replaced with a literal, plain-language paraphrase (e.g., "raining cats and dogs" becomes simply "juda kuchli yomg'ir yog'ayotgan edi," "it was raining very heavily").
2. **Substitution with a target-culture idiom** of comparable simplicity, when one exists that carries similar connotations and is equally accessible to children.
3. **Omission**, in cases where the figurative content is peripheral to the narrative and its retention would introduce more processing difficulty than communicative value.

Each of these strategies reduces the figurative density of the text, trading stylistic richness for comprehensibility—a trade-off that is central to the cognitive-communicative model of simplification.

3.4 Simplification of Proper Names and Culturally Specific Referents

Names of characters, foods, holidays, and institutions frequently undergo simplification or adaptation. While full domestication (replacing an English name with an Uzbek one) is relatively rare in contemporary Uzbek translation practice—reflecting an increasing trend toward source-culture retention for educational purposes—translators often supplement unfamiliar referents with a simplifying gloss or replace obscure cultural items with more general descriptive terms that a child can process without external explanation. For example, "porridge" is sometimes rendered not as a transliterated borrowing but as "bo'tqa," an existing Uzbek term for a comparable, culturally familiar

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cereal dish, sacrificing exact referential accuracy for immediate comprehensibility. English children's prose, even at the picture-book level, frequently contains complex sentences with subordinate clauses—relative clauses, adverbial clauses of time or condition, and non-finite participial constructions. Because Uzbek is an agglutinative, left-branching language in which modifying elements typically precede the head noun and verbs are consistently clause-final, direct syntactic transfer of English right-branching subordination often produces sentences that are structurally awkward and cognitively taxing for young Uzbek readers, who must hold an unusually long string of pre-verbal modifiers in memory before reaching the main predicate.

A common simplification strategy is therefore to split a single complex English sentence into two or more simple Uzbek sentences. Consider a representative English sentence:

"The little bear, who had been walking through the forest since morning, finally found a small stream where he could drink."

A simplified Uzbek rendering typically restructures this into two independent, sequential sentences rather than preserving the embedded relative and locative clauses:

"Kichkina ayiqcha ertalabdan beri o'rmonda yurgan edi. Nihoyat, u suv icha oladigan kichik bir buloqni topdi."

("The little bear had been walking in the forest since morning. Finally, he found a small stream where he could drink.")

This restructuring reduces the pre-verbal processing load in each clause and aligns with the paratactic rhythm characteristic of Uzbek oral narrative tradition, thereby serving both cognitive and communicative-cultural functions simultaneously. Beyond simple clause splitting, translators frequently reduce the *depth* of syntactic embedding-that is, the number of subordinate clauses nested within a single sentence. English source sentences containing two or three levels of subordination (a relative clause modifying a noun within an adverbial clause, for instance) are typically flattened into a single level of subordination or converted entirely into coordinated independent clauses. This flattening directly addresses the working-memory constraints discussed in Section 2.1: each additional level of embedding requires the reader to maintain an open syntactic dependency, and research on reading development suggests that this capacity is markedly more limited in children than in adults. English employs a comparatively elaborate system of tense-aspect marking, including present perfect, past perfect, and progressive aspect forms that do not map neatly onto the Uzbek verbal system. Uzbek children's translations tend to simplify these distinctions by favoring the simple past (*o'tgan zamon*) or narrative present, even where the English source text employs more nuanced aspectual marking. For example, the English past perfect in *"She had already eaten breakfast when her brother woke up"* is frequently rendered with a straightforward sequential simple past construction in Uzbek—*"Ukasi uyg'onganda, u nonushta qilib bo'lgan edi"*—which, while technically retaining a perfect-like auxiliary construction (*bo'lgan edi*), is presented as a single fluid clause rather than the more analytically complex embedded temporal structure of the source. In many cases, translators go further

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and simply sequence the events chronologically ("Ukasi uyg'ondi. U nonushtasini yeb bo'lgan edi"), avoiding subordinated temporal framing altogether. Because Uzbek is a canonically SOV (subject-object-verb) language with strict verb-final tendencies, while English is SVO, syntactic simplification also involves systematic reordering rather than mere word-for-word substitution. Sentences with fronted adverbial or prepositional phrases in English are frequently reorganized so that the Uzbek sentence maintains a natural agglutinative flow, with case-marked noun phrases preceding the verb in a sequence that supports predictable, low-effort parsing. This reordering, while a grammatical necessity rather than a stylistic choice, nonetheless interacts with simplification goals: translators often use the opportunity of reordering to simultaneously shorten and declutter the sentence, removing English-specific cohesive devices (such as multiple relative pronouns) that have no natural Uzbek equivalent. Simplification also extends to the management of cohesive devices. English children's texts often use pronouns extensively to avoid lexical repetition, relying on the reader's ability to track referents across several intervening clauses. Because pronominal tracking imposes an additional cognitive load—especially in a language like Uzbek where pronoun deletion (pro-drop) is common and referential tracking conventions differ—translators frequently reintroduce full noun phrases at intervals where English would retain a pronoun. This lexical redundancy, counterintuitively, functions as a simplification strategy: by periodically re-anchoring the reader to the referent's full name, the translator reduces the risk of referential ambiguity and lightens the inferential burden on the child reader, even though it technically increases lexical repetition. The examples discussed above demonstrate that lexical and syntactic simplification in English-Uzbek children's literature translation is a coherent, systematic set of strategies rather than a haphazard collection of ad hoc adjustments. Viewed through the cognitive-communicative lens, each strategy can be understood as addressing a specific mismatch between the processing demands of the source text and the processing capacities and communicative expectations of the target child reader. However, simplification is not without risk. Excessive simplification can flatten a text's stylistic richness, diminish its capacity to expand a child's vocabulary and syntactic competence, and, in some cases, alter the narrative's tone or characterization. Children's literature scholarship has long recognized that part of the value of reading to and with children lies precisely in exposing them to language slightly beyond their current competence-the notion of a "zone of proximal development" in Vygotskian terms. A translation strategy that simplifies too aggressively risks depriving the target reader of this developmentally valuable linguistic stretch. The cognitive-communicative framework therefore does not advocate simplification as an unconditional good but as a calibrated response that must be continuously weighed against considerations of stylistic fidelity, developmental appropriateness, and narrative integrity. Skilled translators of children's literature-including those working in the English-Uzbek pair-appear to navigate this balance intuitively, simplifying most aggressively at points of high syntactic or lexical density while preserving more challenging constructions where the surrounding context offers sufficient scaffolding for comprehension. This article has examined lexical and syntactic simplification as central, purposeful strategies in the translation of children's literature from English into Uzbek. Employing a cognitive-communicative framework, the analysis has shown that such simplification operates at multiple levels: lexical substitution and semantic narrowing reduce vocabulary load; de-idiomatization and cultural adaptation manage figurative and referential complexity; and syntactic restructuring-including clause splitting, reduced embedding, simplified tense-aspect marking, and cohesion management-accommodates the working-memory and processing

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constraints of young readers while aligning translated texts with target-language narrative conventions. Far from representing a deficiency in translation quality, simplification emerges from this analysis as a sophisticated, reader-oriented adaptation strategy essential to the communicative success of translated children's literature. Future research might productively extend this analysis through corpus-based quantitative methods, measuring simplification indices (such as average sentence length, subordination ratio, and type-token ratio) across larger samples of English-Uzbek children's translations, and might further investigate how simplification strategies vary according to the target age group, genre, and the individual translator's stylistic preferences. Such research would deepen our understanding of how translators mediate between linguistic systems and cognitive development in the service of the child reader.

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