Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561 P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume: 02 Issue: 02 February-2026

Applying Translation Variation Theory to Children's Literature Translation-A Case Study of the Korean Translation of *the Secret of the Matryoshka Doll*

Jiawei Ding

Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Gongshang University, Xiasha Street, Qiantang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China ORCID-ID: 0009000608788148

Published Date: February 27, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E2/2026-11**

ABSTRACT: *The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll* is one of the representative works of the Chinese children's writer Cheng Wei and has long been popular among young readers in China. Its successful circulation in Korea has depended to a large extent on the availability of a high-quality translation. Translating children's literature requires careful attention to readers' age and psychological characteristics, while also striving for language that is vivid, lively, and rich in childlike appeal. Unlike traditional translation theories that prioritise "faithful reproduction" of the source text, translation variation theory foregrounds the specific needs of target readers and advocates flexible adjustment of the original within an appropriate range so as to enhance the acceptability of the translation. Taking the Korean version of *The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll* translated by Kang Young-hee and published by Danbi Children's Publishing House as a case study, this paper, within the framework of translation variation theory, examines seven techniques—addition, omission, editing, retelling, Condensation, integration, and revision. By comparing representative passages from the source text and the translation, it demonstrates that the translator's reasoned adjustments and selections, guided by the reading expectations of child readers in the target language, make the translated text clearer, more accessible, more vivid, and better aligned with the reception habits of young readers abroad.

KEYWORDS: *The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll*; children's literature translation; translation variation theory; translation techniques; Korean translation

1. INTRODUCTION

As an independent literary genre, children's literature shares the aesthetic qualities of literature more broadly, while also reflecting the particularities of child readers in cognition, emotion, and modes of reception. Because children are the primary readership, children's literature must necessarily be child-centred, attending to children's cognitive capacity, patterns of thinking, and levels of comprehension (Gao Huimin, 40). At the same time, children's literature serves as an important vehicle for cross-cultural exchange, and the quality of translation directly shapes young readers' reading experience and cultural understanding. Traditional Chinese translation discourse has largely foregrounded general criteria such as "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance", which can all too easily overlook the agency of target readers and their concrete needs. Compared with the translation of general literature, translating children's literature must take fuller account of children's age-related characteristics and psychological traits, while also prioritising playfulness and vividness in language in order to attract and sustain children's interest. In practice, therefore, translators need to work from the specific needs of child readers and, while respecting the original, make necessary and flexible adjustments so as to reduce obstacles to comprehension. Translation variation theory is explicitly reader-oriented: it advocates multi-level modulation of the source text—through techniques such as addition, omission, adaptation, condensation, integration, and revision—within a reasonable range, thereby offering an operational theoretical basis for children's literature translation. Applying translation variation theory to the study of children's literature translation can help further enhance overall translation quality and convey more effectively the source text's information and affective meanings.

The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll is a novella by the contemporary Chinese children's writer Cheng Wei, running to approximately 50,000

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

words. It tells the story of two young girls living in Germany who, amid a sudden shift in family relations, come into possession of a mysterious Russian nesting doll and gradually uncover the secrets and contradictions of the adult world—learning, in the process, to understand their parents, to settle their own feelings, and to achieve psychological growth. With a restrained yet finely textured style and highly visual detail, the author renders with authenticity a girl's confusion, unease, and quiet maturation in the face of family upheaval. The work maintains a gentle, delicate tone and does not rely on dramatic plotting; instead, it draws on everyday particulars—such as a family holiday or a stopped clock—to create a faint sense of suspense and an atmosphere of introspection. By approaching complex adult issues from a child's perspective, the author translates parents' need for privacy and subtle shifts in family dynamics into experiential situations that children can grasp, thereby guiding readers to reflect on how love and respect ought to be expressed and practised. The nesting-doll motif also offers a deft structural echo of the theme: what appears simple on the outside proves layered and intricate within—much like family relationships, which reveal their true contours only through patient exploration and mutual forbearance. The Korean translation, *아빠가 사라졌다!*, was translated by Kang Young-hee and published in 2014 by Danbi Children's Publishing House. The standalone edition comprises 136 pages and is comparable in length to the original, providing a solid textual basis for the present study's Chinese–Korean comparison and analysis of translation strategies from the perspective of translation variation theory.

2. OVERVIEW OF TRANSLATION VARIATION THEORY

Translation variation theory is one of China's indigenous translation theories. It was first systematically formulated by Professor Huang Zhonglian in 1998 (Huang Zhonglian, iv). Based on the extent to which a translator retains the content and form of the original during the translation process, he divides translation into two categories: translation that strives to preserve the original in its entirety is termed "full translation", whereas translation that involves selection and corresponding reworking belongs to "translation variation" (Zheng Jie; Wang Zhuo; Zhang Xingling, 153). In this sense, translation variation is a strategy defined in relation to full translation: it requires the translator to reshape and selectively retain aspects of the source text so that the target text is more readily acceptable to target-language readers (Gao Huimin, 40). Given the linguistic and cultural differences between languages, translators often need to negotiate tensions between the source and target texts in both form and content; translation variation theory provides flexible means of adaptation to facilitate a smoother translation process (Liao Jun; Tang Tian, 11). In essence, the theory emphasises that translators, in response to differing reader needs, may flexibly employ seven adaptive procedures—addition, omission, adaptation, paraphrase, condensation, integration, and revision—to extract the core content of the source text and enhance the fluency and readability of the translation. Regardless of which procedure is adopted, the fundamental aim is to serve target-language readers more effectively.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE KOREAN TRANSLATION OF *THE SECRET OF THE MATRYOSHKA DOLL* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSLATION VARIATION THEORY

In what follows, a case-based analysis of the Korean translation of *The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll* is conducted from seven angles—addition, omission, editing, retelling, Condensation, integration, and revision—so as to explore how translation variation theory can be applied to children's literature translation.

3.1 Addition (a>b)

"Addition(增)" refers to the introduction of extra information on the basis of the source text. According to Huang Zhonglian, addition may take three forms—explication (释), commentary (评), and rewriting (写) (Huang Zhonglian, 108)—with the aim of accurately conveying the connotations of certain concepts in the source text and enabling readers to grasp the intended meaning more fully. Explication involves explaining part of the original within the translation; commentary entails critique or evaluative remarks on the translated content; and rewriting refers to adding content related to the translated segment.

(1) **ST:** 夏洛特从背包里的大小树叶中间找出手机，准备给爸爸拨电话。嗒嗒，嗒嗒，这时候，对面慢悠悠地过来一匹白色的马。经过她们身边的时候，白马王子勒住缰绳，他笑一笑说："两个小红帽，天很快就黑了，你们没有迷路吧？"

(**English gloss:** Charlotte rummaged among the large and small leaves in her backpack to find her phone, getting ready to call her father. Clip-clop, clip-clop—just then, a white horse came ambling towards them from the other side. As it passed by, the prince on the white horse reined in and, with a smile, asked, "Two little Little Red Riding Hoods, it'll soon be dark. You haven't lost your way, have you?")

TT: 샤를로테가 배낭 속 나무잎을 헤치고 휴대전화를 찾아 아빠에게 전화를 걸었다. 뚜뚜, 뚜뚜,이때 맞은편에서 백마가 느릿느릿 걸어왔다. 샤를로테와 마이아는 얼른 길 한쪽 편으로 비켜서며 점점 가까이 다가오는 백마 탄 왕자를 말끄러미 바라보았다. 두 사람의 곁을 지날 때 백마 탄 왕자가 말고삐를 잡아당기더니 웃으며 말했다. "꼬마 아가씨들, 날이 곧

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

어두워질 텐데 길을 잃은 건 아니겠지?"

(**English gloss:** Charlotte pushed aside the leaves in her backpack, found her mobile phone, and called her father. Beep-beep, beep-beep—at that moment, a white horse came walking slowly from the opposite direction. Charlotte and Maiaquickly moved to one side of the road, gazing fixedly at the prince on the white horse drawing ever closer. As he passed them, the prince pulled on the reins and, smiling, said, "Little ladies, it'll be getting dark soon—you haven't lost your way, have you?")

This case exemplifies what Xia Zeng terms a "rewriting-type" addition. After "a white horse came ambling towards them", the source text quickly shifts to "passing by—reining in—asking a question", leaving unarticulated the characters' immediate response and the gradual closing of distance. The translation adds: "Charlotte and Maia quickly moved to one side of the road, gazing fixedly at the prince on the white horse drawing ever closer", thereby supplying an action-and-viewpoint chain—yielding space → approaching → watching closely—without altering the core event sequence. On the one hand, this makes explicit the spatial relations and behavioural logic of the scene (why they step aside, and how an interaction is set up); on the other, it transforms a compressed narration into a more process-oriented, "cinematic" presentation, making the subsequent line of dialogue flow more smoothly within the narrative. As a typical "rewriting-type" addition, such supplementation of movement, distance change, and gaze externalises meanings that are only implicit in the source text, helping child readers grasp characters' emotions and the situational atmosphere, and thus lowering comprehension costs and potential reading barriers.

(2) **ST:** 夏洛特和玛娅长久地看着那个喜气洋洋的俄罗斯娃娃。其实，我们每个人的心灵里，都隐藏着一只梦想的小鸟，它渴望蓝天，渴望独立地、自由自在地飞翔。

(**English gloss:** Charlotte and Maia looked at that cheerful Russian nesting doll for a long time. In fact, within each of our hearts there is a little bird of dreams, longing for the blue sky and longing to fly independently and freely.)

TT: 샤를로테와 마이아는 싱글벙글 웃는 러시아 인형을 오랫동안 바라보았다. 그러니깐 밀러 할아버지는 마이아 아빠가 쪽지에 써 놓지 않은 까닭은 러시아 인형을 통해 말해 준 것이다. 사실 모든 사람의 마음속에는 파란 하늘을 홀로 자유롭게 날기를 꿈구는 새끼 새가 숨어 있다.

(**English gloss:** Charlotte and Maia stared for a long time at the Russian doll smiling broadly. That is to say, Grandpa Miller conveyed, through the Russian doll, the reason that Maia's father had not written in the note. In fact, in everyone's heart there hides a fledgling that dreams of flying alone, freely, in the blue sky.)

Here the key addition is not the supplementation of scenic or procedural detail, but rather the explicit articulation of an implicit relation in the source text; it therefore aligns more closely with "explication" (while also exhibiting some features of "rewriting"). The source text comprises two parts: first, a descriptive statement ("Charlotte and Maia looked… for a long time"); second, a sudden shift to a generalised lyrical reflection ("In fact, within each of our hearts…"). The symbolic linkage between these two sentences is left unstated in the source text and relies on readers to infer the intended implication. By inserting the explanatory sentence—"That is to say, Grandpa Miller conveyed, through the Russian doll, the reason that Maia's father had not written in the note"—the translation makes the act of "gazing at the doll" point directly to "the doll as a carrier and transmitter of unspoken reasons/information", thereby rewriting the source text's symbolic juxtaposition into a clearer causal chain. This externalisation of implicit meaning helps child readers follow the emotional and thematic trajectory more readily, reducing the potential interpretive "gap" and reading difficulty that may arise when the text moves from an object description to the "dream-bird" metaphor.

3.2 Omission (a<b)

"Omission(减)" refers to the overall removal of information in the source text that, in the translator's judgement, the target readership does not need. At times this means pruning "dead branches and leaves" from the original; at other times it involves squeezing out redundant "water". In translation variation, it is realised as selective retention and deletion of source-text material (Huang Zhonglian, 113). In practice, translators may flexibly adopt strategies such as grammatical reduction and making the explicit implicit to delete and refine unnecessary linguistic information, so as to avoid semantic repetition and over-extended, sluggish prose in the target text (Ding Lifu & Tang Jing, 27).

(3) **ST:** 哲学教授用询问的目光看着玛娅，又看看夏洛特。两个学生同时向他轻轻点头。夏洛特爸爸舒了一口气。他拍拍玛娅和夏洛特的肩膀，轻松地说："听说你们要来，我下午掉了几条鳟鱼。女孩子们，现在，我们烧火，烤鱼，野餐。"

(**English gloss:** The philosophy professor looked at Maia with an inquiring gaze, then glanced at Charlotte. The two students nodded lightly at him at the same time. Charlotte's father let out a sigh of relief. He patted Maia and Charlotte on the shoulder and said in an easy tone, "I heard you were coming, so I caught a few trout this afternoon. Girls, now—we'll make a fire, grill the fish, and have a picnic.")

TT: 철학 교수는 물음을 던지는 눈빛으로 마이아와 샤를로테를 번갈아 바라보았다. 두 학생이 동시에 가볍게 고개를

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

끄덕였다. 비로소 마음이 놓인 샤를로테의 어깨를 토닥토닥 두드리며 유쾌하게 말했다. “너희가 온다고 해서 송어를 몇 마리 잡아놨단다. 꼬마친구들, 우리 당장 불을 피어서 구워 먹을까?”

(**English gloss:** The philosophy professor alternated his gaze between Maia and Charlotte with questioning eyes. The two students nodded lightly at the same time. Finally reassured, he gave Charlotte’s shoulder a few gentle pats and said cheerfully, “Since you were coming, I’ve caught a few trout. Little ones, shall we light a fire and grill them right away?”)

This example can be classified as “omission” in translation variation. After the “professor–students” confirmation, the ST proceeds to lay out multiple process-oriented details: a standalone psychological sentence (“let out a sigh of relief”), an action directed at both girls (“patted Maia and Charlotte’s shoulders”), and an explicit list of subsequent arrangements (“make a fire, grill fish, have a picnic”). The TT trims and compresses these materials in three main ways. First, the sigh of relief is no longer retained as an independent clause; it is condensed into the embedded state description “비로소 마음이 놓인” (“finally reassured”), reducing repetitive affective staging while preserving the emotional turn. Second, the gesture is simplified and focalised: “patted the shoulders of both” becomes “토닥토닥 두드리며” and is narrowed to Charlotte alone, making the narration leaner. Third, the enumerated plan is reduced to a single, more colloquial proposal—“우리 당장 불을 피어서 구워 먹을까?”—with the more expansive “picnic” information omitted. By weakening secondary detail and removing redundant elaboration, the TT concentrates attention on the narrative spine—confirmation → reassurance → invitation to act—thus tightening pace and aligning more closely with the processing rhythm expected of child readers in the target language.

3.3 Editing (a≦b)

“Editing” (编) refers to the act of reorganising and systematising the source content so that it becomes more orderly, polished, and refined (Huang Zhonglian, 115). The unit to be edited may be a sentence cluster, a paragraph, a whole text, or even multiple texts. The aim is to make the main idea more salient, keep content clear and concentrated, and produce a distinct, memorable impression—organising materials according to the needs of the central theme. Through such editing-oriented translation, the target text becomes easier for target-language readers to follow.

(4) **ST:** “金星。”夏洛特爸爸终于开口说了第一个词。夏洛特看看玛娅，玛娅看看夏洛特。她们这么紧急的跑来这里，并不是来看这个金星的。

(**English gloss:** “Venus.” Charlotte’s father finally spoke his first word. Charlotte looked at Maia; Maia looked at Charlotte. They had rushed here so urgently not to see this Venus.)

TT:“금성이야.”아빠가 마침내 처음으로 입을 열었다. 샤를로테와 마이아는 서로 멀뚱히 바라보았다. 자기들이 그토록 서둘러서 이 곳에 온 까닭은 금성을 보고 싶어서 아니었다.

(**English gloss:** “It’s Venus.” Dad finally spoke for the first time. Charlotte and Maia stared blankly at each other. The reason they had hurried here in such a rush was not because they wanted to see Venus.)

This example shows “editing” at the sentence-cluster level. The ST uses a symmetrical pair—“Charlotte looked at Maia; Maia looked at Charlotte”—to convey hesitation and confusion, but the expression is relatively repetitive. The TT edits this into the more concentrated “서로 멀뚱히 바라보았다”, which compresses mutual looking and the affect of being at a loss into one sharper image, producing a clearer “shot” and a more economical information package. At the same time, the TT reorganises “not to see Venus” into an explicit reason structure—“온 까닭은 … 아니었다”—which ties the act of rushing here to a negated purpose in a clearer causal chain. Through streamlining plus logical reorganisation, the translation strengthens the communicative centre of the cluster—namely, that their urgency is driven by something other than stargazing—thereby exemplifying the ordering and concentrating function of “editing”.

3.4 Retelling (a≈b)

“Retelling” (述) means rendering the source content in the target language by writing or stating it out—often as indirect narration or paraphrase. It does not insist on strict word-for-word or sentence-by-sentence correspondence, but seeks primarily to convey meaning (Huang Zhonglian, 117). Although the source form may change, the translation can still transmit the original information accurately (Zhang Hua, 98).

(5) **ST:** 妈妈本来准备直接把她们送到湖边的。可夏洛特和玛娅都说，她们想自己在森林里走一走，她们正好可以顺路收集树叶，完成自然老师布置的作业。

(**English gloss:** Mum had originally planned to take them straight to the lakeside. But Charlotte and Maia both said they wanted to walk through the forest themselves; they could also collect leaves along the way to complete the assignment their nature teacher had set.)

TT: 본래는 호수가까지 직접데려가 줄 생각이었지만 샤를로테와 마이아가 숲 속을 걸니고 싶어 했다. 이 참에 두 아이는 나무잎을 모으는 자연 과목숙제도 같이 해치울 작정이었다.

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

(**English gloss:** She had originally intended to take them directly to the lake, but Charlotte and Maia wanted to walk in the forest. While they were at it, the two children planned to get their nature-class homework—collecting leaves—done as well.)

This example fits "retelling" because the TT prioritises conveying the sense over reproducing the ST's syntactic packaging. The ST presents a relatively standard progression: original plan → children's preference → supplementary rationale (collect leaves to complete homework). The TT re-encodes the same content in a more Korean-discourse-friendly way, using the concessive frame "본래는 … 생각이었지만" to summarise the initial arrangement, then stating the children's wish, and finally bundling "collecting leaves" and "finishing homework" into a single, purposeful plan—"이 참에 … 같이 해치울 작정"—which reads as a coherent action intention rather than an added afterthought. In other words, the translator "retells" the situation by reorganising clause linkage and information grouping while keeping the core meaning stable, a hallmark of the retelling-type procedure.

3.5 Condensation (a<<b)

"Condensation" (缩) refers to compressing and concentrating the source-text content. By using highly concise target-language expressions, the translator condenses the original so that the amount of information is reduced—from large to small, and substantially smaller than the source text—and the length becomes shorter (Huang Zhonglian, 118). Condensation is thus a form of content concentration: the translator compresses the original with succinct target-language wording so that the informational load decreases and the textual span shortens; where needed, two or more parts of the source text that are similar in content or linked by a sequential/causal logic may also be merged (Shi Jinrui & Zhang Menglin, 119).

(6) **ST:** 玛娅看着星星闪烁的天空，问夏洛特："你说，我爸爸现在会不会也正在看天上的星星呢？"夏洛特肯定地说："很可能。""你说，他在想我和妈妈吗？"

(**English gloss:** Maia, looking at the star-flecked sky, asked Charlotte, "Do you think my dad might also be looking at the stars in the sky right now?" Charlotte replied with certainty, "Very likely." "Do you think he's thinking of Mum and me?")

TT: 마이아가 별들이 총총한 밤하늘을 올려다보며 물었다. "우리 이아빠도 지금 하늘의 별을 보고 있을까?"샤를로테는 긍정적으로 대답했다."어쩌면 그럴지도 모르지." "아빠가 지금 엄마를 그리워할까?"

(**English gloss:** Maia looked up at the night sky dotted with stars and asked, "Do you think my dad is also looking at the stars in the sky right now?" Charlotte answered affirmatively, "Maybe he is." "Do you think Dad is missing Mum right now?")

This example can be classified as "condensation". The ST develops the emotion through two successive questions: first, whether the father is also watching the stars; second, whether he is thinking of "Mum and me", which keeps the affective target relatively comprehensive. While maintaining the dialogue frame, the TT compresses the information of the second question by rewriting "Is he thinking of Mum and me?" as "Do you think Dad is missing Mum right now?", reducing a compound referential target ("Mum and me") to a single one ("Mum"). As a result, the affective scope is narrowed and the semantics become more focused and concise. In this local sense, the TT performs a clear reduction and concentration of source content, thereby exhibiting the operational profile of "condensation".

3.6 Integration (a€b)

"Integration" (并) refers to merging: an adaptive technique that combines two or more parts of the original that are similar in content or linked by a sequential/causal logic into a single unit. Integration commonly occurs in two scenarios. First, when the source text's structural arrangement is suboptimal—its expression not sufficiently concise or orderly—content that should be contiguous is scattered across different positions, a pattern often seen at the level of sentences, sentence clusters, or paragraphs. Second, to meet readership needs and dissemination goals, the translator may integrate relevant parts of the original, or even multiple source texts, into one text (or one chapter/book), more often at larger structural levels such as chapters or entire books. The purpose is to present information more efficiently in a concentrated form, thereby conveying core content more economically and rapidly (Huang Zhonglian, 121).

(7) **ST:** 玛娅把这个纸条读了一遍又一遍。最后，她把纸条仔细地叠起来，放回小鸟的肚子里。

(**English gloss:** Maia read the note over and over again. Finally, she carefully folded it up and put it back into the little bird's belly.)

TT: 쪽지를 몇 번이나 읽고 또 읽은 마이아가 그걸 꼼꼼히 접어 새끼 새의 배 속에 도로 집어넣었다.

(**English gloss:** Maia, who had read the note again and again, carefully folded it and put it back into the fledgling's belly.)

This example is a typical instance of "integration". The ST narrates a single action chain in two sentences: "reading the note repeatedly" followed by "finally folding it and putting it back into the bird's belly", which are sequentially and logically connected. The TT merges the two sentences into one compact structure: it uses the modifier-clause-like phrase "읽고 또 읽은 마이아" to subsume the first action, and then strings the subsequent results ("folded → put back in") within the main clause. This integration makes the Korean sentence more economical at the sentence

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

level and produces a more direct logical linkage, allowing the reader to grasp in one pass the complete process of read → fold → return. In addition, "도로" ("back/again") reinforces the "returning to its original place" meaning, making the action loop clearer and further improving narrative coherence and readability—precisely the efficiency- and order-enhancing function pursued by "integration".

3.7 Revision / Rewriting (a¬b)

"Revision" (改) refers to deliberate alteration: the translator, in response to reader needs, rewrites the original so that the translation undergoes a noticeable change, thereby making it better aligned with the reading habits of target-language readers (Huang Zhonglian, 122). What is revised may be the work's basic content or its expressive form—through substitution, adaptation, or transformation (Xiong Yuting & Lü Zhengxiong, 209).

(8) **ST:** 看来，人家也把她们当成了童话世界里的人物。

"好像有一点。"

夏洛特笑起来，问他："你看见一个湖了吗？"

白马王子点点头。

(**English gloss:** It seemed that he, too, took them for characters from a fairy-tale world. "Perhaps a little." Charlotte laughed and asked him, "Have you seen a lake?" The prince on the white horse nodded.)

TT: 백마 탄 왕자는 눈이 휘둥그레질 정도로 무척 멋있고 근하했다.

"그런 것 같아요."

샤를로테가 웃으면서 말했다. "호수를 봤나요?"

백마 탄 왕자가 고개를 끄덕였다.

(**English gloss:** The prince on the white horse was so handsome and splendid that it made one's eyes go wide. "I think so." Charlotte said with a smile, "Have you seen a lake?" The prince on the white horse nodded.)

Here the translator employs "revision" by adjusting the source content to make the character portrayal more direct and vivid. The ST advances primarily through dialogue and does not provide an explicit narrator-led evaluation of the prince's appearance; by contrast, the TT adds an appearance-focused sentence—"The prince… was so handsome and splendid that it made one's eyes go wide"—before the dialogue begins. This changes the presentation mode from a more "dialogue-driven" progression to "narrative pre-positioning": the translation first sets the tonal baseline for the prince's image and then moves into dialogue, thereby constructing the prince as an overtly fairy-tale ideal. The adjective "근사하다" in Korean commonly conveys "splendid / impressive / admirable", reinforcing a strongly fairy-tale atmosphere. Such rewriting aligns with children's reading preferences by using exaggerated, salient evaluation to locate a character quickly, increasing visual vividness and immersive fairy-tale feeling. At the same time, it also narrows the imaginative space left in the ST: the prince's appearance and the atmosphere are fixed earlier and more explicitly by the translator's framing rather than being left for readers to infer.

4. CONCLUSION

Drawing on Huang Zhonglian's translation variation theory as its analytical frame, this study compares Cheng Wei's *The Secret of the Matryoshka Doll* and its Korean translation *아빠가 사라졌다!* in order to examine—through close reading of textual examples—how the translator responds to target-language child readers' comprehension abilities, reading pace, and aesthetic expectations by employing adaptive procedures such as addition, omission, editing, retelling, condensation, integration, and revision. The comparison shows that the translator does not remain at the level of word- or sentence-by-sentence correspondence; instead, guided by the overarching aim of making the story "easier to read, easier to understand, and more vividly imaginable", she consciously modulates narrative information.

More specifically, addition is most often realised through the explicit supplementation of action chains, spatial relations, and implicit meanings. Such supplementation renders processes that are left as narrative blanks in the source text more "cinematic" and helps reduce interpretive gaps created by symbolic leaps. Omission and condensation, by contrast, primarily work through weakening repetitive psychological staging, compressing secondary procedures, and narrowing referential scope; these moves foreground the plotline and emotional focal points, thereby tightening narrative progression. Editing, integration, and retelling are manifested mainly as reorganisation at the level of sentence clusters and discourse re-encoding: symmetrical repetition is replaced by concise summarisation; dispersed sequential actions are merged into a coherent chain; and the original meaning is retold in structures that better accord with Korean narrative conventions, enhancing clarity and readability. Revision, finally, appears in selected scenes where direct evaluation and imagistic description are added to achieve rapid character positioning, intensify a fairy-tale atmosphere, and strengthen reader immersion—though it may also, to some extent, compress the imaginative space that the source text leaves for readers' own inference and affective experience. Overall, these observations suggest that translation variation is not a negation of

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

"faithfulness"; rather, it lowers comprehension costs through selective retention and reorganisation while keeping the core plot and emotional trajectory intact, so that the translation aligns more closely with the reception habits of child readers in the target language.

The analysis therefore further indicates that, in the context of cross-cultural circulation of children's literature, moderate and controlled use of translation variation often enables translators to strike a more effective balance among readability, vividness, and semantic/affective transmission. At the same time, the boundary of such flexibility must be handled with care—especially in relation to symbolism and narrative restraint—since excessive explicitation may alter the aesthetic layering of the original. Future research could expand the corpus and incorporate additional translations and/or reader-response materials, enabling a more fine-grained assessment of how different variation procedures shape children's comprehension and emotional resonance in practice.

NOTE

All English translations of the Chinese and Korean example sentences cited in this article were produced by the author.

For several Chinese journals, an official English journal title is not consistently provided in the source information shared. Where necessary, a functional English translation of the journal title is used, with pinyin in parentheses for identification.

REFERENCES

1) Ding, Lifu, & Tang, Jing. (2023). On translation strategies for culture-specific items in the Huainanzi from the perspective of translation variation theory. Journal of Fuyang Normal University (Social Science), (123), 24–29. https://doi.org/10.14096/j.cnki.cn34-1333/c.2023.03.04
2) Gao, Huimin. (2024). A study on the translation of Chinese contemporary children's literature under the guidance of variation theory: Taking the English translation of Cao Wenxuan's Bronze and Sunflower as an example. Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation, (1), 39–42. (Online publication date: March 2, 2024.)
3) Huang, Zhonglian. (2011). Translation Variation Theory. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation.
4) Liao, Jun, & Tang, Tian. (2021). "Translation variation theory" of Chinese colloquialism: A study of colloquialism translation in the German version of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China. Foreign Language and Literature (Bimonthly), 37(5), 10–15.
5) Shi, Jinrui, & Zhang, Menglin. (2017). A research on translation variation theory: Taking You Are Happy as an example. Journal of North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power (Social Science Edition), 33(6), 118–121.
6) Xiong, Yuting, & Lü, Zhengxiong. (2023). A study of the Chinese translation of Three Days to See from the perspective of translation variation theory. Chinese National Expo, (4), 208–210.
7) Zhang, Hua. (2022). A study on translating tour guide commentaries for the Beijing Palace Museum from the perspective of translation variation theory. Western Tourism, (20), 97–99.
8) Zheng, Jie, Wang, Zhuo, & Zhang, Xingling. (2022). An exploration of children's literature translation from the perspective of translation variation theory: A case study of the English translation of Bronze and Sunflower. Language Comparison Studies, (16), 153–154. https://doi.org/10.14014/j.cnki.cn11-2597/g2.2022.16.048

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Corresponding Author: Jiawei Ding