

# Where the Wild Things Are

## Translating Picture Books

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Riitta Oittinen

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## Abstract



Translating picture books is a many-splendored thing: it includes not only the relationship between the verbal and the visual (images and other elements) but also issues like reading aloud and child images. In the following, while mainly concentrating on the visual, I will deal with the other questions as well, as they all interact and influence each other. My starting point is translating as rewriting for target-language audiences – we always need to ask the crucial question: “For whom?” Hence, while writing children’s books is writing for children, translating children’s literature is translating for children. (See Hunt 1990:1, 60-64 and Oittinen 2000.)

The reasons why I take such a special interest in translating picture books are twofold: cultural and national as well as individual. In Finland, we translate a lot: 70-80% of all the books published for children annually are translations. From the perspective of picture books, the number may be even higher (and 90% of the

translations come from the English language; see Rättyä 2002:18-23). Moreover, being an artist and translator of picture books makes me especially keen on the visual as a translation scholar as well.

As a case study, I have chosen Maurice Sendak's classical picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* and its translations into German, Swedish and Finnish. At the background of my article is my book *Translating for Children* (2000) as well as my forthcoming book *Kuvakirja kääntäjän kädessä* on translating picture books. Due to copyright reasons, I only have picture examples from illustrations of my own.

Keywords : illustration, picture book, iconotext, indexical relationship, Sendak

## Résumé

La traduction de livres d'images implique plusieurs éléments : elle inclut non seulement la relation entre le verbal et le visuel (images et autres éléments), mais aussi la lecture à voix haute et les images pour enfants. Dans cet article, on se concentre principalement sur l'aspect visuel, mais on traite aussi les autres aspects, étant donné qu'ils interagissent les uns avec les autres. Le point de départ est la traduction en tant que réécriture pour le public de la langue-cible (la question « Pour qui ? »). Par conséquent, alors que l'écriture de livre pour enfants consiste à écrire pour les enfants, la traduction de la littérature pour enfants consiste à traduire pour les enfants. (voir Hunt 1990 :1, 60-64 et Oittinen 2000)

Les raisons pour lesquelles on accorde un intérêt particulier à la traduction de livres d'images sont doubles : culturelles et nationales ainsi qu'individuelles. En Finlande, on traduit beaucoup : 70% à 80% de tous les livres annuels publiés pour enfants sont des traductions. En ce qui concerne les livres d'images, le nombre est peut-être même plus élevé (et de plus, 90% des traductions proviennent de l'anglais ; voir Rättyä 2002 :18-23). D'ailleurs, être une artiste et une traductrice de livres d'images me rend particulièrement enthousiaste en ce qui concerne l'aspect visuel en tant que discipline de la traduction.

Comme étude de cas, nous avons choisi le livre d'images de Maurice Sendak « *Where the Wild Things Are* » et sa traduction en allemand, suédois et finnois. Notre livre *Translating for Children* (2000) ainsi que notre prochain livre *Kuvakirja kääntäjän kädessä* sur la traduction des livres d'images sont pris comme fond pour l'article.

## Biographie

# Riitta Oittinen

PhD, is docent in the universities of Tampere and Helsinki, Finland. She is senior lecturer (University of Tampere), and senior scientist (2001-2002, Finnish Academy). She is the author of several books, two in English, e.g., *Translating for Children* (2000). She has also edited books on translation studies. In addition, she is advisory editor of three journals as well as editor and board member of three publishing houses. Her most recent book *Kuva kääntäjän kädessä* (2003) deals with translating the verbal and the visual in picturebooks. She has written over 100 articles on, e.g., translating for children and teaching translation. She has been teaching translation in several universities in Europe and North and South America. She is also translator of children's books, illustrator and artist, and has produced 30 animated films. Her current interests include multimedia and translation, translating picturebooks, and translating Finnish children's literature into English.

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