When the Computer tells Stories:
Children's Literature and Multimedia

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Resumen

El presente artículo se centra en las adaptaciones multimedia de tópicos y motivos literarios de la Literatura infantil y juvenil (LIJ) (no se abordarán los discos compactos y los juegos de ordenador en general). Una investigación significativa de formas narrativas en medios audiovisuales debe comenzar analizando las semejanzas que éstas tienen con los medios de comunicación tradicionales; de hecho, las narraciones infantiles y juveniles constituyen una fuente importante para la creación de software dedicado al ocio infantil (como ya lo fue en su momento en el caso de otros productos para niños tanto del cine como de la televisión). El material utilizado procede de un modelo de software para PC que hace uso de temas de obras de LIJ para la creación de historias y juegos. Dentro del propósito de este estudio no entrarán aspectos teóricos de narratología, sino que el enfoque es eminentemente pedagógico.

Palabras clave: adaptaciones multimedia, motivos literarios, literatura infantil y juvenil, utilización pedagógica del software.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the multimedia-adaptation of literary motives and topics in the area of children´s literature (I do not deal with compact disks and computer games in general.) A meaningful research of narrative forms in new media has to begin with looking at the similarities it shares with narrative forms in the conventional "old" media. In fact narrative texts of the literature for children and young people are an important source for the children's entertainment software - as it already was the case for children's play, radio plays, movies and television. The main focus of these remarks will lie on a specific variation of PC-software, which uses topics from children's books as a material for stories and games.
Neither narrative theoretical aspects nor such of a more advanced object-oriented media or research are attempted. This approach is understandable from the viewpoint of pedagogical necessity, but in lieu of a secure analytical basis it is contraproductive.

Key words: multimedia-adaptation, literary motives, children´s literature,

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pedagogical use of software.

1. Introduction

A difference has to be considered between the form of multimedia-presentation here in mind and other products also distributed by CD-ROM, like for example the audio-CD with music, the radio plays on CD, the audio-book produced as CD, as well as newspapers, movies and television. The scope of this paper will be the multimedia-adaptation of literary motives and topics in the area of children's literature. The definition Multimedia-CD is derived from the fact that the computer can simulate and combine forms of presentation of the conventional media by means of digitisation. The multi-media-CD combines acoustic music and text, presentation with letters, photographs, graphics as well as animated and real film sequences. We are concerned with a most universal medium so far as it is able to reproduce all of the above-mentioned forms of presentation (cf. Heidtmann 1997).

Computer games, of which a minor number is specifically addressed to children, were in Germany for a couple of times mainly perceived in the light of media preferences of children and young people, their political education and protection. This mostly involved pedagogues, social workers and psychiatrists. A short look at the development of the new media proves that initially it always found enthusiastic supporters and immediately afterwards strong opponents. The supporters, on the one hand, tend to succumb to the fascination of the new media, whereas the opponents, on the other hand, have the propensity to search for easy solutions in as how to develop the most safest use if not entirely shunning the new media . Speculations upon the possible effects replace a thorough research of the new phenomena and its structures. The obvious fascination of the game stands in the centre of attention instead of the structures of fiction. Handbooks for the application or a list of criteria are made before ever having analysed the new media. Statements about the "Character and the Form of Computer games" employ only superficial categories of games for example "action games", "Strategy games" and "Jump`n run ".

2. When the Computer tells stories …

The controversial subject "New and old media for children" has meanwhile led to a most interesting discussion about the form and function of multimedia narration. One of the first and most inspirational ones in Germany are Christian Schartner´s "Thoughts upon the aesthetics of computer games" (Schartner 1996). The limitation of the book as a print medium stands in the centre of attention as well as the possible decline of book reading, the innovative potential of the new

media as well as the possible controversial aspects. As far as I can see do the discussions exist more or less next to each other and have not led to a dialogue yet. There is a broad consensus about the fact, that the technical possibilities of the multimedia-CD as well as of the computer contain two components, which have led to a revolutionary form of narration in the new media:

- A component that is constantly emphasized is the possibility of active intervention, the interaction with help of certain input instruments (keyboard, mouse, joystick etc.). In contrast to the conventional texts as well as to movies and television, the multimedia-CD pretends to offer a series of intervention possibilities, among others alternative plots, that allow a story to develop into different directions: "The player is not confined to one single plot (...) He can decide to change the plot at certain stages. The sooner the illusion is created, that the direction of the plot only depends upon a situational decision the better it is. "(Koch 1999, 114). The player at the PC is constantly creating new stories and not merely reproducing a so-called "linear" text. The recipient is put into the position of influencing the story and he is not forced only to follow the structures of a fixed pattern.

- The second component which is of eminent importance is the structure in the form of a hypertext. This means a text that no longer follows a plot with a succession of stages that have been determined. This principle which is followed in conventional texts and the movies is broken and substituted by a system of cross-references, so-called hyperlinks. After clicking on a hot point, these hyperlinks lead to other stages, where more clickable images can be selected and so on. Thus, the network of hyperlinks creates an index on a far higher technical range than can be found in a printed handbook or lexicon and it enables the fast and almost arbitrary movement within the text. The user can, in this manner, move back and forth between the most different text and game components. "Hypertext-literature" is regarded as the boundless literature of the future, and carried by an "entirely new class of authors" (Schön 1999, 10) in connection with the World Wide Web, that uses the Hypertext-System for the structure of a gigantic information service.

Computer games for children with scenarios generated by literary narrative sources are going to be examined for the way and manner in which they use different forms of narratives. In this context the central questions that arise are: What happens with the scenarios taken from the literary texts when they are transferred to and presented in the multimedia? Are new narrative forms created and what are their characteristics? What has this sort of reception to do with reading fictional books? Which importance have they for the game on the one hand and for the narrative communication on the other hand?

3. Typology

A first glance at a relevant selection of multi-media CDs reveals an important aspect for further research. A most obvious factor is that all the examples are characterized by a specific double structure: that one of the story and that of the game. Depending on the way and manner of the simulation used by the media and the presentation of diverse codes which can include the classic writing letters as well as videoclips, two levels can be generally recognized:

- the story, which in itself is divided into the component of the fictional narrative (the topic and material of the pattern) and the information presented in the narrative; we use the term 'informational narrative' when e.g. game rules or background information is presented.

- the actual game activity, that has a fixed set of rules on the one hand and the interaction of the player on the other hand.

The proportion of these two components to each other can differ, and lead to different types of games, under which nearly all of them can be categorized. An attempt to define certain basic forms of narrative structures employed and under the consideration of the preliminary thoughts presented above approximately four types can be listed in the following:

Image 1: David and Goliath

1. An example for the first type, that I will call the *interlinked narrative*, is the production "David and Goliath. An interactive bible story" (Berlin: Buchverlag Junge Welt 1997). It is a presentation divided into four episodes and based upon the first book of Samuel, 16 and 17 in the Old Testament about the rescue of animals from David's flock (1), the consecration of David by Samuel (2), playing the harp for King Saul (3) and finally the victory over Goliath (4). Each of these parts contains a complete plot, which can be solved by the player over a series of clickable images.

The multimedial transfer follows after the children literary adaption: the first step is the transformation of the biblical text into a literary scenario suitable for children; it can be compared to the writing of a children's bible. The second transformation consists then of a process that can be defined as the interlinking of the story. The separate episodes are equipped with "clickable images"; the player can visit and click these with the mouse and is rewarded with small video-gags, psalms and quotations from the Holy Bible and finally with the single hyperlink added to each scene that is connecting further; e.g. in the second episode the horn with the holy oil has to be found to get the end of the

scene: the call of David by Samuel.

The scenario from this example put together with different codes is immensely invariant. The aim of the user's activity consists mainly in comprehension of the essential units of the model text, so the element of play can only develop rudimentary, a system of rules is not necessary. The reason for that is the high authority of the biblical text source, that is allowed to get a more simple shape in the course of a modification targeting at children; but it would not be allowed to become a hazardous game with an arbitrary ending like David spending a night with a beautiful woman or making friends with Goliath.

Besides texts of religious importance like this can be principally accounted for all texts of high authority; others, like the classical folktales, have to remain in their aesthetic patterns. Therefore, this type of multimedia-narrative possesses a clear preference for the linear narrative, the technical possibilities of the multimedia-CD serve merely the purpose of reproducing a conventional text structure.

Image 2: Screenshot from "The Odyssee"

2. I will illustrate a second type, that I will term as a *parallelism of narrative and game*, using the example of "Asterix und Obelix (Stuttgart:Egmont Interactive 1997). The basis text is a comic album, the 26th volume of the "Asterix" series by Albert Uderzo, which first appeared in the year 1982 under the title "The Odyssey".

In this adventure story containing funny-caricature elements the well-known heroes Asterix and Obelix search for oil in the Middle East, only to find out in the end that their journey was absolutely unnecessary. The parallelism of the components (narrative)information, (narrative)fiction and the game action become very clear on the start page (Ill.2): The three starting links offer:

1.the abridged picture sequence of the comic album "The Odyssey"
2.a glossary with explanations of the "Asterix" series ("Asterix-Dictionary")
3. a small collection of conventional skill- and quiz games (target shooting, puzzle, "sinking ships", in this case antique Roman galleys, labyrinth etc.).

From the viewpoint of the author, the digitally reproduced comic story is principally not any less sacrosanct than the bible text about the deeds of David. So it is given here in an abridged form, suitable for the multimedia reproduction. This story can be selected in three languages (German, English

and French). It can be used with and without an acoustic voice telling the story. Moreover, the CD contains an "Asterix-Dictionary" and a game collection with information and game possibilities. The recipient can use all of the components independently from one another, there are only a few links between them: for example the lemma of the Lexicon can be accessed over the story and the games can be retrieved during certain stages of the story. Nevertheless the results of the game neither have an impact upon the story, nor can the narrative of the comics be changed. A characteristic of this second type of multimedia presentation using children's literature scenarios is that in general the game itself has a subordinate status. It only shares the motives and the figures with the story. Separate from this the linear narrative the comic story and the hypermedial text of the lexicon information are presented, whereas the dictionary is made more attractive by adding several game components.

Image 3: Winnie the Witch

3. The third type mainly contains a similar additive structure of the different components. The term chosen for this type is ***marginalized story***, which indicates the shift in evaluation. Examples for this type are CDs based upon the Picture books of "Pettersson und Findus" by the Swedish author Sven Nordquist (Nordquist 1997 and 1999) and "Winnie the Witch", adapted from the picture book by Valerie Thomas and Korky Paul.

The literary source in all these examples does not possess absolute authority anymore. The reproduction of the original text is of secondary importance. These multimedia presentations are adopting the typical setting of the children's books and not the whole plot of the story. The CD-scenario therefore uses a lot of persons, typical accessoires, milieus and plot segments, e.g. from the picture book world of the bestselling Scandinavian author: the pastoral setting, the tomcat Findus, Petterssons farm and workshop. These make up the frame and the elements of the games presented, in this case connecting entertainment with pedagogical intentions ("edutainment"). The timetables are taught, certain objects have to be classified according to certain criteria and constructions are tried out. The narrative has shrunk to a few stories which can be evoked by mouseclick. The game options that exist more or less seperate from each other definitely dominate.

An especially interesting variation is contained in the computer game under the original title of the English book written by Korky Paul and Valerie Thomas (1995) "Winnie the Witch". The picture book teaches how to handle wishes by example of the omnipotent wishes of the witch Winnie, whose magic artistry on the CD are the background for a series of game ideas, offered on the starting

page: A backdrop of Winnie´s black castle in which each room that can be entered contains a game. The dominant principle of surreal-comical transformation is only limited to the protagonist and her magic wand. With every link chosen on the starting page the positioning of the rooms in the magic castle is changed. The former entrance to the kitchen changes into the bathroom full of hidden ghosts or a musical-magical attic with gag compositions.

This all has very little to do with telling stories, although this excellently designed CD contains a realm of surprises. Next to the obligatory narrative version of the picture book for reading and being read there is a third animated picture version of the source text that not only presents a pure animation of the picture book but which is an original variation of movie narration :"Click on the projector and watch the small movie about Zilly and Zingaro." This was the only multi-media product known to me making use of narrative forms from different media in such a subtle as well as playful and entertaining manner.

Image 4: Snow white and the Seven Hänsels

4. A fourth type represented by "Snow white and the 7 Hänsels" is what I call a ***game story***. This type of multimedia presentation integrates interactive elements into a story that offers several possibilities to create different story lines. The hypertextual structure is not pressed into a pseudo-hypertext that offers at least a completely linear plot. In our case it is the purpose of comical confusion, of parody, that allows to play with fairy tale figures and motifs. The player can select between a few possibilities to continue the stories of Snow white and the seven dwarfs, Hänsel and Gretel and Little Red riding Hood. Although there is a slight push into the direction of correct endings, the player is free to send Snow white to the witch, to deliver little red riding hood to a fate different from the wolf's stomach and grandma's hut or to let Hänsel and Gretel alone in the forest.

4. Some Conclusions

Our examples show among others that computer games cannot be that easily compared with literary texts, or that narrative structures in a game and in literature have to be discussed in different contexts. Inherent to these different structures are certain non interchangeable functions that are justified only in the genuine context of their genre. The main question is whether narrative- or game communication is intended.

As a kind of patchwork medium the multimedia-CD serves as a platform for the appearance of diverse visual and verbal codes but also as platform for a game discourse and a narrative discourse. It is therefore no surprise that the majority of

the multi-media products for children, operating with scenarios from children's literature offer such mixed forms. The ignorance of the different functions in this medium leads inevitably to products that neither satisfy as a game nor are they interesting as reading material. Some of them could even be judged as "Storykillers" (Lange 2001). The more cunning products take in account these differences and offer combinations in which the characteristics of each of the components are preserved or they deliberately change the literary model. Text inaccuracy may be important for the audio-book and the radio play. In the field of interactive products it can be dispensed with.

The Multi-media -CD is therefore by no means any sort of "further development" of the book or of literature, in the least it may integrate literature in a certain way. The ability of multimedia products to enable interactivity has to be discussed in this context. It cannot be judged as being a merit as such or regarded as a synonym for creativity. The sometimes existing respect for interactivity in connection with the computer arises partly from a quite pessimistic view of television:" In contrast to the television," writes Rainer Wagenhäuser 1996 "which reduces people to the part of the passive spectator, the computer often offers creative and individual action. "(Wagenhäuser 1996, 19) I cannot agree with that sort of generalization, that does not regard the contents and form of presentation offered by a specific product and confuses interactivity as such with creative action.

The imaginative ability needed for a narrative literary text cannot be equated with the strategic abilities of a cunning player. In addition the presented multimedia products offer a highly different treatment in their use of interactivity. The radius of action is determined by the number and quality of the hyperlinks and in many cases the interactive potential is limited to redundant and stereotypical forms. It makes sense for example to judge the different sorts of hot points like the Australian researcher Emilia Djonov has tried to do. She classifies hyperlinks with regards to grammatical forms. So she makes a difference between elaborating (means: simple gags), enhancing and extending hyperlinks (means: leading to a new level). This could be a way to develop criteria for complex hypertextual structures (Djonov 2001, 4ff).

But at least every game action is in principle predetermined, because the use of the multimedia only offers as much interactivity as the programmer has enabled. So it is only the illusion of limitless action what separates the more complex from the more simple games.

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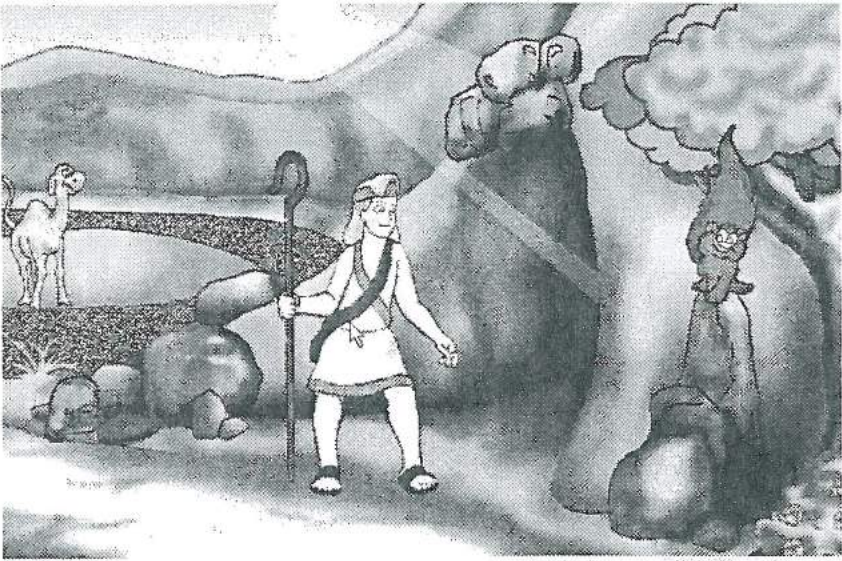
Image 1: David before the lion's cave: The game goes on when he succeeds to free his lamb
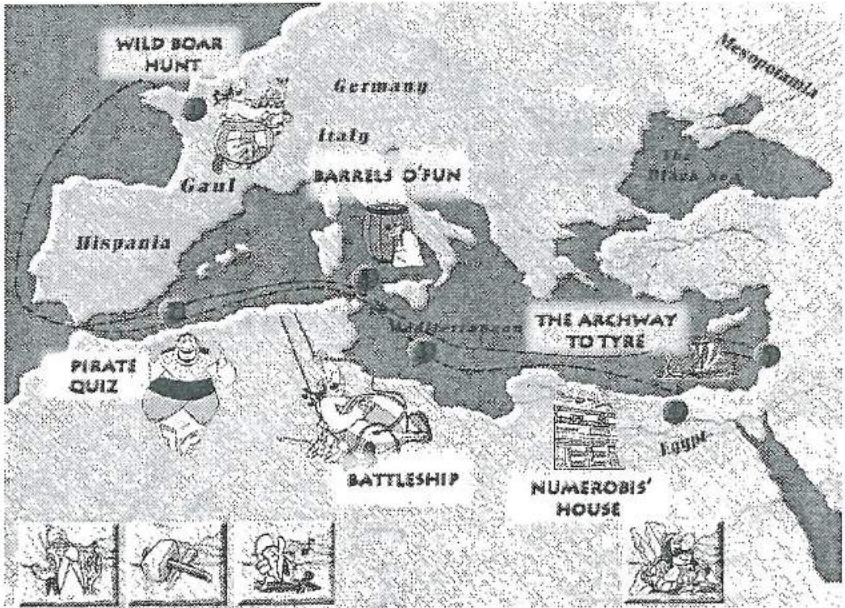

Image 2: Parallelism of comic narrative, game and information in "Asterix and Obelix: Searching for the black gold"
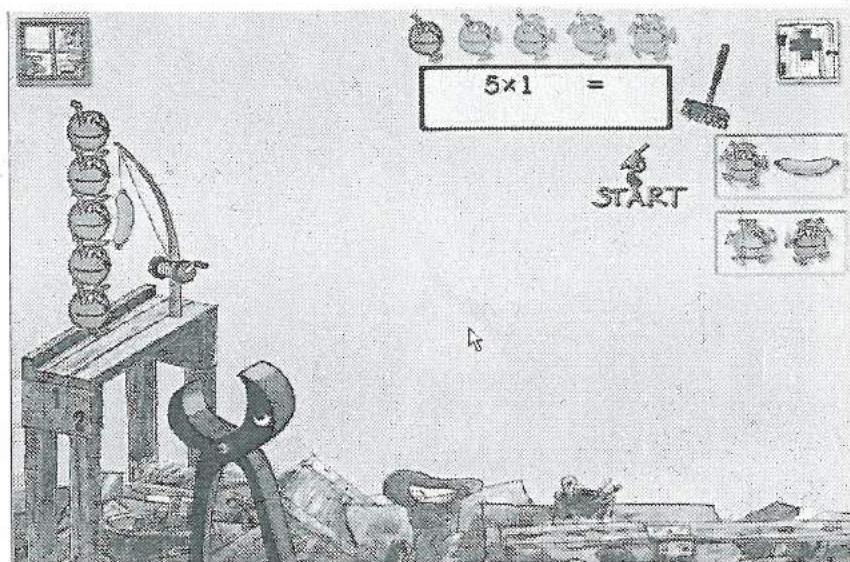
Image 3: Edutainment with „Pettersson and Findus": The game marginalizes the story
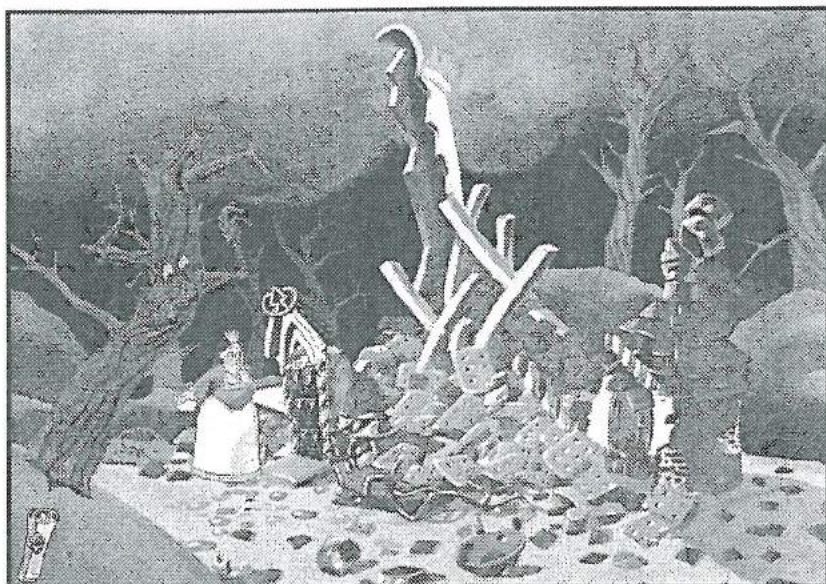

Image 4: A real game story: Snow White has followed the track to the hut of the witch instead of meeting the Seven dwarfs. If the player doesn't like this solution, he can choose an alternative

Manolito en el mundo mundial

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Resumen

El libro *Manolito Gafotas* de Elvira Lindo describe la vida en un barrio popular de Madrid desde la perspectiva de una chico de unos diez años. Es un texto lleno de referencias culturales muy explícitas. La comparación entre el original (TO) y las traducciones francesa y alemana (TM) muestra que los traductores adaptaron algunas de estas referencias como, por ejemplo, la comida.

También hay otras características del texto que parecen requerir una adaptación como, por ejemplo, los juegos de palabras o las referencias intertextuales.

Este análisis quiere ser una pequeña aportación a la discusión sobre la necesidad (o no) de la adaptación en la traducción de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil (LIJ).

Palabras clave: traducción, adaptación, referencias culturales, juegos de palabras, doble direccionalidad

Abstract

The history of Manolito Gafotas (Manolito Four-Eyes) by Elvira Lindo describes everyday life in a popular district of Madrid, seen through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy. The text is marked by a lot of very explicit cultural references. We suggest a comparison between the Spanish original and both, the German and French translation, to observe translator's attitude towards those references: to which point do we find adaptations of specific features (food, for example)? There are other characteristics of the text which seem to require an adaptation, such as puns or intertextual allusions. This comparative analysis wants to be a little contribution to the study of adaptation in Children's Literature and the question whether it is necessary or not to adapt.

Key words: translation, adaptation, cultural references, puns, double address