

Words in time: Inclusive reading and rewriting in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

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Roald Dahl. Inclusive language. Ideological retranslation. Intralingual translation. Sensitivity rewrites.

This study aims to examine the phenomenon of “sensitivity rewrites” in contemporary literary practice, focusing on intralingual translation as a means of making texts more inclusive and respectful. Through a comparative analysis of Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, both in its classic and revised editions, the research integrates André Lefevere’s concept of *rewriting*. In this sense, “sensitivity rewrites” represent a socio-cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity, aiming to eliminate stigmatizing language. The study highlights the dynamic nature of literary works as cultural artifacts evolving with societal values.

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Since antiquity, rewriting literary texts has been integral to the social institution and practices of literature (Munday 2001). Across all modes of rewriting, one common objective has persisted: to make new texts more accessible and understandable to readers. Interlingual translation, widely recognized as the primary form of rewriting, has historically been viewed as a complex, dynamic, and interpretive process influenced by various factors (Lefevere [1982] 2004). This study embraces the idea that rewriting is a transformative process and explores a different form of translation, intralingual translation, which promises new insights into the interplay among ideology, language, and power. This is because in the contemporary world “every act of translation or interpreting operates within the forces of dominant and alternative ideologies” (Hostová and Kusá 2020, 2).

Recent revisions of popular works of literature in English, which are presented as “regular reviews of the language” by the publishing industry, have been dubbed as “sensitivity rewrites” by critics and perceived by proponents as insights based on “inclusive reading” for authentic portrayal of characters. As John Steel (2023, 237) succinctly states when reflecting upon the “sensitivity changes” in children’s novels by Roald Dahl, “literature sometimes evolves to reflect societal shifts” and “texts change”. On the other hand, some critics consider the revised books a side-product of “cancel culture” (Caulcutt 2024), or in more objective terms, a part of cultural changes spurred by progressivism (Banfield-Nwachi 2023) with roots in identity politics (Hodgson 2023). Having started in the mid-2010s with publishing houses first employing “readers specialized in inclusion and authentic representation of marginalized groups” (called variously “sensitivity readers”, “authenticity advocates”, “inclusivity ambassadors”), the phenomenon gained prominence by the beginning of the 2020s.

This editorial and publishing practice involves editing literary texts, particularly novels, with the aim of making them more inclusive and respectful towards marginalized social groups by removing or altering passages in the books under scrutiny that might be considered offensive or harmful. What distinguishes this new wave of rewriting from the ones in the literary past is its depth, not breadth, as it involves more detailed revisions and includes a wider range of what might be deemed inappropriate or hurtful. A heated discussion ensued at the end of February 2023 around Roald Dahl’s books for children published by Puffin Books having been subjected to revision on the basis of recommendations provided by authenticity readers. The opponents from the literary community of both writers and engaged readers refused the “sensitivity rewrites” or the “airbrushed editions” of Dahl’s works. Following this public uproar within which the tipping point might have been the proclamation of Queen Consort Camilla in support of freedom of speech and writing (Khomami 2023), the publishing house announced that it was keeping the previous editions in print as the “Roald Dahl Classic Collection”.

By integrating André Lefevere’s conceptualization of “rewriting” (or “refraction”) which he defines as the adaptation of a literary work for a different audience, aimed at influencing the reception of the work (2004), with Pierre Bourdieu’s insights on “ideological retranslation”, a process of dynamic struggle over cultural dominance

in language (as well as the arts etc.) between dominant and dominated fractions (1984; 1996 cited in Speller 2011, 48), the present study explores the cultural and ideological shift behind “sensitivity rewrites” by focusing on translational choices and strategies (in the intralingual sense) used in these inclusive revisions. The shift is illustrated through a comparative analysis of Dahl’s classic edition and a revised edition of his popular children’s book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (hereafter CCF).

“SENSITIVITY REWRITES” AS INTRALINGUAL AND INTERSEMIOTIC PROCESS

Language and culture are intertwined, leading to inevitable changes over time. Texts are not stable; they evolve just as culture does, making meaning fluid (Benjamin [1923] 2004). A text’s plurality arises from the “stereographic plurality of the signifiers” rather than from ambiguity in its content (Barthes 1989, 59–60). The plurality of the text is woven into the openness of the meaning, allowing it to change, adapt, and evolve over time.

The dynamism behind the sociocultural and ideological contexts necessitates the rewriting of the works of literature for new or specific audiences, as they may otherwise be perceived as inadequate in some sense. According to Lefevere, the process of rewriting is evident in translation, historiography, anthologization, criticism, and editing (Lefevere 1992, 9). Maria Tymoczko (2007, 109) notes that Lefevere viewed rewriting (or refraction) as a way to understand translation within a broader context, highlighting its similarities with other forms of textual modifications and thus illuminating the nature of translation itself.

The theoretical framework utilized in this study integrates a blend of translation theories and sociological concepts. It seeks to describe and define “sensitivity rewrites” or “airbrushed editions”, within the broader Lefeverian context of rewriting, as empirical manifestations of ideological retranslation including the characteristics of both intralingual and intersemiotic translation. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) uses the verb “to translate” and the noun “translation” broadly in his sociology to refer to the conversion of something (as an idea or a piece of information) from one form or medium into another. In this context, ideological translation involves transferring cognitive and semiotic elements from one form of human activity to another (e.g., from the thoughts of individuals into their social behavior, or from observed social action into symbolic capital). Roman Jakobson ([1959] 2004) categorizes three types of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic, each representing different ways of interpreting verbal signs. “Sensitivity rewrites” can be viewed as both intralingual (i.e. rewording in the same language) and intersemiotic translation (i.e. transmutation of the ideas, and social conditions into words). Both types of translation are applicable in defining the sensitivity rewrites and theoretically relatable to Bourdieu’s metaphor of “ideological retranslation”.

Brian Mossop (2016) argues that intralingual translation, that is rewriting (rewording, paraphrasing), should be called *cislation* because “translation is carrying a message to the far side of a language border, whereas cislation is carrying a message to a new place while staying on ‘this side’ of the border” (2). He theorizes how the in-

trilingual translation is dissimilar from interlingual translation and moreover different from any translational activity, and demonstrates that on a detailed set of examples. *Intralingual rewriters* write for a different audience, typically adjusting content and style to suit their readers, such as in children's adaptations of classic literature and they do "not mainly engage in equivalencing", that is, in "writing in the same style as the same-language source text" (9). The objective of their work is "adding and subtracting information to make the text understandable to the new audience; in short, they will engage in stylistic and content editing" (9). Sensitivity readers recommending changes to be made in literary texts fall into the category of *intralingual* rewriters as defined by Mossop, similarly to specialist re/writers who adapt professional medical texts for layman readers or customers (e.g. for a new pharmaceutical product). Very closely related to the case of Roald Dahl is Mossop's example of the intralingual rewriting of classic literary works for child readers with changes in content and style.

The presence of the element of intersemiotic translation within the concept of ideological retranslation may raise the question of whether, in the case of sensitive rewriting, it is not rather an intrasemiotic process. The reason is that from a semiotic perspective, the sign systems in both the source and target texts are identical (written English), making this an *intrasemiotic* process, which includes both interlingual and *intralingual* translation (Gottlieb 2007, 3), but the previous step in the process of rewriting (revision, editing) entails the transfer of a thought from one's head into a written text which must be understood as a cognitive *intersemiotic* process. This is because it involves translating ideas from a mental or conceptual state (which may involve various forms of cognition) into a different semiotic system-written language. Bourdieu used the term in his works about class relations (1984), academia (1988), arts (1993, 1996), and social space (1999). In this study, the ideological retranslation is understood as a metaphor, inspired by Bourdieu's sociology, showing how the interpretation of the real world, contemplation, and expressing one's thoughts verbally or in writing create a never-ending hermeneutical circle (i.e. creating and re-creating meaning).

Studying sensitivity rewrites (cultural revisions based on identity politics) focuses on intralingual translation: converting Dahl's linguistic register and narrative style into "inclusive" English, a more current and polite register aimed at today's child readers. In a translational sense, these revisions are a type of rewriting intended to use "domestication" strategies, where the authenticity/inclusivity readers translate the text within the same language to align it with their cultural values (Leonardi 2020, 3–4).

Similarly, Gideon Toury's (1995) idea of *acceptability* versus *adequacy* relates to the question of rewriting, specifically regarding the extent to which it is acceptable to change a novel's text to preserve its adequate sense and message. The root of the problem seems to be the ever-existing issue of balance between originality and social acceptability. Toury (2004, 199) describes certain socio-cultural norms which have so much validity that they become "as binding as rules" so that translation becomes a norm-governed activity and translators should adhere to these norms when creating a target text for an intended audience. In this regard, rewriting extends

beyond a mere linguistic transfer; it encompasses various forms of transformation where manipulation and ideology play central roles.

Lefevere's concept of rewriting, or refraction, helps explore the sociocultural and ideological issues behind sensitivity rewrites as it transitions "a work of literature" between various systems (2004, 237). Rewriting is a dynamic process influenced by ideology, language, and power. Lefevere describes refracted texts as those processed for a specific audience or adapted to a particular poetics or ideology (1981, 72). Society's culture shapes its literary system, with both systems influencing each other, while poetics and patronage ([1985] 2014, 226) are serving as two control factors. The first component of the literary system, poetics, has two main functions: "one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole" (1992, 26). Poetics operates as an internal factor that regulates the system from the inside through the professionals such as interpreters, reviewers, critics, teachers, and translators. The rewriters hold decision-making positions and adapt literary works to the poetics and the ideology of their era (2014, 226). The second component, patronage, is the external factor that regulates the system from outside and it refers to the powers that further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature (1992, 15). Lefevere emphasizes that the concept of power should not only be understood as a repressive force but also can be comprehended in the Foucauldian sense as something that traverses and produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse.

Writers are continuously rewritten as socio-cultural norms and ideologies evolve. Lefevere emphasizes the fact of literary life that patrons and critics are the influential figures in the decision-making process: "Writers are powerless to control the rewriting of their work, which may be a bad thing; but so, in the long run, is anybody else, which may not be such a bad thing after all" (2014, 236). While the previous centuries saw the censorship practice of bowdlerization, the de-sexualization of Shakespeare's texts in the Victorian era (Volceanov 2005), followed by de-racialization in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. the works of Agatha Christie in the 1950s, Dahl's edits in the 1970s), the new trend in editing seems to take a new, formerly unrecognized, form in a direct reaction to changing socio-cultural norms. This new approach to rewriting 20th-century Anglophone novels transcends the mere sensitivity surrounding intimate themes and the exclusion of archaic racial slurs. This type of rewriting reflects the inclusive efforts of identity politics to build a world in which the voices of women, elderly people, and people of specific body shapes and sizes are heard. Therefore, authenticity readers, who are holders of various cross-sectional identities themselves, have been called by careful publishing houses to "sensitize" the selected texts accordingly.

Rewriting acts as a shaping force by both introducing and repressing literary innovation, often altering the original work for ideological purposes. Regardless of the intentions and the specific ideology they operate under, the purpose of rewriting is to manipulate literature and make altered texts acceptable to the target audience. As Lefevere states: "Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and

in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society” (2003, xi). While rewriting can contribute positively to cultural growth, it is also used to modify the originals so they conform to the ideological trends of the target culture. This type of manipulation aims to influence the reception of the literary work, as Lefevere describes: “Originals refract a poetics and/or an ideology; refractions refract originals” (1981, 76).

The aforementioned idea by Lefevere aligns with Bourdieu’s concept of “ideological re/translation” (1984, 254). Patronage employs ideological retranslation to align literary works with the evolving expectations of the literary market and political correctness. Sensitivity rewrites are a recent example of ideological retranslation, converting real-life values by modifying the language in fictional texts within the realm of cultural production.

Dahl’s classic texts, particularly *CCF*, are being rewritten to remove language deemed offensive to contemporary audience in the 2020s. The socio-cultural norms of Dahl’s era have undergone substantial changes, reflected in the progression from the 1964 original text to the 1973 revised text, and the 2023 sensitized text.

COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CLASSIC VERSION AND AIRBRUSHED VERSION

The comparative textual analysis includes the 2022 classic version (published by Viking) and the 2023 inclusive version (published by Puffin) of Dahl’s *CCF*. The children’s novel underwent several revisions, with major edits occurring during the early 1970s. The changes between the original 1964 text and the revised 1973 version have sparked polemical discussions from a psychoanalytic perspective (Bosmajian 1985), critical racial studies (Corbin 2012), and some reviews that border on personal attacks against the author himself (Cameron 1972).

The research design is based on a qualitative approach and is comprised of a comparative method (Kuckartz 2014, 68–69) and textual analysis (Belsey 2013, 160). The comparative textual analysis is focused on two versions of the same text (*CCF* novel by Roald Dahl) being compared in a systematic manner to identify modified or deleted words, phrases, and sentences and to assess the effect of these changes on literary motifs, themes, and the narrative. The concrete context of rewriting in this particular case, by a team of sensitivity and inclusivity readers who have considered and decided which textual changes to make, represents the role of intralingual translators in the process of ideological retranslation. However, we can only interpret their intentions and decisions by identifying and analyzing the changes they have made.

Three applied analytical perspectives serve as a supportive analytical tool. The aim is to describe the changes in the revised edition within the context of several perspectives in a critical strong-objectivity-seeking manner (Harding 1995, 23) while acknowledging the researcher’s subjectivity that might skew the interpretation and offer a biased analysis (Hammersley and Gomm 1997). The three perspectives that will serve as a helpful interpretive device and can be imagined as three dimensions of the human world surrounding language are ideological, sociological, and translational. The *ideological* (or *normative*) perspective describes the world according

to a particular worldview that is shared by social groups and individuals and, for example, can be as omnipresent as “the ideology of capitalism” (Hostová and Kusá 2020). A person taking an ideological stance sees the world as it *ought to be*, not as it is. The progressive idea behind making the texts of books more inclusive seems to be based on championing social justice and the well-intended assumption that with the use of more polite language, people will change for the better. On the other hand, progressivism might be in danger of being misused as “a smoke-screen for covert increase in governmental social control of citizens” (Mečiar 2022, 115). The *sociological* (or *descriptive*) perspective pursues the description and explanation of the world *as it is*. It helps to explain how the practice of employing the sensitivity readers and “airbrushed” revisions made by publishing houses is a direct empirical demonstration of ideological retranslation (Bourdieu 1984) of values and social norms radiating from the actors in identity politics. The *translatological* perspective, when analyzing any form of written translation as a “social practice”, explicates what strategies and techniques have been used in translation (“rewriting”) of a particular text (Mossop 2016). When it theorizes literature and translation as a “social institution”, inspired by social theory, the authors contributing to this field shed light on rewriting (Venuti 2003; Lefevere 2003) and power relations in patronage (Lefevere 1992).

The image of the three dimensions surrounding language aims to provide the ground for identifying the allegedly obsolete and discriminatory language represented in the novel and to analyze the sensitivity rewrites on the basis of inclusivity with the transformative power of the language. Identity politics (Bernstein 2005) explores how social and political identities intersect with individuals’ participation and experiences in the political sphere, acknowledging factors such as race, class, and gender. Originating in the 1970s, this movement initially focused on protecting rights (Táiwò 2022, 6–7) across eight social dimensions: ability (physical and mental health), age, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Kurzweily, Pérez, and Spiegel 2023). Many of the textual alterations in the revised edition of *CCF* align with core identities discussed by proponents of identity politics.

Text modifications stemming from roots of progressive identity politics

“Progressives are committed to ideals of economic justice and the welfare of the planet” (de Zengotita 2019, 357). The progressive movement in the 21st-century United States is a political and social reform movement with a global impact (Mečiar 2022) that aims to address economic inequality, social injustice, and environmental issues. New progressivism reaches to the sphere of identity politics and its proponents are deeply involved in the issue of social justice: the movement champions causes like racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights, criminal justice reform, and immigrant rights. The preparation of the revised editions of widely-read books can be viewed as an expression of progressivist ideals.

Gender-neutral language in the edited 2023 version of the novel challenges traditional gender norms and promotes inclusivity by avoiding binary distinctions. Terms

like “newspapermen” are replaced with “journalists”, and “policemen” with “police officers”. Gender-specific language is avoided, with “women” becoming “people”, and “girls” becoming “folks”. Diverse family structures are acknowledged by changing “mothers and fathers” to “parents”, and “his/her” to “their” to enhance gender inclusivity. This approach fosters a broader understanding of gender identities and creates more inclusive spaces and practices.

As Mafalda Batista da Costa, Harriet R. Tenenbaum, Alexandra Grandison (2024, 3) mention in their study, Jo Young Switzer (1990) found that the pronoun “they” helped children generate inclusive images when presented with a scenario and questions about a character. Similarly, Lea Conkright, Dorothy Flannagan, and James Dykes (2000) discovered that children interpreted “they” both generically and as a specific gender in their story recall and interpretation. Darren K. LaScotte (2016) found that most native English speakers (79%) used gender-inclusive pronouns for a genderless person, with 68% preferring singular “they”. These studies suggest that using “they” as a generic pronoun can help people express less gendered ideals and foster a more inclusive worldview.

Ageism encompasses discrimination based on age (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer 2018) which manifests through discriminatory language related to a person’s age. The revised edition replaces “old ones” (Dahl 2022, 153) with “the three grandparents” (Dahl 2023, 305), emphasizing familial roles and intergenerational connections that reflect the impact of age on social roles, family dynamics, and relationships. The term “Grandparents” acknowledges their wisdom, experience, and continuity within families, while “old ones” lacks this contextual consideration. The original text’s mention of an “old Oompa-Loompa” (2022, 106) might reflect ageist undertones. In literature, ageism perpetuates negative stereotypes, often implying “ageist tropes of decline” although at the same time they empower “intergenerational relationships” (Caldwell, Falcus, and Sako 2020, cited in Joosen 2023, 235). By removing such references, the text promotes inclusivity and respecting individuals regardless of age.

Avoidance of any references to disability is represented by opting for a grandfather being “short-sighted” (Dahl 2023, 61) rather than directly stating “his eyes were bad” (Dahl 2022, 30) and reflecting a broader societal context. Societal norms often associate vision impairment and disabilities in general with negative connotations and Othering (Wendell 1996, 60). Lennard J. Davis (1995) argues that societal standards have historically framed disability in a negative light, influencing literary portrayals to align with these norms. Davis’s concept of “normalcy” (23–24) suggests disability is not an individual issue but a social construct created by the norm, or societal expectations of what is considered average or acceptable. The term “short-sighted” may soften this perception by framing it as a common condition rather than a personal failing.

All references to possibly questioning one’s mental health were erased. The word “crazy”, used ten times in the classic edition (Dahl 2022) of *CCF* (“Are you crazy?”, “He must be crazy!”), is completely absent in the revised version (2023). The choice of “deliciously” instead of “deliriously” aligns with cultural norms celebrating indul-

gence and pleasure, reflecting a positive view of sensory enjoyment. The phrase “ridiculously rich” (2023, 22) reflects societal admiration for wealth and success without stigmatizing mental health, by modifying the original adjective “crazy” (2022, 12). The term “wildly” (61) replaces “madly” (2023, 30), to evoke spontaneity, joy, and childlike wonder, avoiding negative connotations associated with madness and irrationality. To prevent the mental health association and a potential stigmatization (Goffman 1963, 101) that might be caused by sanism or psychophobia (Perlin 1992), the editor chooses to erase such references entirely from the novel.

Preventing the social stigmatization of obesity and short stature was followed by many erasures in the revised text. The original text’s frequent references to characters’ body sizes, such as describing a character’s “fat hand” or “huge rubbery lips” (Dahl 2022, 95, 96; 2023, 190, 192), have been significantly toned down. The famous character Augustus Gloop is not accompanied by the adjective “fat” anymore, although he still remains an “enormous” boy. Even a positive character (Averill 2016) of the “fat shopkeeper” (Dahl 2022, 42–46) who treats Charlie, the main child character, in a friendly and protective manner when Charlie finds the golden ticket to the chocolate factory, is now referred to only as a shopkeeper, and all the sentences describing his body have been deleted (2023, 86–95). Sizeism in literature can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to body shaming. The revised text seeks to promote body positivity and acceptance of diverse body types, reflecting a broader societal understanding towards inclusivity and the rejection of body shaming. Sizeism in the story is lexically represented by the adjective “tiny” and narratively with the Oompa-Loompas (Pritchard 2023, 14–17). The revised version refers to the Oompa-Loompas in a gender-neutral way as “the little people” (Dahl 2023, 139), or “a little person” (135), and not “a little man!” (2022, 67). If possible, an adjective of size is erased as in “I found the [little] Oompa-Loompas living in tree houses”. This change reflects increased sensitivity and respect towards individuals of shorter stature, commonly referred to as “little people” in contemporary discourse.

By using more inclusive language, the text moves away from potentially pejorative terms that have historically been used to marginalize or dehumanize. For example, the revised statement, “look here, if you and the other Oompa-Loompas would like to come with me” (2023, 140), replaces the more assertive original, “if all your people will come back to my country” (2022, 71). The shift from an assertive to a polite statement in Willy Wonka’s offer reflects a reduction in his perceived dominance and a more respectful, democratic approach. The use of polite register (“if you would like to”) suggests a more democratic and less authoritarian approach, implying that the Oompa-Loompas have a choice and some agency in the decision. The text also demonstrates a shift towards democratic decision-making among the Oompa-Loompas. This is evident in the change from a directive statement to a consultative process as seen in the revised version the Oompa-Loompa leader asking: “Let’s go and ask the others. But I think it’s a deal.” (2023, 142), instead of ignoring the possible will of other Oompa-Loompas by only exclaiming “It’s a deal!...Come on! Let’s go!” (2022, 142). This reflects a move towards recognizing the collective agency and decision-making power of the Oompa-Loompas, rather than presenting them as passive

subjects within hierarchical social relations. The shift from testing products on Oompa-Loompas to Mr. Wonka testing them on himself indicates a move towards more ethical considerations: “I tried it myself yesterday in the Testing Room and immediately a huge black beard started shooting out of my chin [...]” (2023, 179). This change acknowledges Oompa-Loompas’ humanity and moves away from exploitative practices.

References to cultural and ethnic groups, such as describing Grandpa Joe dancing like a “dervish” or mentioning “gypsies” in one Oompa-Loompa song, have been removed due to their potential to carry offensive cultural connotations based on negative stereotyping. This approach aligns with cultural sensitivity, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing diverse cultures without resorting to stereotypes which would promote disrespectful representations (Foronda 2009; Kubokawa and Ottaway 2009). The references to Oompa-Loompas wearing “deerskins” and “leaves” and the children wearing “nothing at all” are problematic as they exoticize their culture and dress, presenting it as primitive and peculiar. These descriptions can perpetuate stereotypes about non-Western cultures being less civilized (Spivak 1988). The omissions aim to avoid these ethnocentric portrayals and foster a more respectful and nuanced representation of cultural differences.

The original portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas who were “imported direct from Loompaland” (Dahl 2022, 68) reflects colonial undertones, ethnic stereotyping and commodification. Descriptions of their lives before working for Wonka, such as “living in tree-house villages” and eating “mashed-up green caterpillars” (69), evoke images of primitive and exotic cultures often depicted in colonial narratives. The idea that Wonka “shipped them all over here” and “smuggled them over in large packing cases” (2022, 71) further reinforces a colonial mindset of exploitation and dehumanization. The original description of smuggling Oompa-Loompas in crates is a commodifying theme, reducing them to objects of trade. By omitting these details, the last revision strives to restore the Oompa-Loompas’ humanity and decommodify them, that is, as Peter Corrigan (1997, 38) explains in the context of sociological theory, changing one’s status from a thing into a person.

Social issues and risk-aversion related rewriting

References to the Oompa-Loompas enjoying alcohol and becoming “drunk as lords” have been omitted (Dahl 2023, 216). Depicting alcohol consumption in a humorous or casual manner can inadvertently encourage such behavior among young readers. By removing these references, the text aligns with modern public health perspectives that aim to promote healthy behavior and discourage underage drinking. Early exposure to alcohol via media can increase the likelihood of underage drinking (WHO 2024) and therefore removing these references supports efforts to create a healthier environment for children.

This deliberate omission of references to potentially harmful behaviors and situations in literature serves to prevent the normalization of social deviance and promote pro-safe behavior, a concept that can be termed a risk-aversion culture (Nikiforidou 2019), or “safetyism” used by its critics (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018, 170). By erasing

any mention of weapons (“machine guns”, even “toy pistols”; Dahl 2023, 66), the revised text is aimed at mitigating the promotion of violent behavior and reducing its portrayal as an acceptable solution to conflict.

The original depiction of Oompa-Loompas in the book reflects colonial undertones, reducing them to be tools for labor. The concept of commodification in literature refers to the portrayal of characters as commodities, and inclusive revision aims to present them as individuals with dignity. This approach aligns with postcolonial critiques that emphasize the deconstruction of the colonial narratives. Edward Said discusses the “Other” in Western narratives, highlighting how colonial literature dehumanizes and commodifies non-Western people who “were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or [...] taken over” (1978, 207). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak (1988, 271) focuses on the necessity of giving voice to the subaltern, challenging dominant colonial discourses that render them invisible. The exclusion of Wonka’s reference to the Oompa-Loompa’s language adaptation, “They all speak English now” (Dahl 2023, 142), aims to recognize linguistic and cultural diversity, progressively countering “imperial discourses around immigration and labor” (Diaz, Clark Mane, and González 2013, 91).

The class position (employment and poverty) and patriarchy issues found their expression in this, now deleted, sentence: “Mr Bucket was the only person in the family with a job” (Dahl 2022, 5). The father’s employment as an unskilled worker in a toothpaste factory explains why the family of six adults and one child live under the level of the minimum wage and at the same the family’s humility in starvation (as they do not blame “the society”) and dignity (in being loving and kind to each other) supports the myth of the deserving poor (Elizabeth Parsons quoted in Cheetham 2006, 12). With this sentence absent, a reading parent might not have to answer questions on why both parents have to work long hours to keep up the family, otherwise a one-income family could end up being poor. The second reason for deletion is to prevent promoting the traditional view that a sole breadwinner in the family should be a man.

Expressions such as “the poor little fellow, looking thin and starved” are intended to evoke empathy but do so in a patronizing manner that highlights their vulnerability and inferiority. This approach can be seen as a form of subtle dehumanization, where empathy is tinged with pity rather than respect. By removing these descriptions, the revisions aim to present the Oompa-Loompas with dignity, focusing on their skills and contributions rather than their perceived deficiencies. In relation to dehumanization, Teun A. van Dijk (1984, 40) identifies the categories employed to justify prejudice against minority groups as “the 7 Ds of Discrimination”; dominance, differentiation, distance, diffusion, diversion, depersonalization or destruction, and daily discrimination. The omitted parts in the text falls under the category of depersonalization which exemplifies exerting control over minority groups, excluding them from social interactions. Due to discrepancy between Dahl’s narrative vision and lingual sensibilities of the present, the original story of the Oompa-Loompas has been reduced significantly. Lucy Mangan (2014), in her biographical book

about Roald Dahl, sheds light on how the famous author responded constructively to the request of a civil rights group to change the origins and outlook of the Oompa-Loompas.

Grammar and vocabulary-oriented changes

The least extensive part of rewriting falls under the labels of grammar corrections and vocabulary updates. One interesting approach is the transformation of negative clauses into positive ones, along with adjustments in quantifiers. The differences between the British and American version were minuscule and are not discussed here. The main focus has been on the differences between the “old” and the “new” language of *CCF*. The rewriter(s) changed some quantifiers, from “all” to “most” in: “Like most extremely old people, he was delicate and weak, and throughout the day he spoke very little” (Dahl 2023, 18) acknowledging individual differences among the elderly people, emphasizing the age-related experiences. Shifting from negative to a positive clause, as in “Tell me more about these” (36) instead of “There aren’t any such people” (2022, 18), indicates curiosity and openness. Instead of denying the existence of certain people, the author invites further discussion. This encourages dialogue and aligns with a communicative approach that promotes exploration rather than shutting down possibilities. The sentence “Most of us find ourselves...” uses “many of us” (2023, 77) instead of “we are all” (2022, 38) to avoid universalizing experiences. For example: “Most of us find ourselves beginning to crave rich steaming stews and hot apple pies and all kinds of delicious warming dishes; and because many of us are a great deal luckier than we realize, we usually get what we want – or near enough” (2023, 77). This approach acknowledges variability in experiences while emphasizing shared desires, avoiding the assumption that everyone shares the same circumstances.

A note on corrective omissions and alterations

Language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication are elements of the micro-level of social structure. In contrast, power, dominance, and inequality among social groups are concepts typically examined at the macro-level of analysis (van Dijk 2015, 468). The use of language is closely related to how discourse expresses and reproduces underlying thoughts (e.g. stereotypes) and ideology. Ideology and translation are interconnected, both on the level of language and of culture (Venuti 1992, 5). The purpose of rewriting is to make the texts acceptable to the target audience, and to conform to the patronage by implementing a dominant or alternative ideology (Hostová and Kusá 2020). Patronage (the copyright owner) may care about the alternative ideology of progressivism contributing with the value of authentic representation, however, when looking through pragmatic lenses the maximization of profit appears to be a more influential factor in supporting “sensitivity rewrites” (Steel 2023).

In the “airbrushed” edition (Dahl 2023) the changes realized either by omission (deletion) or modification (using an alternate word or a synonym) aim to: a) prevent or reduce stigmatization and discrimination of marginalized groups – these

“socially sensitive biases” of the classic edition were discussed by Cheetham (2006) – according to current standard of political correctness; b) adapt children’s literature to promote inclusivity; c) cater to the needs of parents. Two prevailing meta-themes in these rewrites are the application of identity politics and progressive ideals through inclusive language, and the problematic issues made implicit or invisible through rewriting.

CONCLUSION

The sensitivity rewrites of texts, especially in children’s literature, reflect a significant socio-cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity. These alterations extend far beyond simple rewording or intralingual translation for better comprehension; they represent a deliberate effort to align classic texts with contemporary ethical standards. Historically, fairy tales such as those collected by the Brothers Grimm (Nilson 2021, 175) and Hans Christian Andersen (Holbek 2003, quoted in Zipes 2006, 90) often contained themes of violence, death, and even incest, which were later softened or omitted entirely to suit modern sensibilities.

Whether these modern-day sensitivity rewrites are understood as a “censorial layer” (LeClerc 2024; Lawrence 2020) or as necessary revisions, they often seek to address issues such as ageism, ableism, sizeism, and cultural stereotyping. By eliminating stigmatizing language, these rewrites aim to reduce the potential for harm while fostering inclusivity and protecting marginalized groups from biased or inauthentic representation (Inclusive Minds 2024). Advocates argue that such changes are essential for creating narratives that resonate with and include all audiences, particularly in an increasingly diverse society.

However, the public’s mixed reactions to these changes illustrate the ongoing negotiation of what is considered acceptable or offensive. This negotiation has even led some publishers to release both the original and revised versions of texts, recognizing that readers often have a deep emotional attachment to the “unfiltered” versions. The existence of these dual editions reflects the dynamic nature of literature as a cultural artifact, continuously evolving with societal values while preserving links to its historical origins.

A comparative reception study of how sensitivity rewrites affect the perception of literary value and authorial intent – similar to reactions surrounding Roald Dahl’s readership in media paratexts – could provide valuable insights into how modern audiences interpret these revised classics. In particular, it would be revealing to explore whether the softened, sanitized versions are regarded as lesser in literary value, or whether they come to be appreciated as necessary evolutions of stories that remain relevant in a changing world.

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