

# Turkish

## *Cabarvaknâme*

Börül vakti çevişkandı  
Jiren ve matkayan tovar;  
Rubet ınzırları ğandı,  
Sıfildi tüm borogovlar.

Cabarvak'tan sakın evlat!  
Çenesi pençesi yaman  
Cuburkuştan edip ric'at  
Kaçın ürkünç Banırkap'tan!

Alıp zortal kılıncını  
O hasmını arar idi  
Seçip Dumdum ağacını  
A'cık zihnini yorar idi

Hızınç düşüncelere içre  
Dururken birden ormandan  
Cabarvak fırladı işte  
Hızaraktan fosaraktan

Bu bir bak, bu iki deyu  
Kesip zortal kılıncıyla  
Cabarvakın o boynunu  
Batur döndü kafasıyla

“Cabarvak'ı mı öldürdün?  
Işıldak oğlum, evladım!  
Bu amma civelek bir gün!  
Sevinçten ben çoğurlandım!”

Börül vakti çevişkandı  
Jiren ve matkayan tovar;  
Rubet ınzırları ğandı,  
Sıfildi tüm borogovlar.

*Armağan Ekici*



Pelin Kirca

# A Case Study on the Translation of “Jabberwocky” in Turkey

*Nazmi Ağıl and Ilgım Veryeri Alaca*

This commentary on the translation of “Jabberwocky” is based on a study of over twenty editions of *Through the Looking-Glass*<sup>1</sup> published from 1985 to 2019 in Turkey. As a case study, we have chosen to focus on a recent publication of the book by Norgunk Publications. However, considering the value of the other versions, we start with offering a brief review of three other translations, looking at their title selections and content choices.

Tomris Uyar (2001) selected the Turkish “Gıllığış” for her title. It is, in fact, quite an expressive and powerful word implying “evil intention”. Interestingly, she gives the speaker a female voice, and translates “Come to my arms, my beamish boy” as “Koş parıldağım, bak ana kucağı!” (“Run, my beamish boy, here is Mum’s embrace!”). Ceren Cevahir Gündoğan (2018) translated the title “Jabberwocky” as “Zırva”, meaning quite literally “Nonsense”. Gündoğan has chosen to use a descriptor of the nonsense nature of the poem itself rather than the monster’s name, which in this version is “Saçma.. Since “Saçma” is a synonym of “zırva”, “nonsense” stands for the allegorical representation of the monster. This may be considered incongruent with and going against the very heart of Lewis Carroll’s purpose in writing this poem. Nihal Yeğınobalı (1985) creates a title by joining three words into one “Ejdercenkname” (“Dragonfighttale”). This version alludes to old Turkish legends with its choice of archaic vocabulary and resorts to intense domestication, going so far as to name the hero after the protagonist, Dumrul the Mad, (Deli Dumrul from the *Dede Korkut Tales*) Although in many translations, as in the original, the gender of the speaker is neutral, here it is clear that a king-father is speaking to his prince-son. This version even creates a reason for killing the Jabberwock, implying it is a test of the prince’s ability and his victory will

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<sup>1</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* appeared in *100 Essential Works (100 Temel Eser)*, the Ministry of Education’s list of recommended reading for primary and secondary schoolchildren in Turkey between 2005-2018. This highly circulated, classic work was published together with *Through the Looking-Glass* often enough to have made the sequel more accessible.

prove him ready to accept the crown.

With so many versions to choose from, it was necessary to narrow down the selection for in-depth study. Ultimately, we chose Armağan Ekici's (2019) translation published by Norgunk for two reasons. First, we were immediately aware of the visuals and struck by the uniqueness of the book in its totality. Of the many other books we reviewed, most utilised John Tenniel's original illustrations, while Norgunk's version had nineteen black-and-white ink and water colors by artist Pelin Kırca (1982-). Unlike Tenniel's drawing of the Jabberwock that sets the creature in a wooded scene, Kırca's monster is staged against a backdrop of tasselled and patterned curtains reminiscent of a theatrical setting one might associate with the fabricated nature of its existence. This work can be regarded as a continuation of Pelin Kırca's black-and-white illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* printed by Norgunk in 2015, as well as her illustrations for the exhibition and the book *Bloom* (2015), a crossover picturebook for adults inspired by a quotation from *Alice in Wonderland*. Even the cover of this book is quite distinct from other publications. Rather than one of Tenniel's illustrations, Norgunk's purely typographic cover by graphic designer Bülent Erkmén (1947-) is devoid of colour or imagery. Curiously, it still manages to convey a sense that there is an image there. By not adding spaces between words, the text making up the author's name and book's title is closely knit together forming a shape quite like Alice's silhouette. What's more, as the reader holds the book, the shadow that is cast by the reader's form on the cover potentially mirrors the configuration the words make, marrying the implied silhouette of Alice to the reader's.

Second, we were impressed by the cadence of this translation and its success in sustaining the poem's rhythm and music throughout. Ekici translates the poem into four-line stanzas with eight syllables per line, never straying from a rhyme scheme of ABAB. Employing a rhyme scheme of ABAB, which is frequently used in Turkish folk poetry, creates a ballad-like rhythm that perfectly complements the mocking tone of the poem.

For the title, Ekici has coined the word "Cabarvakname", which is an amalgamation of three smaller words. Separated, the words are "cabar", "vak" and "name". The monster's name itself is a combination of "cabar", derived from "cebbar" meaning "tyrant", and "vak", the imitation of a duck's "quack". Affixed to "Cabarvak" is "name", the word for "recorded story". Hence, "Cabarvakname" literally translates to read "the story of a cruel duck". This title is composed not for its meaning but as an echo of those traditional Turkish fables where the hero's name coupled with the word "name" titles the tales of his heroic deeds. The title refers to the story rather than the monster, unlike some of the

other Turkish translations.

Rather than going line by line, we decided to analyse what Ekici does with the text by grouping his words into categories, the first of which is “nonsense-for-nonsense” words. We find for instance that the Turkish “börülce” (“kidney bean”) is changed and shortened to “bürül” and combined with *vakti* (“time”) to create “bürül vakti” as a translation for “brillig”. “Çevik” (“agile”) and “yapışkan” (“sticky”) are merged to make “çevişkan” as a Turkish replacement for “slithy”. “Matkap” (“drilling tool”) and “matkaplayan” (“that which does the drilling”) together form “matkayan” as a substitute for “gimble”. “Rubet” is a distortion of “gurbet” (“away from home”) and is paired with “inzır” (the modern form of the old-fashioned word “hınzır” meaning “pig” or “naughty”), so together “rubet inzırları” means “pigs or naughty ones away from home” and “ları” indicates plurality. For “outgrabe” Ekici invents “ğandı”, which has no meaning by itself but “dı” meaning “was” gives a sense of facticity. The fact that this word starts with “ğ” adds an element of nonsense since it breaks the Turkish grammar rule that prohibits this letter from starting a word. In addition, “ğan” is the last syllable of the translator’s name, which as he explained in his book launch presentation (Ekici 2019) that he purposely selected. “Sığ” (“shallow”) and “sefil” (“miserable”) come together to make “sıfil” as a match for “mimsy”. “Hızınç” is created from “hızlı” and “hınç” (“quick” and “grudge”) and then coupled with “dolu” (“full”) to make “hızınç dolu”, which is used in place of “uffish”. “Jubjub bird” becomes “Caburkuş” (“Caburbird”), which is a complement to “Cabarvak”. “Whiffing” and “bubbling” become “hızaraktan” and “fosaraktan”, both made-up words vaguely alluding to “hız” (“speed”) and “fosur fosur” (the sound of smoke coming out) respectively. “Vorpal” is altered slightly to “zortal”, a combination of “zor” (“hard”) and “battal” (“huge”). “Dumdum” is just an imitation of “tumtum”. Finally, in creating a sound similar to “chortle”, he makes up the verb “çoğurlanmak” and conjugates it for first person singular.

Another category is when Ekici translates the root of the word and simply complements it with a Turkish suffix. For instance, “Bandersnatch” becomes “banırkap”, and while “banır” is “just an echo of “bander”, “kap” is the Turkish word for “snatch”. “Gyre” is translated to “jiren”, phonetically the root word is preserved with an addition of the Turkish suffix “-en” that turns verbs into adjectives. “Toves” is unchanged other than to translate the plural “es” to “lar” thus making it “tovlar.” Lastly, the translator keeps “borogoves,” again only translating the plural suffix so that it appears as “borogovlar”.

Ekici also uses archaisms: “ricat” (“retreat”) for “beware”, “hasım” (for “foe”) “idi” for “was”, and “deyu” (“saying”), “evlat” (“son”), and “batur” (“hero”),

all words reminiscent of old legends in Turkish lore. “Kılınç”, normally “kılıç”, means “sword” and “a’cık” is shortened from “azıcık” (“for a short while”). “A’cık” often used in informal talk bridges daily language with archaic words. Hence, it is used to imply that the hero only gave a cursory thought to the danger he faced, thus belittling the direness of the situation.

Occasionally Ekici replaces nonsense words with real words, as when he uses “ürkünç” (“horrible”) for “frumious” and “civelek” (“lively”) for “frabjous”. At other times he chooses to not translate. Ekici explains that he did not carry out a strict word-by-word translation, sharing his decision-making process in adapting this work into Turkish. For instance, “wabe” does not appear in his version of the poem. Neither is “manxome” featured in the translation although “hasmını” (“his foe”) does in a way imitate the sound. Similarly, “with eyes of flame”, “tulgey”, “so” (in “So rested he...”), “through and through”, “snicker- snack”, “galumphing”, “Callooh! Callay!” do not appear in Ekici’s version. He loosely translates “jaws that bite and claws that catch” in writing “çenesi pençesi yaman” (“whose jaws and claws are fierce”). He maintains mention of the Tumtum tree in the line “seçip Dumdum ağacını” (“chose the Tumtum tree”), but he entirely bypasses any elaboration that describes the young man resting by the tree. Finally, “Come to my arms” is also omitted from this translation. In short, Ekici’s version selectively translates the parts of the poem that will best convey the rhythm and the music of the original by using strict rhymes and sound imitations. This version also manages to convey the parodic aspect of the original poem, but it comes at the cost of pruning several words from Carroll’s text. Overall, this book, so out of the ordinary in Turkey, sets a unique example through its commitment to an exceptional translation, illustrations, and overall design. As is noted in the peritext “literature is health”, and the endeavour of printing this book, Norgunk’s 100<sup>th</sup> publication, proves the publisher’s dedication to producing works that inspire creativity and reflection.

## Selected Translations into Turkish

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