

The Translation of Children's Books into Malay: An Analysis of Publication Trends

Atikah Zabir

School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM Penang, Malaysia
atikahzabir@usm.my

<https://doi.org/10.24191/gading.v28i1.498>

Received: 19 July 2024

Accepted: 31 January 2025

Date Published Online: 30 April 2025

Abstract: Studies have shown that translation has always been integral in stimulating and expanding the children's book industry in Malaysia. Historically, translation was the starting point to provide the necessary reading materials for children in Malaysia pre- and post-independence, although this was not necessarily exclusive to this country. For a long time, childhood was a foreign concept to many parts of the world, and children were considered merely as an extension of adults. Due to this lack of understanding about children and their special needs in the critical growing period, there were limited reading materials for children, and folklore passed through generations through oral rendering was their main source of entertainment. However, the children's book industry has grown exponentially, including in Malaysia. An overview of the history of children's book publications has shown that this information provides critical information about the current education landscape, social norms, and national policies. Thus, the objective of this study is to describe the trends in the translation of children's literature into Malay between 2005 and 2024 with a focus on genres and source languages. Data from this study was collected from the National Library's Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). The study found the most published genres in the past 20 years are comics, educational books, and picture storybooks. Although English remains the main source language of translation into Malay, there has been a significant increase in translation from Chinese and Indonesian. Finally, the study also identified Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia (ITBM) as the main publisher of translated children's books in Malay.

Keywords: Children's literature, genre, Malay translation, publication trends, translation

Introduction

Children's literature is important for the education and entertainment of children. Children learn new words and ideas through literature that contributes to their cognitive and social growth (Pulimeno et. al., 2020). A strong grasp of language and conceptual understanding is important to ensure children growing up well-adjusted and confident in their thinking and behaviour. It is, therefore, undeniable that children's literature plays an important role in the holistic development of children. Despite the indisputable importance of children's literature, writing specifically for children is a relatively new concept in many parts of the world, including Malaysia. Due to the lack of original writing for children, translation is often employed as a quick solution to produce reading materials for children. As a result, translated texts comprise a significant portion of children's literature (Čermáková, 2018).

In Malaysia, translated children's literature is critical in pioneering and growing the children's book industry. Several studies have been carried out to document and analyse the publication trends of

children's literature in Malaysia. A study by Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2005), for example, looked at the publication of children's literature in Malaysia in general. Meanwhile, a study by Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail (2007) also reviewed the Malay translations of children's literature for the period between 1958 and 2003. Before Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2005) and Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail (2007), Proudfoot (1993) documented the publications of children's literature in Malaya in the pre-independence period. More than 20 years have passed since then, and there is a lack of data and documentation of children's book translations into Malay. Therefore, this study aims to document and analyse the publication trends of children's book translations into Malay for the last 20 years, from 2005 to 2024. It is hoped that this study will shed light on the current state of translations of children's literature in Malaysia and subsequently provide the necessary background and information for further research on the country's children's book industry.

Literature Review

The translation of children's books into Malay began in the 19th century to fill the gap and need for reading materials in Malay (Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 2005). The Christian missionaries taught reading skills to the locals in their mission to spread Christianity. They opened missionary schools, and books were translated into Malay as teaching aids. Teaching and reading skills were taught using these translated storybooks (Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 2005). However, the focus of the missionary work was moved to China in the 1840s and subsequently led to a decrease in missionary-published books. Then, in 1876, the British rulers began to focus on local school education by publishing school textbooks (Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 2005; Proudfoot, 1993). At the end of the 19th century, the number of Malay schools increased to 200. Naturally, there was a boom in the need for reading materials for school-age children. According to Proudfoot's documentation (1993), at least 17 titles were translated for children in Malaya between 1840 and 1918.

In 1925, the Translation Bureau under British rule was restructured and renamed Pejabat Karang-Mengarang (literal: The Office of Writing). Pejabat Karang-Mengarang was integral to the improvement of school textbooks. Two series were published: The Malay School Series and the Malay Homes Library Series. The Malay School Series consist of revised versions of school textbooks, as well as new textbooks to suit the current time. Books from the Malay School Series were compulsory school reading materials. Between 1924 and 1957, a total of 85 titles were translated under this series (Sakina Sahuri Suffian Sahuri & Fauziah Taib, 2016). Meanwhile, the Malay Homes Library Series consists of translated classic stories and other light reading materials, to complement the compulsory school textbooks. 64 books were translated as part of this series (Sakina Sahuri Suffian Sahuri & Fauziah Taib, 2016).

In total, Pejabat Karang-Mengarang published almost 200 titles, including several reprints. According to Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2005), nearly half of the books published by Pejabat Karang-Mengarang can be categorised as children's books to foster reading habits and awareness towards written literature. The translation of classic literature in the Malay Homes Library Series allowed the young Malay generation to have access to high-quality, international literature. Skilled translators were also produced, and they went on to produce their own original writing. Pejabat Karang-Mengarang was also integral in stimulating and expanding the literary industry, especially children's literature in Malaya in the 20th century. After the Second World War, Pejabat Karang-Mengarang was transferred to the Education Department in Kuala Lumpur from Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Training College (SITC), now known as Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris) in Perak. At the time, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was known as the Textbook Unit under the department. In 1957, Pejabat Karang-Mengarang was absorbed into Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Ahmad, 1966 & Hamid, 1967, as cited in Sharifah Fadzliyaton Shaik Ismail, 2007). This event marked a new beginning in the children's book industry in Malaysia, which is the post-independence period.

Studies on the post-independence translation of children’s literature in Malaysia have been carried out by Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail (2007), Zalina Mohd. Lazim (2007) and Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak (1998, 2005). Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail (2007) studied the trend in the translation of children’s literature in Malaysia between 1958 and 2003. She found that up until 1962, which is five years after Malaya gained independence in 1957, translation was not actively carried out. Following the formation of Malaysia in the year 1963, there was an increase in the children’s book translation activity. 30 titles were translated from 1963 to 1964. However, the momentum was once again arrested in 1972, the reasons for which include the racial riots in 1969. This event not only affects the children’s book industry but also the overall publication activities in Malaysia.

After the tragedy of 13th May 1969, the government rallied to develop the national identity and spirit and to unite all races. The Malay language was declared the medium for teaching and learning at the national schools, replacing English. As a result, there was a sharp increase in the need for Malay reading materials for use in school. The Malaysian Ministry of Education allocated financial aid for libraries to increase their Malay book collections. However, writings for children in Malay at the time were limited and subsequently, foreign literature works were translated into Malay to fill in this gap (Othman Puteh, 1989). This led to a boom in the translation activity for children’s books between 1974 to 1985. During this peak period, a total of 593 Malay-translated books were published (Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail, 2007). Then, in the mid-1980s, translation activities began to slow down, mainly because there was an increase in the publication of original writings in Malay (Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 2005). In September 1993, Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia, ITNM (The Malaysian National Institute of Translation) was established to facilitate the translation, interpreting, and transfer of information at the national and international levels (Lettress de Malaisie, 2013). This government-linked company (GLC) has since been rebranded in 2011 as Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia, ITBM (The Malaysian Institute of Translation and Books). The establishment of this body has spurred a new wave of translation for children’s literature in the country, as the findings from this study will show.

Table 1. Distribution of Malay-translated Children’s books by Genre from 1958 to 2003 (Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail, 2007)

Genre	1958-1973	1974-1985	1986-1995	1996-2003	Total
Realistic fiction	22	325	104	53	504
Animal	5	55	9	10	79
Biography	2	1	4	1	8
Classics	15	40	7	3	65
Folklore	13	78	18	19	128
Fantasy	7	55	5	16	83
Informational	2	21	3	6	32
Primers	0	18	3	30	51
Total	66	593	153	138	950

Through this examination of the early stage of translation for children into Malay, it is apparent that information on translation trends could provide an overview of the current situations and the nation’s needs. According to Pym (1998), archaeological studies of translation are necessary not only to identify the translators but also the selection of texts, translation strategy and methods, as well as the time and location of the translation. Archaeological translation studies are also important to analyse how factors

such as translators, text selections, time and location influence the product and translation industry as a whole.

The Definition and Types of Children's Literature

Defining children's literature is a challenging endeavour because there are multiple aspects to be considered. First, children's literature books are also known as 'trade books', to differentiate them from school textbooks (Hillman, 1999; Lynch-Brown & Tomlimson, 2008). Meanwhile, Molina (1984) defined children's literature as books that are read for leisure. However, it is undeniable that trade books are also used as an aid for teaching and learning at schools. She further elaborated that children's literature comprises all forms of creative and imaginative writing for children's reading, entertainment, and evaluation. Lynch-Brown and Tomlimson (2008) gave a similar but more detailed definition of children's literature – high-quality trade books for children from birth to teenage years comprising appropriate and interesting subjects whether in the form of prose or poetry, and fiction or non-fiction.

The term 'teenage' in the definition of children's literature is found to be quite subjective. For example, in the definition by Hadijah Rahmat (2006), children's literature is meant for readers aged 16 and below, particularly of school age (primary to secondary). Knuth (2012), on the other hand, defined children's literature as books or literature works written for children until age 18. Knuth's definition is in line with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s definition of children: everyone who is 18 and below. Generally, UNICEF's definition is accepted worldwide, including in Malaysia, as evident through the Child Act 611 (2011). Other definitions include the general one by Oittinen (2000), who said children's literature is all reading materials intended for children, and Zohar (2005), who classified the definition into three parts: "illustrated texts for the very young, texts for young children, and texts for teenagers".

Although there are differing opinions about the term 'teenage' and age stages, a conclusion can be made that most definitions of children's literature include literature for young adults, making them more inclusive as such definitions take into account children's varied levels of reading ability and skills. While children are generally divided into several stages of age and reading levels, Nodelman and Reime (2003) emphasised the importance of recognising different cognitive capacities even among children of the same age. Children with advanced skills and interest in reading might find materials for older age groups like literature for young adults more adequate and appropriate.

Apart from the discourse on the definition of children, the term 'literature' raised arguments about the aspect of quality of children's books. This is because the literature term is often associated with features that reflect good qualities – good writing and content as well as plots and characters that leave a deep impact (Hillman, 1999). Factors such as the level of writing and content, and the effectiveness of plots and characters indicate a subjective element in determining what constitutes children's literature. Referring back to Lynch-Brown dan Tomlimson's definition (2008) of children's literature – high-quality trade books for children from birth to teenage years – it can be surmised that for many scholars, not all reading materials for children were considered as children's literature. Other scholars who emphasised quality as a criterion for children's literature include Hillman (1999), Sutherland and Arbutnot (1977), Molina (1984) and Hadijah Rahmat (2006). To further complicate things, there are two different groups of audiences to evaluate the quality of children's literature; the first one is the adults like parents, teachers and publishers who are responsible for preparing reading materials for children, and the second is the children themselves as the target readers.

Similar to literature for adult readers, children's literature can be divided into several types. Freeman and Lehman (2001) classified children's literature into six groups – picture books, fiction, informational books, biographies, poetry and folklore. Lynch-Brown and Tomlimson (2008) and Hillman (1999) outlined similar classifications, but they further divided the fiction category into three – modern fantasy, realistic fiction and historical fiction. Russell (2018) also divided children's literature into the following groups – picture storybooks, folklore, poetry, fantasy, realistic fiction (including historical

fiction), and biographies and informational books. However, Russell also added another category, which is the books of early childhood, such as picture books with no words, toy books, and alphabet and counting books. Meanwhile, Goforth (1998) divided children’s literature into three main types – fiction, non-fiction, and others. The fiction category comprises folklore, fantasy, and realistic fiction, whereas biographies and informational books fall under the non-fiction category. Poetry and picture books were placed under others.

Methodology

This paper examines the types of texts, source languages as well as publishers to describe trends related to the translations of children’s literature into Malay in Malaysia. This information was extracted from the National Library’s Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). This catalogue was selected as the source of data in this study because, in 1982, the Malaysian National Library was appointed as the National Centre for *International Standard Book Number* (ISBN). In addition, under the Deposit of Library Material Act 1986 that replaced the National Archives Act 1966, all book publishers in Malaysia must submit five copies of printed books and two copies of non-printed books to the Malaysian National Library. As such, the National Library’s OPAC is the most complete source for information regarding the publications of translated children’s books into Malay. An example of the display of information from the National Library’s catalogue is shown in Figure 1 below.

The screenshot shows the OPAC interface for the book 'KAWAH / Emma AdBage'. The header includes the logo of the National Library of Malaysia and the text 'SISTEM KATALOG ATAS TALIAN PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE (OPAC) NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA'. Below the header are navigation links: Register, Login, Cart, Heading Search, Clear Session, Quickbook@PNM, and Mobile.Chamo. A search bar is present with a 'Search' button. The main content area displays the book title 'KAWAH / Emma AdBage ; Diterjemah oleh Datuk Hj Zaiton Hj Ajamain' and the author 'Adbage, Emma'. It also shows the year '2024' and the publisher 'Integra Creative Media Sdn Bhd'. A 'Physical Description' section indicates '1 volume (unpaged) : color illustrations ; 29 cm'. There is an 'Add To Cart' button and a 'Total Ratings: 0' indicator. At the bottom, there is a table with columns for Location, Item Class, Call Number, Units, Copy Number, Barcode, Status, and Public Note. The table contains one entry for 'Pinjaman Kanak-kanak' with a call number 'ADB f K' and a due date of 'January 10, 2025'.

Location	Item Class	Call Number	Units	Copy Number	Barcode	Status	Public Note
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinjaman Kanak-kanak	Koleksi Pinjaman Kanak-kanak	ADB f K		1	1001477542	Due January 10, 2025	

Fig. 1 The Malaysian National Library’s OPAC Display

As shown in Figure 1, the National Library’s catalogue provides information about the title, year of publication, author, translator (if applicable), and a brief description of the type of text. Many of the translated texts also come with information about the source language, but when this information is not available, further investigation is carried out through online searches based on the title, author and

publisher. By examining this catalogue, data about the publications of translated children’s literature can be identified and extracted. The data was compiled in a spreadsheet, with annotations of information such as title, year of publication, author, translator, source language and types of text for systematic management and to allow for automatic data generation. The classification of children’s literature genre in this study was adapted from the classification of children’s literature by Russell (2018).

Findings and Discussion

Children’s Books in Malaysia: Genre

Findings from this study have shown that the translations of children’s literature are still carried out actively in Malaysia. In the period between 2005 and 2024, more than 1800 titles of children’s literature were translated into Malay. This number is not only higher than the 593 titles translated and published in the peak period of translation between 1974 and 1985 but also exceeds the 950 titles published from 1958 to 2003. This trend shows that in line with the increase in children’s book publications in Malaysia, translation activities for this genre also increased, and translations still play an integral role as a source of reading materials in Malay. Based on the literature review and data collection from this research, a framework for the genre classification of children’s books in Malaysia is proposed and outlined as follows in Table 2.

Table 2. Description of children’s literature by genre

No.	Types	Description
1.	Early books for children	First books for infant and toddlers, up until four years old. This genre consists of nursery rhymes, wordless picture books, toy books, and books introducing alphabets, numbers and concepts.
2.	Picture storybooks	Picture storybooks are books that tell stories using both words and illustrations. Usually, picture storybooks are targeted towards 5-year-olds and older children. The content of the stories may vary, such as retelling of folklore, original fantasy, as well as realistic fictions.
3.	Folklore	Folklores can be divided into several types such as myths, animal stories, fairy tales and other stories that have been told through many generations.
4.	Modern fantasy	Modern fantasy stories consist of impossible stories like adventures in fantasy worlds, time travel, supernatural world, and so on. Modern fantasies are told by individual authors instead of being told through many generations orally like folklore.
5.	Realistic fiction	Realistic fictions are stories that represent the real world. Realistic fictions can be divided into two: contemporary realistic fictions and historical realistic fictions.
6.	Biography	Biographies tell the life story of a person or an individual. Biographies can be fictional and non-fictional.
7.	Educational books	Educational books are books that contain facts and

		information. Russell (2018) divided educational books into four categories: 1) history and culture, 2) science and environment, 3) humanities, arts and society, and 4) human and behavioural development.
8.	Poetry	Poetry or verse are forms of writing different from prose. Malay poetry includes <i>sajak</i> , <i>syair</i> , and <i>pantun</i> .
9.	Religious stories	Stories taken from the Quran and hadith, or other religious books like the Bible.
10.	Comics	Stories or narratives told through words and illustrations. However, comics are different from picture storybooks because the illustrations in comics are displayed through series of panels following the acts or scenes, and text in comics are placed in the speech bubbles.

This study found that between 2005 and 2014, educational books were the most translated genre into Malay, with 377 titles (36.1%). As described in Table 2, the genre includes books on mathematics, science, geography, and so on. In Malay, the equivalent term for literature is ‘sastera’, which usually refers to literary works, both fiction and non-fiction. However, as demonstrated through the various classifications of children’s literature in the previous part of this paper, the term children’s literature in English also covers educational or informational books. This genre refers to children’s books that contain facts to deliver information to children while entertaining them at the same time. Among the books in this category are encyclopedias and books explaining concepts or phenomena. For instance, Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia (ITBM) published educational books through different series like *100 Perkara yang Kamu Patut Tahu* (translated from the 100 Things to Know About series), *Soalan dan Jawapan Awal* (First Questions and Answers), and *Perkaitan Antara Dahulu dan Sekarang* (Linking the Past and Present). Also contributing to the large percentage of this genre are religious education books such as the encyclopaedia on Juz Amma (the last of the 30 sections of the Quran, containing brief chapters (surah) and memorised at heart by many Muslims), books for learning how to perform salah and others. This includes titles such as *Siri Kalimah Toyyibah Untuk Anak-Anak Muslim* and *Indahnya! Belajar Solat*, published by Darul Mughni Trading. These titles were translated from Indonesian. However, educational books dropped to third place between 2015 and 2024, with only 118 titles published, marking a significant decrease (68.7%) compared to the previous 10 years.

Graphic literature, including comics, was highly stigmatised. Critics and educators used to complain that comic books corrupted the minds of the kids reading them (Llorence, 2011). However, this perception has gradually changed towards a more positive acceptance, and comics have become a respected literary form (Skwarzyński, 2019). Many comics have been recognised with literary awards like the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize (Chute, 2008; Hatfield, 2007). For example, the comic titled *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang was listed as a finalist for the National Award Book 2006 in the United States. Then, in 2018, Andrew Sean Greer’s comic titled *Less* won the Pulitzer Prize for the fiction category. Earlier, in 1992, Art Spiegelman’s famous comic, *Maus*, also won a Pulitzer Prize (Charles, 17 April 2018; Mudd, 2023). Furthermore, government-link publisher, Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia has also published various educational comic translations in Malay aimed at child readers.

In line with this change in perception, this study also found that comics were the second most translated genre in Malaysia between 2005 and 2014, with 150 titles (14.4%). More remarkably, this genre has risen to first place in the past 10 years, with 401 titles (49.7%) published between 2015 and 2024. This marks a monumental increase of 167% compared to the previous 10-year period. It is important to note that many comics translated into Malay were educational comics, as evident through the comic series such as *Siri Komik Sains* (translated from English and published by ITBM), *Komik Pendidikan Britannica* (translated from Korean and published by Penerbitan Pelangi Sdn. Bhd.), *Siri*

Eksplorasi Sains (translated from Japanese and published by Orbit Buku Sdn. Bhd.), and *Siri Kuasai Dalam 3 Jam* (translated from Chinese and published by Kadokawa Gempak Starz Sdn. Bhd.). This list also shows that both the government and independent publishers recognise the value and marketability of educational comics.

Apart from educational books and comics, picture storybooks are also among the most translated genres. Between 2005 and 2014, 151 (14.5%) titles were published in this category, making it the third most translated genre after educational books and comics, respectively. This number slightly rose to 162 titles (20.1%) between 2015 and 2024, surpassing the educational books genre and making it the second most translated genre of children's literature in Malay for the past 10 years. Part of the reason for the big percentage is the variety of books in this genre, including folklore, modern fantasy, and realistic fiction. Similar to comics and educational books, many of the titles under the picture storybook genre are also published as a series, such as *Siri Adib Hebat* (translated from Indonesian and published by Kids Prima), *Koleksi Cerita Adik Mulia* (translated from Thai and published by Penerbitan Pelangi Sdn. Bhd.), dan *Siri Buku Cerita Klasik Disney* (translated from English and published by Advantage Quest Sdn. Bhd.).

Folklore and religious stories from the Quran and hadith contributed 5.8% (61 titles) and 5.6% (59 titles) between 2005 and 2014, respectively. However, both genres showed a decline in the past 10 years. Between 2015 and 2024, only 13 titles of folklore translations were published, amounting to 1.6%. Meanwhile, only 28 titles of Islamic religious stories based on the Quran and hadith were published in the same period, amounting to 3.5%. Islamic religious stories are grouped as a separate genre from religious educational books. Darul Mughni Trading has been the main contributor of publications in this genre for the past 20 years, with titles like *10 Cerita Terhebat Sahabiyah* and *Kisah-Kisan Mukjizad Para Nabi* (translated from Indonesian), as well as *Firaun Dilemaskan di Laut Merah* and *Ashabul Kahfi Dibangunkan Kembali* (translated from English).

The realistic fiction genre has shown an even more dramatic decline in the past 10 years. 167 titles (16%) were published between 2005 to 2014, and only 18 titles (2.2%) were published between 2015 to 2024. This means that this genre has dropped almost 90% in the past 10 years. The titles under this genre include *Kesatria Setia*, *Raider Goh: Bermalam Dalam Ketakutan* and *Ang See Beng Berkaki Lapan: Dendam Dr Dredd*, both from the *Detik Tengah Malam Mr Midnight* series published by MPH Group Publishing Sdn. Bhd. , and *Sherlock Holmes: Misteri Surai Singa, Misteri Penyewa Berkerudung, Misteri Shoscombe Old Place & Misteri Pesara Kilang Cat*, published by Penerbit X. Penerbitan Fargoes, however, is the biggest contributor to this genre, with series like *Siri 3 Penyiasat* and *Siri 5 Penyiasat*. As evident through this list of titles, the realistic fiction genre was dominated by detective mystery books.

Similar to realistic fiction, the translation of modern fantasy has also been through a significant decline, from 33 titles (3.1%) between 2005 and 2014 to a mere two titles (0.2%) between 2015 and 2024. However, it is important to note that this number only includes modern fantasy in the form of novels, like the Harry Potter series. The study has found that modern fantasy is often published in the form of picture storybooks as well, and therefore, they fall under a separate genre. Other genres on a downward trend are primers and poetry, although the numbers were small to begin with. Only 1.3% (14 titles) of primer or early books for children were published between 2005 and 2014, and this number has dropped to 0.6% (5 titles) in the past 10 years. Unsurprisingly, no poetry translation has been published in the last 10 years, as only one poetry translation (0.1%) was published between 2005 and 2014. Biography, on the other hand, is showing an upward trend. Thirty-two translations of biographies in Malay were published between 2005 and 2014, amounting to 3.1%, and this number almost doubled to 60 titles (5%) between 2015 to 2024.

With over 1800 titles published in the last 20 years, translation still plays a key role in the Malaysian children's book industry. As shown in Table 3, however, the number of children's book translations in Malay has dropped in the last 10 years, from 1045 titles published between 2005 and 2014, to 807 titles published between 2015 and 2024. There are significant factors to consider, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely affected the publication industry.

Table 3. Distribution of Malay-translated children’s books by genre from 2005-2024

No.	Genre	2005-2014		2015-2024		Total	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1.	Early books for children	14	1.3	5	0.6	19	1.0
2.	Picture storybooks	151	14.5	162	20.1	313	16.9
3.	Folklore	61	5.8	13	1.6	74	4.0
4.	Modern fantasy	33	3.2	2	0.2	35	1.9
5.	Realistic fiction	167	16	18	2.2	185	10
6.	Biography	32	3.1	60	7.4	92	5
7.	Educational books	377	36	118	14.6	495	26.7
8.	Poetry	1	0.1	0	0	1	0.05
9.	Religious stories	59	5.6	28	3.5	87	4.7
10.	Comics	150	14.4	401	49.7	551	29.65
	Total	1045	100	807	100	1852	100

Source language

As shown in Table 4, the study found that English remained the main source language in translation into Malay from 2005 to 2024, with 1059 titles (57.6%). However, in the past 10 years, there has been a 59% drop compared to the previous 10-year period. Between 2005 and 2014, 752 titles were translated from English, representing 72% of Malay translations in this period. On the other hand, only 38% of translations were from English source texts between 2015 and 2024. Although the lower percentage is partly influenced by a significant increase in contribution from another source language, the total number of titles has dropped as well to 307. Translation from Korean has also been on an incline in the past 10 years, with only 53 titles (6.6%) compared to 93 titles (8.9%) published between 2005 and 2014. Four other languages - Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Spanish - contributed small percentages of 2.4% (25 titles), 1.4% (15 titles), 0.5% (5 titles) and 0.2% (2 titles), respectively, between 2005 to 2014. However, the study found no translation from these four source languages between 2015 to 2024.

Not all languages are on a downward trend. Chinese, for instance, has shown a sharp incline from 15 titles (1.4%) between 2005 and 2014 to 291 titles (36%) from 2015 to 2024. This jump in the number can be mainly attributed to the rise of comics translation. Apart from Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian have also shown an upward trend. Between 2005 and 2014, 46 titles were translated from Indonesian, amounting to 4.4% of the overall translation in this period. The number has increased to 71 titles, representing 8.8% of the overall translation in the past 10 years, double the percentage compared to the previous 10-year period. Meanwhile, only two titles (0.2%) were translated from Japanese between 2005 and 2014, but this number has increased to 38 (4.7%) in the past 10 years. Two new source languages were identified from the last 10 years - Swedish and Slovak – each contributing 0.4% (3 titles) and 0.1% (1 title), respectively. Finally, the source languages for 94 out of 1852 titles (5%) of children’s book translations into Malay in the past 20 years could not be identified, although these titles were indicated as products of translation.

Table 4. Distribution of Malay-translated children’s books by source language from 2005-2024

No.	Source language	2005-2014		2015-2024		Total	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1.	English	752	72	307	38	1059	57.2
2.	Chinese	15	1.4	291	36	306	16.5
3.	Indonesian	46	4.4	71	8.8	117	6.3
4.	Korean	93	8.9	53	6.6	146	7.9
5.	Japanese	2	0.2	38	4.7	40	2.2
6.	Thai	14	1.3	25	3.1	39	2.1
7.	Persian	25	2.4	0	0	25	1.3
8.	Swedish	0	0	3	0.4	3	0.2
9.	Slovak	0	0	1	0.1	1	0.05
10.	Arabic	5	0.5	0	0	5	0.3
11.	Turkish	15	1.4	0	0	15	0.8
12.	Spanish	2	0.2	0	0	2	0.1
13.	KIV	76	7.3	18	2.2	94	5.0
	Total	1045		807		1852	

The study has analysed the trends in the publication of children’s book translations into Malay, with a focus on the genre and source languages. Overall, 1852 titles of translations have been published in the past 20 years, between 2005 and 2024. As discussed earlier, this is still a significant number, considering the publication trends of children’s book translations in Malaysia from 1958 to 2003. However, there has been a decline in the past 10 years, with only 807 titles published between 2015 and 2024. This is 22.7% lower compared to the previous 10-year period, whereby 1045 titles were published between 2005 and 2014. Based on the yearly analysis carried out, the number of publications in 2021 was remarkably smaller compared to the preceding and following years of 2020 and 2022. Only 24 titles of children’s book translations were published in 2021, which is 61.3% lower than in 2020 (62 titles) and 53.3% lower than in 2022 (45 titles). This is most likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the peak of which occurred between 2020 to 2021 (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Analysis according to genre also provides an insight into the types of text preferred for publication. Although comics have surpassed the educational books genre in the past 10 years, the study found that many comic translations into Malay are educational. Hence, the study concludes that informative texts are the preferred types of books by publishers to be translated into Malay, compared to expressive or operative texts (Reiss, 1976). This is not to say that the expressive and operative texts have been completely neglected. There are still significant numbers of storybooks translated for children to read for enjoyment and leisure, as evident through the significant portion of picture storybooks published. Furthermore, many children’s storybooks contain didactic elements to teach values and instil societal norms. This can be seen through titles like *Jujur Itu Hebat*, *Saya Menghormati Setiap Perbezaan*, *Rasulullah Idola Saya*, *Saya Rajin Solat* and *Saya Rajin Mengaji* from the *Little Adib Anak Cerdas & Soleh* series by Bestari Kids, translated from Indonesian. Titles like this are intended to shape children’s behaviour according to religious and social values. Hence, based on Reiss’ typology of text functions, they can be considered as operative texts too.

Although English has remained the main source language for the past 20 years, as has been the case ever since the translation of children's literature started in the country, the findings from the study show that translation from other source languages, especially from Asia, is increasing. The difference in percentage between English and Chinese as source languages for the past 10 years is minimal (38% vs 36%). Translation from Indonesian is also not slowing down. Nevertheless, the high percentage of translations from Chinese is correlated to the strong domination of the comics genre. On the other hand, texts translated from English are more varied. It remains to be seen whether comics will continue to be the most published form of translation, although the trend does not seem to be slowing down currently.

Conclusion

Findings from the study have shown that translation still plays a key role in the Malaysian children's book industry. Historically, translation was the point of beginning to provide the necessary reading materials for children in Malaysia pre- and post-independence, although this was not necessarily exclusive to this country. For a long time, childhood was a foreign concept to many parts of the world, and children were considered merely as an extension of adults. Due to this lack of understanding about children and their special needs in the critical growing period, there were limited reading materials for children, and folklore passed through generations through oral rendering was their main source of entertainment. However, the children's book industry has grown exponentially, including in Malaysia. Through translations, children get access to various types of literature from all over the world, apart from locally produced books.

There is still so much information to be discovered regarding the translation of children's literature in Malaysia, and the Malaysian children's book industry. For starters, future studies into the translation of children's literature into languages other than Malay would provide a comprehensive overview of translated children's books in this country. Many translations have been done into Chinese and Tamil, for instance. It would also be interesting to investigate further the rise of translations from Asian languages, such as Chinese and Indonesian, to identify the factors involved and perhaps further encourage this trend. More importantly, the publication trends of children's literature reflect various situational factors that shape our society and country at a given time. It is imperative, therefore, that more in-depth bibliometric and contextual analysis is carried out and all the relevant information is documented. Finally, translation studies scholars might also want to study the approaches used by translators to translate children's literature in Malaysia. Although several such studies have been conducted, these studies are still very limited and there are still so many gaps to fill regarding information about translated children's books in the country.

References

- Čermáková, A. (2018). Translating children's literature: some insights from corpus linguistics. *Ilha do Desterro*, 70 (1), 117-133.
- Charles, R. (2018, 17 April). *Finally, a comic novel gets a Pulitzer Prize. It's about time.* The Washington Post. [thewashingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com).
- Chute, H. (2008). Comics as literature? Reading graphic narratives. *PMLA*, 123 (2), pp. 452-465.
- Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *David J. Sencer CDC Museum: In Association with the Smithsonian Institution.* <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html>
- Freeman, E. & Lehman, B. (2001). *Global perspectives in children's literature.* Allyn & Bacon.
- Goforth, F.S. (1998). *Literature and the learner.* Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Hadijah Rahmat. (2006). *Peranan dan Perkembangan Sastera Kanak-Kanak.* Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Hatfield, C. (2007). Introduction: Comics and childhood. *ImageText*, 3 (3). <https://imagetextjournal.com/introduction-comics-and-childhood/>

- Hillman, J. (1999). *Discovering children's literature* (2nd ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Lettress de Malaisie. (2013). <https://lettresdemalaisie.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/soalan-daripada-lettres-de-malaisie.pdf>
- Llorence, J. (2011). Exploring Graphic Literature as a Genre and its Place in Academic Curricula. *McNair Scholars Journal*, 15(6), <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol15/iss1/6>
- Lynch-Brown, C. & Tomlimson, C.M. (2008). *Essentials of children's literature* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak. (2005). *Perkembangan Sastera Kanak-Kanak di Malaysia*. Cerdik Publications Sdn. Bhd.
- Molina S. Nijhar. (1984). Apakah sastera kanak-kanak khususnya buku bergambar. In Othman Puteh & Abdul Ahmad (Eds.). *Sekitar Sastera Kanak-Kanak dan Remaja* (pp. 1-14). Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
- Mudd, Z. (2023). Why comics are literature. *The Boar*. <https://theboar.org/2023/12/why-comics-are-literature/>
- Nodelman, P. & Reimer, M. (2003). *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- Oittinen, R. (2000). *Translating for Children*. Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Othman Puteh. (1989). 'Sastera Remaja: Sahlan Keliru?'. *Dewan Sastera*, 19(10), 7-8.
- Pulimeno, Piscitelli & Colazzo (2020). Children's literature to promote students' global development and well-being. *Health Promotion Perspectives*, 10(1), 13-23. DOI:10.15171/hpp.2020.05
- Reiss, K. (1976). Text Types, Translation Types and Translation Assessment. Andrew Chesterman (Trans.). In Andrew Chesterman (Ed.). *Readings in Translation Theory*. (pp. 105-115). Oy Finn Lectura.
- Russell, D.L. (2018). *Literature for children: A short introduction*. (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Proudfoot, I. (1993). *Early Malay Printed Books*. Akademi Pengajian Bahasa Melayu dan Kepustakaan, Universiti Malaya.
- Pym, A. (1998). *Method in Translation History*. St. Jerome.
- Sakina Sahuri Suffian Sahuri & Fauziah Taib. (2016). The role of translation in education in Malaysia. In Asmah Haji Omar (Ed.). *Languages in the Malaysian education system*. (pp. 133-146). Routledge.
- Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail. (2007). *The Publishing Phenomenon of Enid Blyton in Malay Language in the 1970s: Socio-cultural context and Strategies Employed*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester.
- Skwarzyński, J. (2019). Translating Images. Comic Books and Graphic Novels as Multimodal Texts in Translation. *New Horizons in English Studies*, 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/nh.2019.4.102-117>
- Sulaiman Masri. (1984). Penulisan bahan bacaan kanak-kanak. (1984). In Othman Puteh & Abdul Ahmad (Ed.). *Sekitar Sastera Kanak-Kanak dan Remaja* (pp. 15-20). Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Sutherland, Z. & Arbuthnot, M.H. (1977). *Children and books* (5th ed.). Scott, Foresman.
- Zalina Mohd Lazim. (2006). Adapting culture in the translations of children's literature books. In Shanta Nair-Venugopal, Khazriyati Salehuddin, Shantini Pillai & Vanjuree Sriadulpan (Eds.). *Writing the past into the present: Reflections of 35 years of scholarship in language and literary studies* (pp. 343-354) Penerbit UKM.
- Zohar, S. (2005). *A past without shadow: Constructing the past in German books for children*. Routledge.