

**INTRODUCING A CANADIAN BOOK SERIES FOR
RELUCTANT READERS INTO THE
LATIN AMERICAN MARKET:
THE CASE OF ORCA SOUNDINGS**

by

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Abstract

This report examines the Spanish translation of four recent titles in the series Orca Soundings, from Orca Book Publishers. It explores the specifics of working for a reluctant reader market. It also details the efforts made to distribute the series into the Latin American market.

The five parts of this document provide a general overview of the Canadian company Orca Book Publishers, an analysis of the Spanish versions of four new titles of the Orca Soundings series, and information on the distribution work initiated with Latin American companies.

The first part of this report gives some detailed information about Orca Book Publishers, with a special focus on the series Orca Soundings. The second part analyses the reluctant reader market, particularly in Latin America. The third part offers an overview of the Spanish Orca Soundings. Part four is a thorough examination of the translation of the four most recent titles of the series, translated as part of the internship described in this report. Part five recounts the distribution work developed in Latin America during the time of this internship.

Keywords: Orca Book Publishers, Orca Soundings, reluctant readers, Latin America, Translation, Spanish translation, distribution, marketing.

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1: Orca Book Publishers

1.1 Overview of Orca Book Publishers

Orca Book Publishers was created 25 years ago with the publication of *Island Pubbing* in 1984, by Bob Tyrrell (current president of the company) and Boyd Corrigan. Now, a quarter century later, Orca is one of the top Canadian publishers for children and teenagers, and the largest publisher of its kind in Western Canada.

According to Tyrrell, in all that time Orca's revenue has always grown steadily: it actually closes in on \$4 million in sales per year. The independently owned company has published 600 titles in all and has 65 new titles a year, many appearing in the best selling lists and nominated to important prizes, like the Governor General's prize for children's literature. Almost all of Orca's authors are Canadian, and Orca rarely prints and binds its books outside of Canada. Distribution is key for profit: 60 percent of Orca's books are sold in the U.S. market. That is why the company operates a warehouse in Bellingham (Washington), apart from its offices on Balmoral Road in Victoria, British Columbia.

Orca Book Publishers has published books in an array of subjects and styles, but their bestsellers, the ones that sell tens of thousands copies, are titles like the ones published within the series Orca Soundings: books for reluctant readers, exciting stories for people that are not inclined to reading or that have a limited vocabulary. This is a market that Orca Book Publishers was not originally trying to address, but since this market is not as volatile as the retail trade, it has helped the company to grow.

Regardless of the company's success in the reluctant readers market, Orca Book Publishers receives funding from the Canada Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage, support that allows Canadian book publishers to survive in a very competitive market dominated by the United States.

For Orca Book Publishers, the key for survival has been to focus on new ideas and staying away from trends, which always come and go. The editing work is done in-house, which assures consistency. The company tries to focus on good ideas and to work solely with good writers.

The reluctant readership niche has proven to be a lucrative niche for the publishing house. Orca Soundings explored one sector of that niche in developing titles addressed to teenagers. Given that success, Orca has created a second imprint named Raven Books that is publishing easy-to-read-novels for adults.

1.2 Orca's mandate

Orca's primary interest is to publish the best books possible: award-winning, high quality texts for children and teens, and also for challenged readers of all ages. According to the company's website, Orca is committed to publishing titles that range "from beautifully illustrated picturebooks through captivating juvenile fiction and compelling novels for teen readers to professionally-written teachers' guides." The website also states that "Orca is dedicated to bringing the best possible books to young readers". No doubt, Orca's mandate will be updated to encompass the focus of Raven Books. The site also mentions that the publisher is committed to environmentally sustainable publishing.

1.3 Current publishing activities

In pursuit of its mandate, Orca Book Publishers has published more than 500 titles and adds 60 more every year. The publishing house has several very distinct series, all of them very carefully edited and of the outmost quality. For young children the company publishes Board Books and Picturebooks, and also a series called *Topsy and Binoo*, which is based on the Canadian television show of the same name. Orca Echoes also has chapter books for kids aged 7 to 9, which are commonly used in the classroom for character building programs.¹ For children aged 8 to 11, in a series called Orca Young Readers, the publisher offers chapter books with historical and contemporary stories.

In the Juvenile Fiction category for ages 8 to 13, Orca offers the series called Graphic Novels, full of adventure and suspense. These titles are compelling stories in various genres, for readers of a similar age to the target population of Orca Young Readers. Orca Book Publishers also has a wide variety of nonfiction books for adults and youngsters.

Another series called Orca Currents is made up of exciting and contemporary novels for reluctant readers in middle school. Orca Sports are similar novels for ages 10 and up, but with lots of team sports action. The series called Teen Fiction, intended for teens 12 or more, includes compelling novels by popular authors.

Orca French has only four titles now, translated from other collections, but it is a series that is already growing. Rapid Reads and the above-mentioned Raven Books are easy-to-read, fast-paced novels for adults.

¹ Programs designed to help young people learn what it takes to be a good student and person.

Orca Soundings, which is made up of by high-interest novels intended for reluctant readers, and its Spanish translations are the focus of this report.

1.4 About the series: Orca Soundings

The Orca Soundings series has been so successful that it has sold a million copies in Canada and the United States over the last 6 years. The series is intended for teenagers twelve and up, or between grade 2 and grade 4.5 (according to the Fry Readability Formula)². Announced as “Teen Fiction for Reluctant Readers”, this series offers high-interest novels that teenagers can easily enjoy. They are written for teens who do not find reading appealing and who read below grade level.

All of Orca Soundings titles have contemporary themes that kids can relate to, and there is a clear intent of leaving a message. Without being patronizing, each of these stories tries to teach teenagers a way of acting, or reacting, to difficult situations in life. All the books of this series are attractive to youngsters, for their stories are exciting and are conveyed in a forceful way.

The series’ novels are short (about 13,000-15,000 words or 100 pages long), they have compelling characters and have linear and easy plots, because the purpose of Orca Soundings is to hook the readers from the first page and to take them all the way to the end of the book. Reluctant readers then feel satisfied and accomplished, proud of themselves for having read a whole novel; in other words, they feel less intimidated by

² According to the *Orca Soundings Resource Guide*, the Fry Readability Formula for English texts was developed by Dr. Edward Fry, as a guide for teachers, librarians and educators. It assigns grade reading levels calculating the average number of sentences and syllables per one hundred words.

reading. This is a first very important step in the development of a more intense reading interest. Although reluctant readers are the foremost audience for these novels, the titles are intended to appeal to all teenagers. They are designed to be exciting and involving books and intended to make their readers more interested in reading.

In order to make reading simpler for reluctant teen readers, Orca Soundings books have a limited vocabulary, few characters and a clear context. They do not use flashbacks as a narrative device, because the reluctant reader may lose track of the story.

Reading the books of Orca Soundings regularly, or any other text intended for teens that read below their grade level, will increase teenagers' fluency and enhance their vocabulary, which will result in an improvement of their writing skills and raise their test scores. The bimonthly journal *VOYA, Voice of Youth Advocates*, which is addressed to librarians and educators, notes that the Orca Soundings books

...use simple vocabulary and short sentences combined with lots of authentic dialogue and engrossing subject matter, making them ideal for high-interest, low-reading-level collections. The authors are not afraid of controversial language or material, which is in large part the secret of the series' appeal. Open endings lend to discussion and further exploration. These little novels with their colourful covers are sure to be a hit.

1.4.1 The books

Orca Soundings has 70 titles to date. The subjects of Orca Soundings could have not been considered appropriate for teenagers decades ago, but are now common in juvenile literature and popular media. Orca Book Publishers presents these subjects with an educational bias. Bullying, underage drinking, peer pressure, racism, teenage pregnancy, anorexia, are some of the subjects treated by Orca Book Publishers with care, and delivered with the intention of promoting a healthy dialogue.

To encourage that dialogue, Orca provides Teacher's Guides, which help teachers, and librarians identify and discuss the most compelling points of the stories and guide the conversation in the classrooms or in study groups. These guides organize the series by subject, so the guiding adult can easily make various connections among the books, and also guide the teenagers to similar texts when the youngsters have particularly enjoyed a specific title of the series. The guides present a thorough analysis of each title, detailing its subject, conflict and the words that may be considered in a "vocabulary enrichment" column.

Although in many of the books there are no references to the location of the stories, it is common to find them located in Canada, since most of Orca Book Publishers' authors are Canadian. Cities and characteristics of particular towns are mentioned and give the books a very distinctive charm. Since Orca Soundings' books need to be attractive and enticing to young people, they always have very strong covers.

These novels are written by award-winning authors. Orca approaches established authors to write in the specific format Orca needs: it asks authors to write compelling novels of short length that could be accessible for teenagers reading at a grade 2-4 level.

Among those authors who have written for Orca Soundings are William Bell, Eric Walters, Beth Goobie, and Kristin Butcher. Many of Orca Soundings' authors have written more than one novel for the series, sometimes as many as ten. Beth Goobie is one such author who has written *Sticks and Stones*, *Something Girl*, *Kicked Out*, and *Who Owns Kelly Paddick*. Commonly, authors who write for Orca Soundings also write for other series published by Orca Book Publishers.

Even though it was not Orca Book Publisher's original intention, the series is also being picked up by English-as-a-second-language students and adult literacy students. The basic vocabulary used in the series, the excitement of the stories and the length of the novels make them ideal for people that speak languages other than English and are trying to learn the language.

For Orca, literary quality should never be sacrificed. The publisher contests the idea that books made for people reading below grade level should be simple and dumb, so uncomplicated that anyone can write them and have nothing interesting to convey. Orca Soundings' stories are always interesting and compelling. The characters on the Orca Soundings series are three-dimensional and distinct from each other. The novels' descriptive passages are usually short, because reluctant readers are more easily attracted to good and realistic dialogs.

Even though the vocabulary of the series tends to be simple and the sentences short, it is common to find some words that are not of everyday use, for the series aims to broaden its readers' vocabularies. In those cases, the words are repeated throughout the book, so the reiteration reinforces their acquisition. Since sophisticated literary tools such as flashbacks or complex subplots usually increase a novel's difficulty, Orca Sounding's books tend to avoid them. To promote an easy reading progress, there are not

many plot twists either. The pace of the stories is fast, and the story structure is straightforward and moves the struggling reader through the text quickly. As a result, the teenager enjoys the reading activity and keeps going from one book to another. The reader could eventually look for more complex literature.

The Spanish Orca Soundings series has been around for four years, and the company publish four new titles every year. The series was originally published for the United States market, because the company knew of a considerable demand from teachers. Since the start of the series, sales have been good, largely to libraries and schools through the major wholesalers. The series has also been purchased by vendors for the program called Reading is Fundamental, the largest literacy non-profit in the United States.

Orca Book Publishers sells the series through direct mail to schools, off its website and directly. The company sells the series as a collection of Spanish titles and also as a collection with the corresponding English titles.

1.5 About this report

This project report aims to give a detailed account of my work at Orca Book Publishers from May to November 2010. During that period, I had two very distinct tasks: for one part, I was to translate into Spanish four books of the Orca Soundings series. These four titles were going to be added to the fourteen titles that formed up the series. On the other part, as Business Development Manager for Latin America, I had to make a connection with Latin American publishing and distributing companies to try to introduce the series into that territory.

The rationale for writing this report is to present an overview of Orca Book Publishers and the series Orca Soundings, which is offered in Part 1. Then, in Part 2, I analyse the reluctant reader market, particularly in Latin America, and write about the reading interests of that audience. Part 3 is devoted to the Spanish Orca Soundings, as a way of introducing Part 4, which revolves around my work translating the four titles that were the focus of my internship at Orca Book Publishers. Finally, part 5 gives an overview of the marketing work done during that period.

2: Reluctant readers and reluctant reader markets

Although literacy levels have become very high in modern developed societies, literacy does not translate to good reading habits. There are still huge gaps to fill up. And when it comes to third world countries, the problem is much more complex.

According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), only 1,155 million people or 18.6% of the world population (with a total population of 6,200 million) have access to a formal education. A total of 876 million adults and young people are illiterate, and 112 million children in school age do not attend school.³

Reading habits are directly related to literacy, but even in developed countries with high literacy rates, reading habits can be substantially low. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) has thoroughly researched reading habits in the world and published some of its conclusions in the year 2000. The following chart⁴ shows the reading level of 15-year-old kids in some of the countries that are members of OECD. The second column shows the average grade performance of each country, whereas the third gives each country a position related to the others.

³ UNESCO. *World Education Report*, 2000.

⁴ OECD, "Programme for International Student Assessment. Sample tasks from the PISA 2000. Assessment of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy", 2001, p. 16.

Table 1.1 Reading habits

Country	Average performance	Position
Finland	546	1
Canada	534	2
Ireland	527	3
Korea	525	4
Sweden	516	9
United States	504	10
Spain	493	17
Italy	487	19
Mexico	422	31
Brazil	396	32

As a point of reference, 51% of the population in Spain do not like to read, and in the US, more than a third of the population avoid it.⁵ Among the less developed countries, Mexico is the second last in the world (108 countries were accounted for in the study); only 2% of the Mexican population has a regular reading habit.⁶

⁵ Gutiérrez Valencia, Ariel and Roberto Montes de Oca García. “La importancia de la lectura y su problemática en el contexto educativo universitario. El caso de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (México)”. In *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*. <http://www.rieoei.org/deloslectores/632Gutierrez.PDF>.

⁶ UNESCO. *Study on World Education 2000*. Madrid: Santillana, 2000, p. 183.

In May 2002, Exeter University undertook a study in 30 schools in the south-west of England. It was done over one week with 707 students aged between 11 and 15. This study reports the reading habits of British teenagers.⁷

Table 1.2 Reading habits of British teenagers

Year group	Number reading a book at home	Percentage of year group sample
11-12 year-olds	127	64
12-13 year-olds	142	61
13-14 year-olds	147	64
14-15 year-olds	16	36

The table shows the decline in reading as children grow up and move through adolescence: only 16 teenagers were reading a book at home, whereas 147 13-14 year-olds were doing so. Surprisingly enough, the British teenagers' choices were not precisely easy-reading books:

⁷ Cited in Hopper, Rosemary. "What Are Teenagers Reading? Adolescent Fiction Reading Habits and Reading Choices". In *Literacy*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, November 2005, pp 113-120.

Table 1.3 Reading habits of British teenagers

Book title	Author	Students reading the book
<i>Harry Potter</i>	J. K. Rowling	36
<i>Lord of the Rings</i>	J. R. R. Tolkien	27
<i>Northern Lights</i>	Phillip Pullman	7
<i>Talking in Whispers</i>	James Watson	7
<i>The Hobbit</i>	J. R. R. Tolkien	5
<i>Holes</i>	Louis Sachar	4
<i>Double Act</i>	Jacqueline Wilson	3
<i>Girls in Love</i>	Jacqueline Wilson	3
<i>Goosebumps</i>	R. L. Stine	3
<i>The Amber Spyglass</i>	Phillip Pullman	3

The Latin America scenario is very different from the British one. Not only do Latin American kids not enjoy reading, but also when they decide to read at all, they choose a comic or some very low quality material, like showbiz magazines. This is something we will discuss at length in the section devoted to the reluctant reader market in Latin America.

With so many new forms of expression created by mass media—forms of expression that include television, cinema and videogames, and that ask for less of an effort from the consumer— it is not surprising that most teenagers do not consider reading an enjoyable thing to do. Reading requires effort and time, and so it demands a strong will and interest.

The love for reading starts at home, at an early age. If that was not the case, the reader requires a very special kind of book, one that serves as an entrance point, from which the reader can go to a different and more complex reading material. Providing the teenager with high-interest, age appropriate books,⁸ is one crucial step in helping them to find interest in reading.

2.1 General outlook of the reluctant reader market

In the last decade, the juvenile book market has grown enormously thanks, among other things, to the success of the *Harry Potter* series. After J. K. Rowling's success, youngsters started looking for other books and authors to read. According to the British study mentioned earlier, young readers have been mostly interested in books about magic and fantasy, a genre that "may be seen to fit the adolescent's desire to escape, or even to experiment with role and identity",⁹ represented by titles by J. K. Rowling, J. R. R. Tolkien and Philip Pullman. It is not always the case, though, that these books appealed to teenage reluctant readers. The length of the volumes and the complexity of the story deterred youngsters who were not used to reading. In Hopper's words, these authors

offer texts of varying degrees of reading challenge: the Harry Potter series is generally agreed to be less complex than the books of either Pullman or Tolkien. Both the latter demand high-level reading skills,

⁸ Veto, Dori. "Motivating Reluctant Adolescent Readers". *School Administrator* 63 no. 4, 21 April 2006.

⁹ Hopper, Rosemary. *op. cit.*

and also include intertextual references, and allow complex engagement with narrative, at several levels of challenge.¹⁰

A good book for reluctant readers will not be as complex as Pullman's or Tolkien's, or even as Rowling's, but it has to be interesting enough to appeal both to reluctant and fluent readers. The reluctant reader is drawn in to shorter volumes and stories with few characters and a simple narrative line. The stories for struggling readers are designed to be easy to read, so the reader does not encounter uncommon words or get lost in long sentences. These books are usually very short and the lines are widely spaced, so the final bound book looks like a short novel that the reader can feel proud of having finished.

It is interesting to mention that reluctant readers are three times more likely to be boys than girls.¹¹ When writing for teenage reluctant readers, the stories usually address boys or girls. The first reason for this is that the reader will feel attracted to a story depending on whether the protagonist is a girl or a boy. Then, the story will usually seem more appealing for girls if the heroine goes through an experience they can relate to, often connected to family relationships or friendship in general. Boys will be more interested when there is a storyline with lots of action. Orca Book Publishers is aware of this fact, and so the company publish books that are clearly addressed to either girls or boys, even though they can ultimately attract either gender.

Hi-Los is a term that comes from "high interest - low vocabulary readers", a term for novels written primarily for people that have a lower reading age than their chronological one. Penguin is one publisher that started a series for reluctant readers

¹⁰ Hopper, Rosemary. *idem*.

¹¹ Kropp, P. (n.d.). *The Boy Problem in Reading*. High Interest Publishing: HIP Books.

(called Penguin Readers). Others are Bloomsbury, Barrington Stoke, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, and Capstone Press.

As a rule of thumb, a novel for reluctant readers will not have this information printed on any page, for the reader would feel uncomfortable if treated as a special audience. In the case of Orca Book Publishers and its series called Orca Soundings, only the strictly promotional material for librarians and teachers will inform the intended readership of the series.

According to a 2005 survey,¹² four out of ten Canadians, age 16 to 65 (representing 9 million people), struggle with low literacy, falling below level 3 on the prose literacy scale. Of those adults with low literacy, 15 per cent have serious trouble dealing with any printed materials. Across the country, libraries and school boards develop programs to increase literacy and promote reading.

When it comes to teenage reluctant readers, Orca Book Publishers is the foremost publishing house in Canada, competing with Whitecap Books, High Interest Publishing, and Tea Leaf Press, which also publish high interest novels for teenagers. Orca's books have been chosen by librarians as ideal tools for teenagers to increase their reading habits.

¹² "Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey", Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005. In ABC-Life Literacy Canada (abclifeliteracy.ca).

2.2 The reluctant reader market in Latin America

The book market in Latin America faces many challenges. According to a 2007 research by Centro Regional para el Fomento del Libro en América Latina y el Caribe, CERLALC, and Convenio Andrés Bello,¹³ in 2006 only 99,000 books were published in Latin America (with a population of 580 million people), whereas 62,820 books were published in Spain (with only 46 million). Latin America imported books worth a total of 1,050 million dollars. On the other hand, 74% of Latin American publishing houses printed less than 20 titles a year and only 2% published over a hundred. Piracy is rampant, especially in Mexico, where the publishing sector loses 10% of total sales because of it.¹⁴

In a region where many fifteen-year-olds have trouble understanding the sense of a simple text, according to a UNESCO study,¹⁵ the reluctant reader market should be most prolific, but reading habits are just too low to show healthy book sales in any sector. The UNESCO study revealed that 80% of Peruvian fifteen year olds failed a basic reading test.

In the middle of this grim state of affairs, Argentina has showed some improvement in terms of sales in the past few years. In 2008, sales of literature books in general grew 3.5%, in relation to the previous year. According to the study “Global Entertainment and Media Outlook, 2008-2012”,¹⁶ developed by the company PricewaterhouseCoopers, sales in Argentina were of about US\$115 million. The study

¹³ Dávila Castañeda, Rosa Luz. “El libro en América Latina: Situación actual y políticas públicas”. *Boletín GC: Gestión Cultural No. 13: Políticas de apoyo al sector del libro*. September, 2005.

¹⁴ “México encabeza en América Latina la piratería de libros”, *Diario Hispano Mexicano* (Agencias), January 19, 2007.

¹⁵ BBCMundo.com, July 1st, 2003.

¹⁶ “Crece la venta de libros en Argentina”: <http://www.pwc.com/ar/es/prensa/assets/cp-200809-2.pdf>.

shows that Brazil, Mexico and Argentina are the foremost consumers of educational and general literature: Brazil sales are of US\$3,108 million and in Mexico sales reach US\$889 million. In Latin America the biggest percentage of book sales go to educational books, which in 2007 represented 54% of the total sales, whereas in Canada it was a 39% and in the US a 33%.

The same study suggested that in 2012, book sales in Latin America will grow 2.4% annually, from 4,591 million dollars in 2008 to 5.041 million dollars in 2012. Brazil is the dominant book market of the region, with 68% of total sales of all Latin America. Mexico follows with 19% and Argentina with 5%. General literature books are projected to sell 2,281 million dollars in 2012.

Brazil, Mexico and Argentina are the most important publishing markets in Latin America, followed by Colombia, Chile and Venezuela.¹⁷ But even so, the total production of the region is not even a 10% share of the global one.

2.2.1 The empire of Graphic Novels

The reluctant reader market in Mexico is saturated with graphic novels or comics. Reading books is out of the question for most of the population. For men there are cowboy stories like *El libro vaquero*, and for women romantic drama like *Lágrimas, risas y amor* or showbiz news, which sell more than half a million copies every week. Comics have been the first reading material for Mexican people since the 1950s. Both in big cities and little towns, comics are sold in millions: every month there are in

¹⁷ Dávila Castañeda, Rosa Luz, *op. cit.*

circulation 30 millions of the small graphic book *El libro vaquero*. In average, every copy of *El libro vaquero* is read by five people.

TV Notas, a showbiz magazine read mostly by women, has a print run of 780,000 per week, with a pass along of 4 people per copy, which means that it has three millions readers every week.¹⁸ *TV Notas* could be compared with magazines such as *OK!*, *US*, *Star*, *People*, and *Famous*. The magazine is made up of with many photographs that fill up most of the pages, and it gives an account of the latest TV people gossip.

Inheritors of comics like *Kalimán* (which used to run two million copies every week), today's graphic books for men—*Frontera violenta*, *La novela policiaca* y *El libro vaquero*— and women—*Lágrimas, risas y amor*—fill up newspaper stands and each can sell half a million copies weekly. Their price is less than 50 cents, whereas a normal book never sells for less than 5 dollars.

The challenge for publishing companies like Orca Book Publishing and also for Latin American federal governments is to slowly bring these reluctant readers to a completely different kind of texts. Those impressive numbers show that the interest in fiction does exist. It should be then possible to attract all these readers to a more varied and richer literature.

¹⁸ Marcín, Mauricio. "Historietas y revistas, no libros, lecturas favoritas del mexicano". *La Crónica de Hoy*, January 3, 2005.

3: Overview of Spanish Orca Soundings. The new titles

The Spanish Orca Soundings book series derives from the Orca Soundings English list. The first titles of the series were published four years ago, and since then four new books have been published every year. To date there are 16 Spanish titles. Two have just been published in 2010 and two more are coming, for a total of 18 titles. These four new translations—*Breathless*, *Grind*, *Stuffed* and *Knifepoint*—are to be analysed in depth in the translation section of this document, because they were translated as part of the internship recounted in this report.

Most of the Spanish Orca Soundings' titles were written by different authors. Only three have published more than one, and until now only one author, Eric Walters published three titles in the Spanish Orca Soundings: *Overdrive*, *Grind*, and *Stuffed*, published in Spanish as *A toda velocidad*, *Al límite* and *A reventar*. Eric Walters, one of Orca's most prolific authors, is also published by Penguin and Doubleday.

The Spanish series is very diverse, just as the original Orca Soundings. In this collection of books there are titles about peer pressure (*Al límite*, *A reventar*, *El soplón*, *A toda velocidad*, *El plan de Zee*), self-acceptance (*Identificación*, *Ni un día más*), bullying (*El qué dirán*, *Revelación*, *La Verdad*), and family issues (*De nadie más*, *El blanco*, *Un trabajo sin futuro*).

The four new titles of the series are very distinct. *Breathless (Respira)*, written by Pam Withers, is the story of Beverly, a 15 year-old scuba diver from Winnipeg who takes

a job with her uncle in Hawaii for a few weeks. There, she struggles with anorexia and learns to be in control when it comes to men and dating.

Unlike *Breathless*, Walters' *Grind* (*Al límite*) is a novel intended primarily for boys, a story about skateboarding and friendship. Phillip is a great skateboarder that is always skating with his friend Wally and, before his breakup, with his girlfriend Lisa as well. When Phillip realises they could be making money by recording their tricks in video and uploading them online, he gathers the group and they all try to skate for business. The tricks grow more dangerous over time and at the end the teens have to learn when to stop.

Both *Grind* and *Stuffed* (*A reventar*) were written by Eric Walters. *Stuffed*, which was nominated for ALA's Popular Paperbacks list this year, takes off from the moment a class of teenagers have just finished watching a documentary about the dangers of eating too much fast food. Ian, a very smart kid and the son of two lawyers, decides to promote a boycott against a big fast food chain and is threatened by its legal firm. With the help of his friends, Ian defends himself and stands up for his beliefs.

Knifepoint (*A punta de cuchillo*), the last of these four novels, stands out from the group because it is intended for a slightly older readership. Written by Alex Van Tol, *Knifepoint* is the story of Jill, a girl that is spending the summer in the mountains, working in a ranch as a guide for horseback rides. The violence of the story is blatant. Jill is kidnapped by a psychopath who plans to rape her, torture her and finally make her disappear in the bush.

The Spanish Orca Soundings series was at first developed thinking on the United States market, since the company received a considerable demand from teachers. The 18 titles of the Spanish line are some of the most successful ones from the original Orca

Soundings. The series is purchased by libraries, schools and vendors for the literacy program called Reading is Fundamental. The series is sold through direct mail to schools, off its website and directly.

4: The translation of Spanish Orca Soundings

When translating the books of the Orca Soundings series, the challenge is to achieve the same qualities that make the original novels so successful. Whether in French, Chinese, English or Spanish, they need to have a similarly uncomplicated vocabulary. The humour and usual light-heartedness of the English versions must prevail as well. It is also crucial to translate the books in such a way that the Latin American reluctant reader—or the US Spanish speaking reader—can enjoy the story as it was his or her own; in other words, that he or she can get completely immersed in the novel. The way to accomplish this is to pay attention to the narrative rhythm and never let it slip away. It is important here to underline the word *reluctant*, because the difficulty for the translator, as well as for the author, is precisely to find a way of making reading pleasant for someone that finds it hard to enjoy it at all.

The translator of a novel for reluctant readers needs to follow the same general guidelines as the author who writes for reluctant readers: she has to limit herself to short sentences devoid of unnecessary complications. The glue that keeps all those qualities together is rhythm: a unifying rhythm.

When working on the translation of a book for reluctant teenage readers, the translator tries, more than anything, to keep it simple. The vocabulary has to be basic enough for the reader to understand every word, but at the same time it has to be varied and rich, so the reader will feel challenged and never bored. He might need to decipher, by context, the meaning of a word he has never used, but those cases will be exceptional.

The second aspect that the translator has to consider at all times is rhythm, as I just mentioned. Rhythm is the key for keeping the reader interested. Even if the phrases need to be very short, the text has to flow, as a way of keeping the reader completely engaged with the story. The reading activity needs to be fluent, never broken by the use of a complicated word. Rhythm, actually, is cardinal when it comes to any kind of translation.

4.1 Translation for reluctant teenage readers in a Latin American context

If the reluctant reader market is a difficult one to reach in North America, where literacy is higher than in most Latin American countries, and where there are broader healthy reading habits; to do so in Latin America is even more complicated. Adults there are not used to reading, and teenagers are even less interested in doing so than youngsters in North America. Mexican people, for example, read an average of only 2.9 books a year, according to a national survey on reading habits developed by UNESCO.¹⁹ Parents do not normally read to their children, and so the kids grow up without the slightest interest in reading on their own.

A third of the Mexican population does not even read a book a year, another third reads one or two a year, the fourth of the population

¹⁹ In Flores, Guadalupe, “Mexicanos leen casi tres libros al año”, *Noticieros Televisa*, December 7th, 2010.

reads three books a year, whereas the remaining 4.2% reads more than ten books every year.²⁰

Very tangible testimony to this negligence is the lack of libraries in most Latin American countries. There are of course, excellent university libraries, but there are only a few small libraries that serve neighbourhoods or small regions. In Mexico, the Red Nacional de Bibliotecas (or National Network of Libraries) has 6,000 libraries in the country with holdings of 33 million books, which means that there are .33 books per capita.²¹ Generally speaking, reading is not something people do out of personal interest.

The Latin American reluctant reader market is therefore very reluctant and very hard to reach. When translating a book for this market, and particularly for teenagers, it is imperative to consider that the final result has to be very attractive for youngsters, both on the outside and in terms of the story content.

It is then very important to figure out what exactly teenagers regard as attractive features in a book. According to the Exeter University study mentioned in Part II of this report,²² when choosing a book to read teenagers consider the following:

- prior knowledge of book or author (116 of 707 students surveyed);
- the appearance of the book (115);
- recommendation (90);
- television or film (35);
- genre (26).

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Marcín, Mauricio, *op. cit.*

²² Harper, Rosemary, *op. cit.*

It is crucial that a text for reluctant readers is so uncomplicated that it will not scare any reader. The story, sure enough, needs to be so compelling from the first page on that the teenager cannot stop reading until the end. Fortunately, one book leads to another, which later could lead to a more complex one. The hardest step is the first one: in other words, the very first book a reluctant reader will pick up and read.

4.2 Review of Latin American context and its distinctiveness from the US Spanish market

It is true that the Latin American context is different from the Spanish speaking North American one, and it is also true that there are very significant differences between Latin American countries and even among certain regions within each country. However, there is a common cultural territory that everyone shares. When it comes to literature, there is no need to alter a story for reluctant readers of different regions: there is no need to make substantial changes for all of them to fully understand what is going on in the text. If the translator does a good job, any reluctant reader from any Spanish-speaking town will comprehend what is happening in a story, because any teenager ultimately experiences the same emotions, no matter where he or she grows up. Ultimately, he or she is responsible for his or her own reading and understanding of the text.

Even if local culture could make every reader approach a story in a slightly different way, at the end they will all appreciate as one the emotional development of a text. In other words, it is not the task of the translator to make changes for every reader

to understand a phrase or an expression, but to respect the particularities of the original text and convey them as loyally as possible.

Specific vocabulary and the regionalisms are a different story. When a Spanish translation is going to be read by people in different countries, the goal is to find a common ground where there are not regionalisms that could confuse the general readership. The word “computer”, for example, could be translated as *ordenador* (as it is used in Spain) or as *computadora*, or even as the masculine word *computador*. Orca chooses the second one because its use is the most commonly used one.

The *voseo* (use of the subject *vos* with singular non-deferential value) is a frequently used second person singular form of address in various American regions, but given that most of Spanish speaking countries use the pronoun *tú* instead of *vos* for saying “you”, Orca Soundings uses that pronoun. The same is true for the conjugation of verbs. In the south of the continent people accentuate the last syllable of certain forms of verbs, but since the majority of countries don’t, Orca Book Publishers follows that rule. As an example we have the word “mira” (“look”), which in South America people accentuate as “mirá”, whereas in the northern Latin American countries is pronounced “mira”, strengthening the first syllable instead of the second. Other conjugations follow the normal use in northern Latin America.

The challenge for the translator is to find that common ground where the great majority of readers will feel comfortable enough to keep reading. His or her purpose is to bring the world of North American teenagers to the Latin American world, in such a way they can ultimately make the story their own. No matter if the translated book will be read in Argentina, Peru or Mexico, the reader should feel integrated by a common language and never alienated by foreign expressions.

4.3 Translation work: Orca Soundings into Spanish

Most scholars agree about what makes a book appropriate for reluctant readers. There are a few qualities that a successful reluctant reader book should have. In terms of the plot, it needs to be simple and linear, without unnecessary flashbacks. The story needs to be plot driven. Let us take the cases of the four most recent stories that have been translated into Spanish: *Breathless*, *Grind*, *Stuffed* and *Knifepoint*.

Breathless, by Pam Withers, flows nonstop from the moment she takes her first dive with her uncle. The reader gets to know in the first pages that she intends to lose a few pounds, no matter what the cost is, and to have her first boyfriend. We follow Beverly through her time in Hawaii. We see her starving, diving in very dangerous conditions because of dietary weakness, and we are with her when she meets an 18 year-old guy that will pursue her so aggressively that she'll have to draw a very firm line for her own safety.

On the way, Beverly learns the dangers of anorexia and gets new confidence as a growing woman. The story never breaks its continuity. Time wise, it goes from one day to the next, from one situation to the following. We only know about her life in Winnipeg and about her family through some of her memories, since she's the omniscient narrator of the novel. Other facts from the past are recounted through dialogue, never through flashbacks.

Just like *Breathless*, *Grind* and *Stuffed* flow day to day, with the novels' main characters acting as the narrators. Having the protagonists as narrators make it easier to convey the story in a simple way, but most of all, it helps the reader feel more connected to the narrative, as if he or she were directly participating in what is happening. Among

these most recent Spanish Orca Soundings books, *Grind* is the one with the most lines of dialogue.

In *Knifepoint*, the author narrates the actions as they happen in a few hours. The novel starts when Jill wakes up and starts working at the ranch. Jill, as the omniscient narrator, mentions that she recently had a problem with her boss. The reader understands that her anger is fuelling her bad judgement when she takes out a visitor for a horse ride without informing anyone on the ranch. Once out, away from everyone, the man gets very violent and yet she manages to escape him, only to get into his hands again and become very close to death. At the end, her strength and experience as a wildlife guide helps her to survive, while her attacker dies in the white waters.

In the case of *Knifepoint*, the translation had to adapt to a different readership age. *Breathless*, *Grind* and *Stuffed* have fifteen-year-old characters meant for a readership of the same age, and so they all use a very tame vocabulary. *Knifepoint's* characters, on the other hand, are about eighteen-year-olds, and the book includes some cursing. The translation of expletive expressions required caution, since the series is to be offered to Latin American school librarians.

In all four books, the dialogue is straightforward, realistic and natural. The translation of the dialogue had to be made in the same manner. Eric Walter's books, *Grind* and *Stuffed*, had the most dialogues of the four, and *Knifepoint* the least. Both *Knifepoint* and *Breathless* use more narration than conversation among the characters. It is very likely that this is due to the intended readership: since the first two books, *Grind* and *Stuffed*, have male protagonists and therefore are most likely to be read by boys, dialogues are the best bet. It is important to remember that there are two boys for

every three reluctant readers, and that boys feel more inclined to dynamic stories, sometimes better conveyed by dialogue than by narration.

The Spanish versions also needed to keep the humour of the originals, both in dialogue and narration, and make propitious adaptations of puns. In *Breathless*, for example, a Hawaiian boy talks about Winnipeg as “*Winter-peg*”. Given that a combination of the word Winnipeg and the Spanish word for “cold” would not make any sense for the Spanish readership, the final translation was “*Friolandia*”, which in English would mean something like “coldland”. This translation holds the humorous touch of the original, for in Spanish words ending in “*landia*” are always connected to childlike expressions.

As most reluctant reader books usually do, the four original stories use short phrases instead of lengthy ones. This characteristic was transported to the translations almost unflinching. In cases where the Spanish expressions were too abrupt, two short phrases were connected to make a very simple but slightly longer one. As an example of this particular matter, we have, in *Breathless*, the following: “Okay, so I’m not fat. I’m pudgy. And I’m not as ugly as that freaky fish was, for sure. It scared me.” In Spanish, the exact same punctuation would’ve been too succinct, because Hispanics are used to more flowing sentences, so the translation was more interconnected, keeping, of course, the sentiment, humour and colloquial colour of the above: “Bueno, no soy gorda: soy regordeta. Y no soy tan fea como ese engendro de pez; eso sí que no. Me dio un buen susto.” The colon and the semicolon make the phrase more fluid while keeping the necessary stops in the text.

In many other cases, it was possible to keep the phrases as short as in the original. In *Knifepoint* it was crucial to do so, since Alex Van Tol, author of the novel, used forced

stops for a dramatic effect: “This is such. A bad. Day.” The Spanish translation was finally: “Es. De verdad. Un día. Terrible.”

These two examples make another point as well: the vocabulary used in Orca Soundings’ books is fairly basic, which is another prerequisite for a book intended for reluctant readers. Everything that can be told in a straightforward manner will be told that way. And of course, the same rule applies to the Spanish translations. In the books we have teenagers speaking, as well as teenagers’ inner thoughts as narration, and even though these teenagers are normal smart kids, they will always speak in a simple way. There is no beating around the bush; the authors are blunt at all times, and so are their characters.

As for helping the readers to broaden their vocabulary, Orca Soundings introduces a few words that may not be considered of everyday use, at least not in the particular case of reluctant readers. As it was already said, these words are repeated a few times to reinforce their acquisition. It is the case, for example, of the word “boycott”, used several times in *Stuffed*, for it is a central point to the storyline.

In terms of vocabulary, Orca Soundings usually introduces specific words that enrich every story, depending on its subject matter. Each of these four books has a very particular terminology. *Grind*, a novel about skateboarders, presents several expressions to refer to skateboarding tricks, many of which were used in the Spanish translation without any change. The same was decided when working in the French translation. Words like *skateboarding*, *ollie*, *fakie* and *tail slide*, were kept in English for the Spanish versions. Just the same as words related to the Internet, like *webmaster*. When English words were kept in the translations, italics were the norm.

When working on *Breathless*, on the other hand, it was necessary to bring a special attention to scuba diving terminology. In this case, however, the Spanish version uses mostly the translated words, since they are of common use in everyday language. An example of this situation is the word “regulator”, translated as *regulador*. The case of the word “divemaster” is different. It was decided not to translate it, since it is an English word that Hispanic people in the scuba business use anyways. Likewise, specific horse riding terminology in *Knifepoint* was also translated.

In the book *Stuffed*, finally, there was some law-related terminology that was easily translated, for the general population normally uses those terms. A separate matter is the chat-room language used in the original. Both in English and Spanish, youngsters today are using a very specific way of writing when in chat rooms. After researching some Spanish chat rooms, the translation work was then all about finding the correct abbreviation for every shortened English word, and then trying to make the dialogues understandable for people that are not used to that kind of condensed language.

Another focal point in reluctant reader novels is to have only a few characters in every story and giving them names that are easy to remember and also very different to clearly distinguish the characters from one another. All these stories have very few characters: one protagonist, one or two secondary characters and only two less important ones. The names are always of common use: Beverly, Garth, Phillip, Wally, Lisa, Ian, Julia, Jill, Darren. As in most modern translations, Orca Soundings uses the original names for the Spanish versions.

4.3.1 The Spanish titles

The Spanish titles for these four books were chosen considering good resonance as well as meaning. The Spanish choice for *Breathless* was not a direct translation of the word, because it would not be very attractive sound-wise. Instead of going for something like “Sin aire”, which would have been the exact translation of the English title, our choice was *Respira*, which literally means “Breathe in”. In the context of this title, *Respira* makes the reader think of a moment of anguish when it is necessary to remind oneself to keep it together.

The Spanish translation for *Grind* needed a lot of thought, since the English title came from a skateboarding trick and, at the same time, conveys the idea of going too far, of touching reasonable limits. Thinking about this second meaning, and considering that the characters in the story go beyond sensible caution, *Grind* became *Al límite*, which literally means “To the limit”.

Stuffed and *Knifepoint* were translated in a more direct way from the original titles. *Stuffed* Spanish title is *A reventar*, an expression used when a person has eaten too much, but also in limit situations, when something is so stressful that something seems to be about to snap. *Knifepoint*, on the other hand, was translated as *A punta de cuchillo*, which means exactly the same, without losing the compelling sound of the original, thanks to the strong sound of the word “cuchillo”, or knife.

All these Spanish titles are very attractive sound-wise and easy to remember, as are their original counterparts. As for the 14 previous titles of the Spanish Orca Soundings, they also used short phrases that conveyed the strength of the stories, for

example: *La tormenta, La guerra de las bandas, Los Pandemónium, Un trabajo sin futuro, Ni un día más, Revelación.*

5: Marketing work as Business Development Manager – Latin America

Orca Book Publishers is distributed in the United States by Ingram and Baker & Taylor. Orca's business partners distribute their titles in Europe and Asia, both in English and in translation. In the last couple of years, the series Orca Soundings has also been sold in the United States' Spanish market. Even though there has not been a focused effort to sell the books in Latin America, those distributing companies could ship these books there only upon online or phone request. Since the books are not being promoted at the moment, there has not been demand for the series in those territories. The success of the Orca Soundings series in Canada and the United States has prompted the publishers to develop a commercial agenda for a Latin American distribution.

In May 2010, Orca started approaching distribution companies in Mexico and made some efforts to promote the Spanish series. Although no agreement has been made, we have at the moment a very good distribution option: Selector. This Mexican distribution and publishing company has 900 points of sale in that country and abroad, so it seems to be an ideal option for Orca Book Publishers.

In view of the fact that titles similar to the Orca Soundings series published by other companies like Ediciones Castillo, Fondo de Cultura Económica, and Editorial Alfaguara, are selling in Mexico for about 8 Canadian dollars (between 95 and 100 Mexican pesos), that is the selling price Orca is proposing.

Before Selector, we approached four other companies that seemed like good possibilities: Editorial Océano de México, Colofón, Editorial Castillo and Algarabía (through Editorial Otras Inquisiciones). We sent these companies a book package with title information sheets and promotion material. Even though a couple of them showed interest, they did not commit, so we moved forward to Selector.

At the same time, for literary reviews we contacted the digital editions of two literary magazines: the Madrid magazine *Leer* and the Barcelona magazine *Qué leer*, and also the Mexican magazine *Algarabía*. The space for reviewing in the magazines is unfortunately limited and mostly reserved for paying publishing houses.

After researching English schools and pedagogical universities in Mexico, we sent a book package to each language school to promote the titles among the English teachers, who could use the English Orca Soundings in class.

We are now researching the Mexican Government Reading Program to participate with a few titles of the Spanish Orca Soundings in the contest called Libros del Rincón. This federal program invites publishing houses to present some of their books to be chosen as part of the class libraries (very selective small libraries within each class).

5.1 Future promotion in Latin America

Given that the reluctant reader market in Latin America is dominated by comics, a good way of entering that market would be through Orca Book Publishers graphic novels, which could also be translated for the Spanish readership. Orca Book Publishers

graphic novels combine adventure and suspense, and are intended for children 8 to 11. The young readers could get to know Orca Book Publishers from an early age and would be aware of the publisher's catalogue through some publicity inserted in the graphic novels. Those young readers would become familiar with Orca Soundings and with other Orca Book Publishers' series.

In terms of publicity, it would be interesting to present the Orca Soundings series with a campaign using a graphic novel style, for that is the medium the reluctant readers are used to. Just as an idea for how that campaign might be approached, there could be signs advertising Orca Soundings books outside Latin American high schools and bookstores. These signs could be made using a few panels in a graphic novel style. For example, for *Breathless*, or *Respira*, the first image would be of Beverly happily swimming in Hawaii with Garth, the divemaster, and thinking about her determination to lose weight. The second one would show Garth's violent attempts to kiss her, and the third one would show her trying to get it together, accompanied by the words "Respira...", and "An Orca Soundings novel". The dramatic conclusion would be excluded in the promotion comic, drawing the public to read Pam Withers' novel.

6: Observations and conclusions

The process of introducing the series Orca Soundings into the Latin American market presented a set of challenges. For one part, the series for reluctant readers had to be offered to Latin American publishers and distributors that are already working near their limit. The Latin American market is so constricted that introducing a new product is a hard and slow task.

The achievements of the last period of this internship project are promising, but there is no distribution agreement signed. In order to see satisfying results, it is important to follow this matter through for a few more months.

The translation work that has been done during the period of this internship will support the strategies that were initiated at the beginning, and will help to achieve the pre-established goals in terms of distribution into the Latin American market.

The work done for Orca Book Publishers during this internship allowed me to develop a series of skills for translating novels intended for reluctant readers. When working on this kind of novel, the translator, like the author, needs to limit her vocabulary and the length of every expression, keeping in mind at all times that the narration rhythm should never be broken. It is thanks to that rhythm that the reluctant reader will be able to finish the reading activity. Rhythm is key in any translation, but in the case of a struggling reader it is even more important. If a translation makes an unnecessary pause, the reader will be lost and will simply close the book. A novel for reluctant readers must be fluent from the first phrase to the last.

All of my work for Orca Book Publishers, both the translation part and the marketing one, allowed me to become familiar with the workings of a Canadian publisher and with the specifics of a series intended for reluctant readers. The biggest challenge at the moment is to keep alive the connections already made with foreign publishers and distributors and to follow this matter through to finally get the books into the Latin American market.

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