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CONSIDERATION OF MODERN LITERARY TEXT IN RUSSIAN IN THE ITALIAN AUDIENCE

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Abstract: *The article is concerned with the study of Russian literature by Italian philology students. The research is based on the book "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" written by Yana Mori. The article aims at determining how and to what extent Italians understand the Russian literary text. The research tasks are to describe the specific perception of the text in question and evaluate its translation into Italian. The authors use a comprehensive approach, including observation and generalization methods at the intersection of literary criticism, linguistics, psychology and semiotics. They comment on some characters and text realities and reveal that Italians did not find it difficult to perceive the meaning of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" despite the abundance of quasi-real phenomena. The authors also compare different translations into Italian and analyze samples that indicate linguistic and cultural differences. The complex study of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" has been conducted for the first time.*

Keywords: *Italian-Russian translations; specifics of languages and cultures; information decoding; characters and realities; modern literary text; Russian language.*

INTRODUCTION

A person obtains much information from texts, including from belles-lettres of the 21st century. The study subject is a multifaceted problem at the level of interdisciplinary research: the perception of information in modern Russian literature from the standpoint of the Italian culture. The research material is the book "Songs of the Shaman's Mom: Philosophical Tales about Time, Apples and the Meaning of Life" written by Yana Mori (Mori, 2018). Yana Mori's works have not been considered in literary criticism, linguistics or translation studies. The article aims at determining the specific perception of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" in Russian by Italian students. The study objectives are as follows: to describe the specific perception of information in this text and its translation into Italian. The study results are related to the text and its Russian-Italian translation.

We consider text understanding "in the medium of language" (Gadamer, 1991) as an issue of modern linguistics and humanitarian knowledge. We need to define the boundaries of awareness and unconsciousness, understanding and misunderstanding in connection with the perception of a foreign language text. Semiotics regards language as a complex language sign, while the perception of a text presupposes the perceptual-cognitive-affective processing of one's experience in cognition and communication, including verbal and non-verbal, personal and social (Zalevskaya, 2018).

The study of text understanding is interdisciplinary and lies at the intersection of literary criticism, linguistics, psychology and semiotics. In the course of the study, we applied a comprehensive approach using observation and generalization methods. Culture leaves an imprint on the world perception and the process of thinking. Mental activity is inextricably linked with the cultural space determining the "form and boundaries of the mind" (Bruner, 2006). Contemporary culture is a dynamic system and assumes the free coexistence of various cultural worlds with their values and life priorities (Denisova, 2019). Third-year students studying Russian at the Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology at the University of Florence (FORLILPSI) were asked to translate fragments of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" from Russian into Italian. The decoding of this literary text was influenced by its understanding and interpretation. Any fictional text is complex since it is metaphorical and any metaphor "aims at bringing an infinite number of possible effects" (Eco, 2014).

THE LOGIC OF PRESENTING IDEAS AND EXPRESSING MEANINGS IN THE TEXT

The book under consideration has a special structure and poetical form. The songs, or fairy tales, do not have the same plot. The students focused on the melodiousness of certain songs and the author's metaphors used in the construction of phrases. Difficulties in decoding the given text were primarily associated with allegories.

1. Title. The melodiousness of the verses expresses the extravagance and magic of the story. The author introduces images and characters known and unknown to the reader to convey the atmosphere of mystery and creates a tangible emotional effect. To comment on the text, we consulted with explanatory, linguistic, encyclopedic, associative and mythological dictionaries. The title of the book is derived from the word *pesn* [song] that is close to the meaning of *folk tale* in Russian. This fact conditions the specific content, lyricism and melodiousness of the text.

The word *shaman* can be perceived in both an intercultural and supracultural meaning: *a wizard, witch doctor, sorcerer, healer, magician, miracle worker, enchanter, even a lama, fakir, monk or just a traditional practioner (Rotmistrov, 2006-2020)*. Associative dictionaries list 67 associations for the word *shaman*. The most common ones are as follows: *a man, bonfire, fire, to conjure, trance, dance, ritual, fortune-telling, to invoke, etc.* The Russian version of such a dictionary also lists the *Chukchi, Indian, Nenets*, i.e. the names of peoples living on different continents. This is an interesting fact since associations often express the conceptual meaning of a word.

According to encyclopedic dictionaries, the word *shaman* comes from Sanskrit and means a monk. Historically, it was adopted by the Ural-Altai languages and then transferred to English. At the end of the 17th century, Italians borrowed the word from English (Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana, 2018). Thus, the Italian students did not have any difficulties perceiving and decoding the meaning of this word. They defined a shaman as a person having the skills of a traumatologist and healer, who can communicate

with spirits and natural forces, as well as change reality. Both Italians and Russians perceive this image in the same way.

The title and context of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" combine the concept of *shaman* with the concept of *mother*. Mother and son are eternal concepts. The text does not specify whether it is an adult or a child son. The author conveys motherly love for her son through usual and unusual actions. In the text, the mother's ability to change reality and her own image does not seem fantastic when she follows her son. She turns into a fish, a hare, winter, etc. The linguistic perception of the text is intertwined with philosophical. In Russian, the word *mom* is used in family communication and when children talk about their mothers (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014). An informal and emotional address to the mother is associated and correlated with such concepts as *children, son and daughter*. The emotional reflection of the author became the source of this literary text. There is the following dedication in the book: "To my Mom who will love me *even after hundreds of light-years*".

Like the word *shaman*, the word *mom* in the title and text is written with a capital letter. The Italian students use the word *mother (madre)* in non-family communication. When they were acquainted with the text, they began to consider the image of mother as the progenitor of humankind. In Italian, the word *mother (Madre)* should be capitalized when used in the meaning of "the mother of Jesus Christ" (Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana, 2018). Thus, the image fixed in the national consciousness is projected onto the perception of a fictional character since the author's imagination often brings the reader into a mythological quasi-reality. Mother is a primary archetype. The divine origin of shamans is also described in Buryat mythology (Dashieva, 2014).

The ancestrality of the mother image (informally called "*mom*" in Russian) lies in its universality. She is the progenitor not only of her own family but, possibly, of all humankind. While recalling all her lives, the heroine of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" lives both in the real and fantasy world. On the one hand, she rules the entire Universe on par with God: in a blink of an eye, the Shaman's Mom can become *a hundred years younger or accidentally get several centuries older, end wars with a single movement of her hand*, turn into any animal, *destroy the whole world and immediately create it anew... Through the ages*, different mythological creatures respond to her voice. On the other hand, the Shaman's Mom raises bread and kneads dough, bakes pies, collects medicinal herbs, combs her dogs, spins wool and knits socks, i.e., performs ordinary and understandable actions. Thus, the unusual and the ordinary are intertwined in the narrative imperceptibly and organically.

2. An appeal to different cultures through symbolic characters. Text understanding is associated with the perception of meanings through some mythologemes that cannot be unambiguously attributed to any particular culture.

The World Turtle with a map of the universe depicted on its shell (Mori, 2008) is an ancient image of the universe typical of Chinese mythology. The upper shield of the shell is like the sky and the lower one is like flat and square earth. At the same time, American Indians associated the turtle with the power of the female origin. Since the shell of some turtles consists of 13 plates and the lunar year consists of 13 lunar cycles, there are reasonable scientific assumptions that the symbolic connection between the moon and the turtle goes back to this understanding.

Black blue-eyed kelpies (Mori, 2008). In Scottish mythology, kelpies are water fairies that inhabit rivers or lakes. They can appear in the guise of a horse grazing by the water that lets people mount it and then drags them into the water. Kelpies are often

associated with the Loch Ness Monster. They are also mentioned in J. Rowling's "Harry Potter".

Hwedo (Mori, 2008). In Dahomey mythology, *Aido-Hwedo* is the Rainbow Serpent. When it floats to the water surface, it is reflected in the sky as a rainbow. In early myths, this creature is presented as a demiurge, namely, the creator of all that is. *Aido-Hwedo* is older than the earth and sky. Moving on the ground, it created the surface of the earth. The serpent supports the earth by curling up in a ring and biting its own tail. When the creature tries to get comfortable, it can cause earthquakes (Shcheglov, Archer, 2006).

This article does not aim at considering the realities mentioned in "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" that go back to one or another culture. We only note that realities, like mythologemes, cannot be unambiguously attributed to a specific culture. In our opinion, "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" demonstrate a tendency of modern literature to erase national differences in the perception of artistic images and move towards things common to all humankind. However, the language consciousness of each Italian student can interpret the meaning of the text and certain statements in their own way. The correct understanding is associated with the specific interpretation of linguistic means used in the Russian text.

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THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT OF THE TEXT

The processes of understanding are considered in psycholinguistics. They are influenced by various mental processes related to each other: thinking, speech, memory, attention, perception, understanding and emotions. The previous experience of an individual is also important for the understanding of texts as "any verbal interpretation is based on a wide network of connections in one's mind and body memory, without which no understanding or mutual understanding can be realized" (Zalevskaya, 2018). Today, linguistics encourages the semantic-cognitive approach to language (Popova, Sternin, 2007). Let us consider specific examples of translating thoughts into words, linguistic means and their use in the above-mentioned text.

The reader's attention focuses on the meaning of each message. The special structure, melody, unpredictability and phantasmagoric characters common to "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" prepare the reader for the perception of quasi-real images and text transformations. The Italian students did not have any problems with the perception and translation of the following phrase: *The Shaman's mother takes a spoon out of the cup and the whole Universe slows down (Mori, 2008, p. 55)*. The translation of particular phrases and sentences shows that half of the original text is translated into Italian almost identically: *the wind of wanderings* (that children bring in their palms) (*il vento dei pellegrinaggi*) (Mori, 2008, p. 10), *rhythm breaks* (when the Shaman's Mom taps the rhythm with her left heel) (*il ritmo si spezza*) (Mori, 2008, p. 13), *loves terribly* (*ama terribilmente*) (Mori, 2008, p. 6), *crosses an invisible border* (*attraversa un confine invisibile*) (Mori, 2008, p. 91).

The process of translation becomes more complicated if there are differences between languages and cultures and the specific usage is fixed in one's language consciousness. Let us consider the translation of some words and semantic constructions that cannot be or should not be literally translated from Russian into Italian. In the course of the study, we found and classified more than a hundred of such lexemes and phrases. To support this idea, we will provide some examples.

1. The word level: vocabulary. As a rule, the names of public holidays, rites and national dishes are lexical gaps (cannot be translated into another language). In "Songs of the Shaman's Mom", there are two words associated with the traditional Russian/Slavic cuisine: [*pirožki*] and [*studen*]. The Shaman's Mom *brings pirožki to her son* (Mori, 2008, p. 91). [*Pirožki*] ([*pirožok*] in singular) are a well-known dish in Russian cuisine. The second meaning mentioned in the explanatory dictionary defines them as "small oval-shaped pastries with a filling" (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014). There is no such dish in Italy. Thus, the Italian students perceived this word using the teacher's comments and translated it as a *focaccine* (round or flat bread product baked in the oven or on the grill). In northern Italy, this word also denotes various types of traditional sweets made from yeast dough and filled with different ingredients depending on the region. In southern Italy, it is a dish consisting of several layers of thin dough, stuffed with various ingredients and baked in the oven. For Russians, the word *focaccia* is new. Russian restaurateurs call *focaccia* or *focaccina* Italian bread baked with the addition of spices and herbs. Upon reverse translation, the Russian version would correspond to a *lepeszka* (flatbread). This parallel translation goes back to the French version of "Little Red Riding Hood" by C. Perrault, well known to both Italians and Russians. The girl brings gifts to her grandmother: *focaccine* (in Italian) and [*pirožki*] (in Russian). Consequently, this version of the translation is incorporated into the experience of reading literary texts and is included in the mnemonic associative knowledge of students.

[*Studen*] is a dish made of jelled meat or fish broth with small pieces of meat or fish that turned into jelly while cooling down (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014). *The air around her (the Shaman's Mom) is like jelly [studen]* (Mori, 2018, p. 91). In Italian, *l'aria attorno a lei sembrava gelatina*. Italians do not have jelled meat like the Russian [*studen*]. *Gelatina* evokes the same feeling as the Russian word denoting *jelly*. In this case, the *jelly* variation preserves the meaning of the original text.

2. The phrase level: epithets. To what extent is it possible to predict the Russian variants of lexical compatibility and metaphoricity for the Italian translation? In Russian, a *fast-flowing stream* is possible (Mori, 2018, p. 18) since the dictionary mentions such a meaning as "moving at high speed" (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014). The specifics of Italian are that both adjectives and adverbs have the same linguistic form. If the denotative meaning of the word is a reference point, then Italian *veloce* (*fast*) is similar to the Russian one but is used as an adverb: "a stream that runs fast". However, we took the Russian syntax as a basis and translated the above-mentioned phrase as *ruscello allegro*. In this case, Italian *allegro* means not only "fast" but also "cheerful, joyful and lively". The choice of possible translations is conditioned by the general context and the mood of the reader and/or the translator. The predicted associative field of the given text fragment reveals a large number of positive associations. The Shaman's Mom knits a sweater from everything imaginable and inconceivable, including *this fast-flowing stream*. The result is a sweater [*ladnyj*] (well-made) (Mori, 2018, p. 19). For Italians, it is hard to understand this adjective and we believe it is better to be translated not as "well-made" (*ben fatto*) (Dobrovolskaja, 2011) but as "a thing that fits well" (*maglione perfetto*).

Another Russian epithet [*kruglyj*] is used in such a phrase as *all year round* (Mori, 2018, p. 6). Metaphoricity originates from the denotation: the explanatory dictionary records the first meaning of "having the shape of a circle" and the second meaning of "being full and whole" (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014), which is absent in Italian. The Italian translation presupposes variants that have approximately the same meaning "throughout the year" but are used in different types of speech, from literary to colloquial (*per tutto l'anno, per l'anno intero, per l'anno sano*). The lexical compatibility of a word is inherent in the mind of a native speaker. For example, the Russian word *zarya* (dawn) can be combined with such adjectives as *scarlet or red*, which derives from the folk-poetic origin "bright and light": red dawn (Mori, 2018, p. 24). Historically, the word *red* designates a color and adopts other meanings from Russian folk poetry. These include "beautiful, gorgeous; honorable; joyful; bright, light" (Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar russkogo yazyka, 2014). In Italian, dawn is usually described with the epithet of *pink* (*l'alba rosa*).

In addition to common metaphors, "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" also contains the author's metaphors. One of them refers to *mountains as horned* (Mori, 2018, p. 24). This combination of an adjective and a noun is acceptable in the Russian language since it highlights the meaning "in the form of horns". The Italian students translated this metaphor either as the combination "in the form of horns" (*a forma di corna*) or as the adjective "pointed" (*appuntite*). In Italian, horned is used to describe "a man who cheats on his wife", which is offensive. A similar meaning is present in the Russian language, but the noun (*cuckold*) is more frequently used than the relevant adjective. The subconscious emphasis on the second meaning of this adjective can be explained by the lexical and grammatical categories typical of the Italian language: the adjective coincides in its form with the noun and is mentioned in an entry both in translation (Dobrovolskaja, 2011) and explanatory dictionaries (De Mauro, 2008). The metaphorical meaning "in the form of horns or a sickle" is not dominant for Italian and is revealed only in the Big Italian Dictionary (Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana, 2018). The same applies to *udobno* (conveniently) (Mori, 2018, p. 53) in the phrase – *the tablecloth fits on the table conveniently*. The Russian adverb *conveniently* has an additional meaning of "nicely". The Italian students managed to perceive this meaning in the Russian context but translated it into Italian using the adverb "softly" (*morbidamente*) and avoided the literal translation as "conveniently or comfortably" (*comodamente*) (Dobrovolskaja, 2011). In Italian, this adverb is usually combined with an animate noun to mean "someone who gives a feeling of comfort or ensures a state of well-being" (Treccani vocabolario online, 2011).

3. The sentence level: stereotypes in communication. The specific transmission and perception of information are associated with the pragmatics of the text. The choice of vocabulary is not always conditioned by the meaning of a particular lexical unit but rather by a conceptual framework of a particular language. The Russian expression *the house is open* (for guests) is synonymous with the expression *the door is open*. *The house of the Shaman's Mom is always open to tired sailors* (Mori, 2018, p. 52). In Italian, it is also possible to use the phrase *the house is open*, but it is better to say *the door is open* (*La porta della Mamma dello Sciamano è semper aperta ai marinai stanchi*). This is a communication stereotype that fits such a situation, and this phrase is more widely used by Italians.

There is a different translation of the phrase about sailors who leave *salt marks on the floor* (Mori, 2018, p. 52). In this context, the word *floor* is better to be translated into Italian as *land* (*terra*). In Italian, *land* has a broader denotative meaning: its fourth meaning is "a surface, most often flat, on which a person (or an animal) stands, walks, etc.,

or on which a building, a room is located". Thus, *land and floor* can be synonymous for Italians in certain contexts (Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana, 2018).

Differences in syntax can be explained by the different structure of languages: for example, the abundance of impersonal sentences in Russian, where the logical subject of action is mentioned in the dative case. There are many examples, but we will consider only two of them. *There is a dream in them that they have returned home* (Mori, 2018, p. 53). Such sentences are usually translated into Italian as personal constructions but here we can also use a gerund based on the subject in the previous sentence (*Sognando di essere tornati a casa*). Russian impersonal sentences with a combination of predicative adverbs and infinitives are translated into Italian with the use of personal constructions: *it is always hard for the Shaman's Mom to fall asleep and when sleep comes, it is often uneasy* (Mori, 2018, p. 23) (*La Mamma dello Sciamano fatica semper a prendere sonno e rimane in dormiveglia*). This is the main difference between Italian and Russian. However, we do not claim that the structure of a language influences the perception of the world and the views of its speakers, especially their cognitive processes. Any language is more of a tool for reproducing ideas, but not the idea itself (Deutscher, 2010). The comparison of the Russian text and its Italian translation might be of interest for a translation course. Translation studies in universities aim at expanding methods, materials, curricula and activities for teaching translation (Piotrowska, Tyupa, 2014) and are considered in various aspects, including social (Farahzad, Varmazyari, 2018).

RESULTS

Our article studies the understanding of the literary text in question and the factors on which it depends. The main ideas and conclusions were presented in our report and discussed at the 2nd International conference "The synergy of languages and cultures: interdisciplinary studies" on September 25-26, 2020 held by the Saint Petersburg State University. The key ideas and examples were original and published for the first time. Further research can be concerned with the analysis of popular literary texts in Russian and describe special variants of their translation into Italian.

CONCLUSION

A fictional text is filled with potential meanings that the perceiving consciousness of a reader should process. A special combination of meanings creates a psychological effect, i.e., the emotional effect of immersion into the world of ideas, characters and feelings conceived by a particular author. Each individual has their own knowledge and ideas about the world, namely their personal cognitive space. According to our observations, Italian students would better understand a literary text in Russian if they determine its semantic features and possess the necessary linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge. Text interpretation is associated with the reader's expertise in the field of cultures, traditions and myths. To create new meanings when reading a literary text, it is necessary to perceive the basic methods of conveying the author's ideas.

Conclusion No. 1. The comments on characters and mythologemes we proposed help students in disclosing the meanings of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" written by Yana Mori. Within such an approach, Italian students did not find it difficult to perceive the meaning of "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" despite the abundance of quasi-real phenomena and artistic metaphors. The images and associations used in the text belong to different

cultures (without any of them given a priority), which probably appeals to the younger generation. The diversity of realities should also create a general sense of the unified world, which affects the reader's perception. Currently, some scholars declare the formation of a new language personality (Denisova, 2019).

Conclusion No. 2. The decoding of the information in "Songs of the Shaman's Mom" requires the understanding of specific features common to the Russian language. We selected some samples from this Russian literary text and compared them with the Italian translation. Means of expressing one or another meaning in Russian and Italian disclosed the possibilities of both languages in this sphere. In the course of the study, we revealed interesting facts that do not lie on the surface of perception but can be realized only in each case of comparison.

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