

## TRANSLATING FOLKLORE: THE MYTH OF *BABA JAGA* IN AFANASEV'S FAIRY TALES

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**Abstract:** The main aim of this article is to provide a thorough insight about the difficulties encountered when translating fairy tales from Slavic folklore, in a sense that not only it implies the shift from an oral version to a written one, but also it has to face all the challenges of children's literature. In order to do this, we have analyzed one of the hundreds of fairy tales present in the work of the Russian writer and linguist Aleksandr Nikolaevič Afanas'ev, *Narodnye russkie skazki*, an extraordinary collection and classification of a large amount of fairy tales of the Slavic oral culture. Our analysis focuses on the well-known character *Baba Jaga*, the 'wooden leg' witch, who lives in an *izba* and rests on hen's legs in an enchanted wood. In particular, an attempt is made to conduct a translational analysis of Afanas'ev's text, within the framework of textual typology considering the translation macro-strategy, the most significant linguistic factors, as well as some potential translation strategies which help the story to fit in the target language and culture in the best possible way.

**Key words:** translation, fairy tale, Slavic folklore, mythology, translation strategies

### 1. Introduction

Having become one of the typical characters of Slavic folklore (and, in particular, of the Russian one), the myth of *Baba Jaga* knows no borders: born in the distant lands of the East, it soon reached many different countries, cultures and peoples. All this has led to the creation of countless fairy tales talking about this mysterious character, like the one present in Afanas'ev's collection of fairy tales and which represents the object of our analysis. Since this is a fairy tale that comes directly from the folkloric oral tradition, it is important to underline that in the translation process a main problem lies precisely in the attempt to understand and become aware of the cultural identity of a certain nation (Palchevska 2019: 73). This is because there is a very strong connection between folklore and the culture of a particular community. Indeed, it can be stated that folklore is nothing more than a mirror of culture, since it refers to the lifestyle of the people who produce it, as well as their beliefs, customs, attitudes, and ways of thinking (Rurangwa 2006: 16). In this sense fairy tale, like folklore, can be considered a

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representative vehicle for the transmission of specific cultural traits, even if they cannot always be fully understood by those outside this reality just by following the translation of a text.

Not surprisingly, one of the most difficult tasks for a translator struggling with a folkloric text concerns the ability to translate the so-called 'gaps', or 'culturally marked lexical units', that is lexical units that do not have an equivalent in one of the languages, due to the absence of the concept itself or of the lexical unity in the culture of the target language. In these cases, the translation can unfold (i) either by replacing the source word (or phrase) by a corresponding equivalent in the target language, or (ii) by interpreting, i.e., in addition to the equivalent meaning of the target language, the translators provide information on the coincidence (or divergence) regarding the cultural component of that connotation. Despite the primitive nature of the narration and the lightness of the themes used in folkloric texts, even the translation of a simple fairy tale – like our story of *Baba Jaga* – hides dangerous pitfalls. In particular, the main obstacles we shall focus on in this article concern (§2) the method of reworking the text, (§3) the translation of cultural elements, (§4) the theories of domestication and estrangement, (§5) the translation of *realia*, (§6) the communicative and semantic translation, an analysis regarding linguistic factors on two different levels: (§6.1) the first one will concern rhythm, proper names and common names, (§6.2) the second one will focus on parataxis, hypotactic and tenses, and finally (§7) we shall deal with the residue and the lost elements during the translation process.

## **2. Methods of Reworking the Text**

In case of fairy tales, it is not unusual to find numerous omissions and deformations of elements considered unsuitable for a young audience. In this event, translation is the result of remakes and profound alterations of the original, of which it often becomes a mere and superficial imitation.

We can thus identify a series of textual interventions that characterize this genre:

1. *Reduction*. It is the process of summarizing what the author stated in a broader way, even by cutting parts and creating gaps on the narrative level. This technique can be considered satisfactory only when it allows the dilution of the most distressing or macabre passages of the text, without ruining its very nature;
2. *Correction*. It modifies the original text in case of inconsistencies in it at the narrative level. For example, in an Italian version of *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs* by the Brothers Grimm we read *scatola che, gettata in un profondo corso d'acqua non va a fondo* 'box that, thrown into a deep stream of water, does not go to the bottom' instead of the original 'a box, which being made of wood, remained afloat' (Salviati 1981). In this case the translator felt the urge to correct something that in the fairy tale seems incongruent with the logic of everyday life.

3. *Substitution*. It affects one or more terms deemed unsuitable for this type of literature. For instance, a word like ‘pig’ is diminished to ‘piggy’ or ‘little pig’;
4. *Censorship*. This process aims at modifying the message that the content conveys. In children's fairy tales, certain behaviors within the family are frequently censored, with the aim of representing the family context as serene as possible;
5. *Integration*. The translator can insert characters, episodes and phrases that do not appear in the original text for a variety of reasons:
  - a. explanatory additions clarify the relationships between the characters or what the author says in a concise and superficial way;
  - b. reinforcing additions consolidate positive or negative feelings towards a character, thus attempting to direct the reader's feelings towards the best path;
  - c. moralizing additions have the task of imparting teachings to the child through a less cumbersome and repetitive way.

Thus, fairy tales are among the types of narration that are more likely to undergo processes of reworking and modification once translated or readapted. However, this kind of activity might threaten the literary nature of fairy tales, as well as their artistic value. Indeed, it is preferable to introduce the text in its full form but, when this is not possible, we can choose adapted versions of it, as long as they remain as faithful as possible to the original.

### 3. The Translation of Cultural Elements

Cultural elements and their translation represent another major threat for any translator willing to approach the translation of folkloric fairy tales. The reason is very simple: as the child has a limited knowledge of other cultures, the translator must decide whether preventing the young readers from the difficulties posed by the presence of different cultural elements in the text or stimulating their fascination for what is unknown and extraneous to their reality.

The cultural specificity of a society is regulated by language as well, especially at the lexical level – such as with regard to elements that refer to everyday life – and at the pragmatic level, through the interaction with other speakers (Kramsch 2006: 13, 25-36). Each group of people has its own lexicon, linked to a certain culture, and containing certain words that refer to representative objects of their society. However, these elements are often unlikely to find an exact correspondent in other traditions; hence the study and analysis of different translation theories aim at finding a relevant solution to this type of problem. Furthermore, the educational and pedagogical functions that characterize children's literature entail adjustments and adaptations on the basis of what are considered the main needs of the young readers, especially with the method of ‘purification’, i.e., the modification of the aspects deemed unsuitable for an audience of this type (Nikolajeva 2006: 47). This kind of modification is also

referred to as cultural context appropriation. According to Klingberg (1986: 17), the cultural elements difficult to recognize by the youngest and inexperienced readers include literary references, foreign languages in the source text, references to mythology and popular beliefs, historical, religious, and political notes, food, customs, usages, games, flora and fauna, personal names, titles, pet names, object names, and geographical names (Klingberg 1986: 17).

Being able to maintain the same degree of adaptation of the original text also in its translation represents a fundamental goal for Klingberg (1986), who proposes a series of strategies to fulfill this operation:

1. *Added explanation.* An explanation is added to the element of the original text;
2. *Reformulation.* The source text is reformulated without the use of the cultural-specific element;
3. *Explanatory translation.* The function of the cultural element is explained without using the foreign name of the element;
4. *Explanation outside the text.* The cultural-specific element is explained in a footnote or within the preface;
5. *Replacement.* The element is replaced with either an equivalent or an approximate equivalent element in the culture of the target language;
6. *Simplification.* A more general concept is used instead of the specific one;
7. *Omission.* Cultural-specific words, sentences, paragraphs, or chapters are just deleted;
8. *Localization.* The cultural environment of the source text is compared to that of the reader of the target text.

Being able to maintain this type of adaptation is useful to facilitate the understanding of the text, or to make it more interesting for young readers.

#### **4. Translation Theories: Domestication or Estrangement of the Text?**

Talking about translating techniques, they can be read in light of two polar attitudes the translator needs to adopt: on the one hand s/he can opt for 'domestication', i.e., the clarification of what may appear ambiguous and incomprehensible to the reader; on the contrary, s/he may decide to keep the incomprehensible elements, adding only comments, by means of 'estrangement.' In the case of adaptation, the text is brought closer to the reader, whereas in the case of estrangement, the reader is presented with a foreign element. The distance thus created can be filled by the translator through notes and comments (Morini 2007: 225). These techniques are based on the lexical choices adopted by the translator and there is no right or wrong way. However, in the case of children's literature, it becomes more complicated. In fact, if one opted for the estrangement process, the reader would be placed in the position of having to make an extra effort. In the case of young readers, the younger the age, the lower the ability to understand these extraneous elements, so various adaptations will be required to facilitate their understanding. On the other hand, an excessive domestication of the

text, as pointed out by Oittinen, would not allow the child to understand and learn the differences between various cultures, thus eliminating the pedagogical purpose of this literature (Oittinen 2006). In sum, the best path seems to be the adoption of the technique of estrangement, by keeping some foreign words, in order to allow the young readers to deal with a reality that does not belong to them and thus enrich their own cultural background (Nikolaeva 2001: 404-413).

## 5. The Case of *Realia*

Among the elements that translators have a hard time dealing with in the process of translation *realia* are the most problematic. *Realia* are words "which denote unique objects and phenomena characteristic of a culture or a certain linguistic community" (Johansen 2018). In particular, *realia* are often defined as words (or compound phrases) of the popular language that constitute denominations of objects, concepts, or phenomena typical of a geographical environment, a culture, a material life or historical-social peculiarities of a society, a nation, a country, or a tribe, and which therefore carry with them a national, local or historical color; these words have no exact correspondences in other languages (Osimo 2011: 112). The lack of this equivalence entails a high degree of complexity when *realia* need to be translated. The solution proposed by many scholars are numerous and vary according to the type of source and target texts under consideration.

First, *realia* can be simply transcribed. Furthermore, in case of a different alphabet in the target language, transliteration can be used. Both solutions aim to preserve the foreign element as it sounds in the source language, resulting in "the greatest appropriation of the foreign element" (Osimo 2014). With regard to translation, the two scholars Vlahov and Florin suggest different possibilities, like the creation of a neologism based on a cast or calque (e.g., the Italian *grattacielo* for skyscraper) or the approximate translation of *realia*. In this latter case, the most common technique is "the replacement with a generic expression of a broader meaning" (Osimo 2011: 112). Furthermore, *realia* can be conveyed by periphrasis (e.g., the Hungarian *cigány* becomes "walking violinist from the Hungarian regions"), or by the introduction of an adjective to identify the origin of the term (e.g., "the *Argentine* pampas") (Osimo 2011: 112-113). Finally, an approximate translation consists in the replacement of the original cultural element with a "local counterpart" in the target language, that is a *realia* belonging to this culture (e.g. the French expression *art nouveau* for the German *Jugendstil*) (Osimo 2011: 112).

## 6. Communicative and Semantic Translation

All the above-mentioned issues were considered by Gigliola Venturi, when she published her version of Afanas'ev's collection in the Italian version *Antiche fiabe popolari* (1953). For the sake of the current analysis, we will consider only the translation of Afanas'ev's (1873) version of the well-known tale *Baba Jaga*.

Speaking of literary texts, the translator can utilize two main translating strategies: *communicative translation*, according to Newmark (1982: 79), is a free, idiomatic translation, oriented towards the reader of the target language, while *semantic translation* aims to render the text literally and be faithful to the original meaning of the text. In the case of fairy tales, we often opt for semantic translation, which consists in trying to be as faithful as possible to the author's style. This choice is the one adopted by the translator of our fairy tale, who aimed at making the story easy for its audience to understand. However, the examined text does not contain numerous elements specific to Russian culture; on the contrary, when these culture specific elements are present, Venturi opted for communicative translation and linguistic domestication, with a view to making the narration as simple and smooth as possible, as well as bringing the young readers closer to a reality unknown to them. A vivid example, as we will see later, regards how the terms *ded* and *baba*, 'grandpa' and 'grandma', the first two characters mentioned in this fairy tale, were translated as *uomo* and *donna*, 'man' and 'woman', probably because the translator thought these terms could sound more familiar and understandable to the Italian reader, hoping to echo the same 'familiar' effect imparted by the original. However, by doing so, our translator sacrificed the great meaning that these two words carry in the Slavic tradition, i.e., the cult of the ancestors, in order to favor the young reader of the target text.

### 6.1. Linguistic Factors: Rhythm, Proper Names and Common Names

With regards to linguistic factors, in our analysis we have considered the phonological (i.e., rhythmic aspects) and lexical factors (i.e., proper nouns and common nouns). In fairy tales, rhythm plays an important role, as the repetition of patterns creates a smoother and clearer text, which is therefore easier to understand and memorise; furthermore, rhythm helps to create an overall folkloric atmosphere. In this fairy tale, the rhythmic aspects concern, first of all, the repetition of entire phrases – a technique used not only to give a rhythmic pace to the narrative, but also to highlight the most important concepts of the story – as well as consonances. Whereas repetitions are introduced also in the translated version (see bold text in examples (1) and (2)), consonances (see underlined text in examples (1) and (2)) are not maintained in the Italian version:

(1)

<p>«<b>Там</b> <u>тебя</u>, племянюшка, будет березка в глаза стегать — <b>ты</b> ее ленточкой перевяжи; <b>там тебе</b> ворота будут скрипеть и хлопать — <b>ты</b> подлей им под пяточки маслица; <b>там тебя</b> собаки будут рвать — <b>ты</b> им хлеба брось; <b>там тебе</b> кот будет глаза драсть — <b>ты</b> ему ветчины дай».</p>	<p>«Nipotina mia, <b>là</b> una betulla vorrà pungerti gli occhi, <b>ma tu</b> legala con un nastro; la porta scricchierà e sbatterà, <b>ma tu</b> versa un po' d'olio sui cardini; <b>là</b> i cani vorranno morderti, <b>ma tu</b> getta loro del pane; il gatto vorrà graffiarti gli occhi, <b>ma tu</b> dàgli del prosciutto».</p>
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(2)

<p>Вот девочка приклонила ухо к земле и слышит, что баба-яга гонится, и уж близко, взяла да и бросила полотенце: сделалась река такая широкая-широкая! [...] Девочка приклонила ухо к земле и слышит, что баба-яга близко, бросила гребешок: сделался лес такой дремучий да страшный!</p>	<p>Ed ecco la ragazzina poggia un orecchio a terra e sente che la baba-jaga la rincorre, che le è già vicina; allora prese e gettò l'asciugamano, quello diventò un fiume così largo, ma così largo! [...] La bambina poggiò l'orecchio a terra, e sentito che la baba-jaga era vicina gettò il pettinino: divenne una foresta orribilmente fitta!</p>
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The rhythmic aspects can also appear across verses in the form of rhymes. Let us consider how rhymes are translated in the following example (3):

(3)

<p>и я там был, мед-пиво пил: по усам текло, в рот не попало.</p>	<p>Anch'io sono stato da loro, birra e idromele ho bevuto, sopra i baffi m'è caduto, neanche un goccio mi son bevuto.</p>
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In the original text, the rhyme scheme is of type AA BB, while the translated version does not retain the same model, as the first verse does not rhyme with the others, while the other three rhyme with each other (A BBB). Furthermore, in order to keep the rhymes and create rhythmicity in the verse, some elements of the last two verses in the target text were translated in a different way: (i) the Russian verb *teklo* 'flew' is rendered by the Italian *è caduto* 'has fallen'; (ii) the last verse *v rot ne popalo* '(the beer) in the mouth did not enter' was translated as *neanche un goccio mi son bevuto* 'not a drop I drank myself' for the sake of rhyming.

Similarly, the number of syllables in each verse varies from the original text to the translation, as seen in (4):

(4)

<p>и - я - там -был, (4) мед - пи - во - пил:(4) по - у - сам - те - кло,(5) в рот - не - по - па - ло. (5)</p>	<p>Anch' - io - so - no - sta - to - da - lo - ro,(9) Bir - ra - e - i - dro - me - le - ho - be - vu - to, (11) So - pra - i - baf - fi - m' - è - caduto, (9) ne - an - che - un - goc - cio - mi - son - be - vu - to.(11)</p>
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Moving to lexical factors, a peculiar feature of fairy tales is that they seldom introduce proper names in reference to the characters of the story; instead, common

names of things, people, and animals are more common, such as a man, a woman, a girl, a cat, dogs, etc. This choice has a very specific purpose: the author wants to present the characters of his stories as bearers of values and symbols, so they do not need a proper name in order to identify them. From a translation perspective, even this trivial aspect brings about many problems, as witnessed in the very first sentence of our fairy tale, in (5).

(5)

<i>Жили себе дед да баба.</i>	<i>C'era una volta un <b>uomo</b> e una <b>donna</b>.</i>
“Lived by themselves grandpa and granny.”	“Once upon a time a man and a woman.”

We have already mentioned how in the Russian language the names *ded* and *baba* correspond to the Italian *nonno* e *nonna*, literally ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother.’ However, in the Italian translation they have been rendered as *uomo* and *donna*, i.e., ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ In fact, in Russian fairy tales it is not unusual to find this formula, as in most cases at the beginning of the story we find expressions such as *starik so staruchoj* ‘an old man with an old woman’ or *ded da baba* ‘grandpa and grandma.’ According to Beljakova (2010: 13-18), the images of the *ded* and *baba* are to be imply both grandparents and elders in general, and might refer to an ancient archetype, reflecting the cult of the ancestors, the elders, and the hearth, considered the bearers of the entire Russian folkloric tradition.

This role of the elderly, however, does not belong to the Italian popular tradition, the target culture of the analysed translation. Our translator, therefore, opted for communicative translation because, as already mentioned before, the terms *uomo* and *donna* seem to sound more acquainted to the Italian reader.

As for the remaining common names in the story, fidelity to the prototext has been maintained. However, in order not to repeat the same name too many times, the translator has also opted for the use of synonyms or terms of endearment. For example, in the original text we always find the word *devočka* ‘girl’ in reference to the protagonist (except in cases where the aunt and *Baba Jaga* refer to her as *plemjaniška* ‘little niece’), while in the target text in its place we mostly find the term *bambina* ‘[female] child’, but also *ragazza* ‘girl’ and *ragazzina* ‘little girl’; similarly, the name *baba-jaga* is kept throughout the story, except at the end, where it is rendered as *strega* ‘witch.’ Finally, as we have already mentioned, the source is rich in terms of endearment and diminutives that help to give a more childish tone to the story.

Another aspect that is important to focus on concerns the use of diminutives. Unlike Russian, Italian has a limited use of diminutives; it is thus not surprising that often, as illustrated in (6) and (7), a Russian diminutive noun is translated with its basic counterpart in Italian.



(6)

« <b>Матушка</b> послала к своей сестре».	“La <b>mamma</b> vuol mandarmi da sua sorella.”
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(7)

«попроси у нее <b>иглочку</b> и <b>ниточку</b> ».	“chiedile <b>ago</b> e <b>filo</b> .”
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The words *matuška*, ‘mom-DIM’, *igoločku*, ‘needle-DIM’ and *nitočku*, ‘thread-DIM’ are in the diminutive form, but in the Italian text they have been translated as *mamma*, *ago*, and *filo*, i.e., without any trace of diminutive morphology. As already mentioned, the use of diminutives in Italian would have been considered superfluous here, as the word *mamma* ‘mom’ already carries with it that sense of familiarity that is found in *matuška*; Similarly, the objects needle and thread are unlikely to appear in the diminutive form in Italian.

In a few cases, however, we can see the opposite phenomenon. In example (8), the non-modified Russian terms have been rendered into Italian through the use of diminutives.

(8)

«Вот тебе гребешок и <b>полотенце</b> ».	“Eccoti un pettinino e unasciugamanino.”
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Therefore we see how the translator has worked very freely, without staying faithful to the original text, but opting for the communicative type of translation.

Finally, there have been situations in which nouns already present in endearment or diminutive form in the original text have also retained in the translation: *tetuška*, *plemjajuška*, *chorošenko*, *batjuška*, have been rendered respectively with *zietta*, ‘auntie-DIM’, *nipotina*, ‘granddaughter-DIM’, *per benino*, ‘for good-DIM’ and *babbino*, ‘dad-DIM.’

## 6.2. Linguistic Factors: Parataxis, Hypotactic and Tenses

Speaking of linguistic factors, another element that must be considered in translation is syntactic complexity. In particular, when translating a text for children, parataxis tends to prevail over hypotaxis. This is because the parataxis implies a simpler discursive typology, unlike subordination, which produces more complex structures; therefore, short and simple periods, connected to each other by a coordinative conjunction, are favored.

The original Russian version displays an extensive use of parataxis, aiming to communicate its message as clearly and directly as possible. On the contrary, the Italian literary style tends to rely on hypotaxis, by introducing long and complex

phrases. However, since our translator has opted for a semantic macro-strategy, no significant shift from parataxis to hypotaxis has been recorded, except for the passage shown in (9).

(9)

Злая мачеха ее не полюбила, била её и думала, как бы вовсе извести.	La cattiva matrigna <b>che</b> non le voleva bene la picchiava e pensava a come liberarsi di lei.
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In this case, in the prototext the sentence *ee ne poljubila* '(she) didn't love her' was rendered in the metatext with a relative sentence introduced by the relative pronoun *che* 'that', coreferred to *zlaja mačecha* 'evil stepmother', while in the prototext it consists of a unitary main sentence, i.e. *zlaja mačecha ee ne poljubila* 'the evil stepmother didn't love her', followed by a series of coordinated sentences.

However, there are also opposite cases in which in the original text there are longer and more complex periods that have been simplified by the translator, as in (10):

(10)

дед овдовел и женился на другой жене, а от первой жены осталась у него девочка.	l'uomo rimase vedovo e sposò un'altra moglie. Dal primo matrimonio gli era rimasta una bambina.
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In the Russian text there are two sentences: *ded ovdoveli ženilsja na drugoj žene* 'the man (lit. grandpa) became a widower? and married another woman' and *a ot pervoj ženy ostalas' u nego devočka* 'and/but a daughter from the first wife remained to him.' This last sentence is introduced by the coordinating conjunction *a* 'and/but' and is separated from the first one by a comma. In the translated text, however, the coordinating conjunction has been eliminated and replaced by a full stop, thus creating two main sentences.

The last linguistic aspect considered here is the analysis of how verbal tense, aspect and mood are rendered in translation. Since we are dealing with a fairy tale, a narrative text, the events are reported in a chronological order and the most frequent tense in the translation is the past; the present and the future often appear in the dialogues together with the imperative mood. As Italian has a complex verbal system, with a marked interplay between tense and mood in order to create a wide range of interactions at the level of *consecutio temporum*, let us consider how different tenses are used in the Italian translation.

The *passato remote* 'preterite' is used to indicate an action that took place in the past, completed and with no connection with the present. In most cases, this tense corresponds to a Russian perfective past, as in the following examples in (11) and (12):

(11)

дед <b>овдовел</b> и <b>женился</b> на другой жене.	l'uomo <b>rimase</b> vedovo e <b>sposò</b> un'altra moglie.
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(12)

Баба-яга и <b>отошла</b> , а девочка <b>дала</b> коту ветчинки	La baba-jaga <b>si allontanò</b> , e la bambina <b>diede</b> il prosciutto al gatto
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In some cases, the Russian perfective past is translated with the *trapassato prossimo* 'pluperfect', to indicate an action that took place before another in the past, or connected with it:

а от первой жены <b>осталась</b> у него девочка.	Dal primo matrimonio gli <b>era rimasta</b> una bambina.
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Раз отец <b>уехал</b> куда-то	Una volta che il padre <b>era andato</b> in qualche luogo
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The imperfective past, on the other hand, is usually translated into Italian as *imperfetto* 'imperfect' to describe actions that occurred in the past the end or beginning of which is not known, and therefore the result is not important, or their repetition is highlighted:

Злая мачеха ее не полюбила, <b>била</b> её и <b>думала</b> , как бы вовсе извести.	La cattiva matrigna che non le voleva bene la <b>picchiava</b> e <b>pensava</b> a come liberarsi di lei.
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Another tense that often recurs in the narrative is the present tense. Unlike Russian, which allows only one form of present – obviously imperfective, Italian has both a simple and a progressive form. However, in the Italian translation of this fairy tale, the present tense always appears in the simple form, as it is used with the meaning of *praesens historicus*, i.e., to describe actions that occur at the time of narration, as in (12):

(12)

<b>Стоит</b> хатка, а в ней <b>сидит</b> баба-яга костяная нога и <b>ткет</b> .	<b>Vede</b> una capanna, là <b>sta</b> la baba-jaga, gamba d'osso, e <b>fila</b> .
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As regards the Russian perfective future, a verbal form that is missing in Italian, it is translated either with the present or the future. In particular, the Italian present tense appears in the hypothetical period to indicate an action the result of which is undoubted, as in (13).

(13)

<p>если ж баба-яга <b>перейдет</b> через реку и <b>станет</b> догонять тебя, ты опять приклони ухо к земле и как услышишь, что она близко, брось гребешок — <b>сделается</b> дремучий-дремучий лес; сквозь него она уже <b>не проберется!</b></p>	<p>se la baba-jaga <b>riesce</b> ad attraversarlo e <b>sta</b> per raggiungerti, tu posa nuovamente l'orecchio a terra, e quando la senti vicina, getta il pettinino: <b>diventerà</b> un bosco fitto fitto; lei non <b>riuscirà</b> certo a penetrarvi!</p>
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The future tense, on the other hand, indicates a future action without highlighting its completeness, as in (14).

(14)

<p>«Там тебя, племянушка, <b>будет</b> березка в глаза <b>стегать</b> – ты ее ленточкой перевяжи; там тебе ворота <b>будут скрипеть</b> и <b>хлопать</b> – ты подлей им под пяточки маслица; там тебя собаки <b>будут рвать</b> – ты им хлебца брось; там тебе кот <b>будет</b> глаза <b>драть</b> – ты ему ветчины дай».</p>	<p>– Nipotina mia, là una betulla <b>vorrà pungerti</b> gli occhi, ma tu legala con un nastro; la porta <b>scricchiolerà</b> e <b>sbatterà</b>, ma tu versa un po' d'olio sui cardini; là i cani <b>vorranno morderti</b>, ma tu getta loro del pane; il gatto <b>vorrà graffiarti</b> gli occhi, ma tu dàgli del prosciutto –.</p>
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The final remark regards the use of the imperative mood; as in Russian the expression of aspect is compulsory, also the imperative mood must be either imperfective or perfective. The perfective imperative usually indicates a request, an order, or a piece of advice, which can be carried out immediately or in the immediate future, as in (15):

(15)

<p>«<b>Поди</b> к своей тетке, моей сестре, <b>попроси</b> у нее иголочку и ниточку – тебе рубашку сшить».</p>	<p>– <b>Va'</b> da tua zia, mia sorella, <b>chiedile</b> ago e filo, per cucirti una camicetta – .</p>
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The imperfective imperative, on the other hand, always indicates an order, a request, or a piece of advice, which, on the contrary, must be carried out immediately,

or in any case the time between the enunciation of the action and its implementation must be limited, as in (16).

(16)

«Хорошо; <b>садись</b> покуда <b>ткать</b> ».	– Bene, <b>siediti</b> e intanto <b>tessi</b> .
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As the Italian language does not differentiate aspect in the imperative mood, and therefore the Italian translation consists of a bare imperative, this overtone of meaning is lost in translation.

## 7. The Residue and the Lost Elements

Whenever a translation process is carried out on a text, it will inevitably see the loss of some elements, even where an attempt has been made to faithfully reproduce the author's style and message, and inevitably this fact has also affected our fairy tale.

First of all, there were losses at a lexical level related to culture-specific expressions and some *realia* present in the text, which in some cases it was not possible to reproduce in the metatext with the same meaning. This is the case, for example, of how the names *ded* and *baba* were translated into *uomo* and *donna*; as a result, the profound meaning that binds them to the Slavic oral tradition is completely lost. Another case is that of the word *chatka*, the abode of *Baba Jaga*. In the Italian translation, it is referred to as a *capanna* 'hut', but the choice of this word does not at all do justice to our witch's home. In fact, the Italian reader, by listening to the word *capanna* will probably imagine a small house, without foundations and usually built out of wood, leather, fabric, and foliage. However, the *chatka* (or *chata*) is much wider than some simple accommodation made of 'perishable' materials. Probably, a more suitable version could have been *casa rustica* 'rustic house', but the translator must have considered this variant not very intuitive for the young reader. Another example of inappropriate translation can be found in the term *med-pivo*, commonly known in Italian as *idromele* 'mead.' In the translation the term *idromele* alternates with the word *birra* 'beer', as if to underline the alcoholic quality of this drink, a characteristic that, according to Venturi, could be unknown to a child.

There were also losses in terms of stylistic elements. We have noted that the rhythm is one of the distinct features of fairy tales, which the author tries to reproduce above all via repetition and nursery rhymes. Also in this formal aspect the faithfulness to the prototext was not always possible. The original scheme was substituted by a different one; it is worth noticing that despite the rhythm is different, what is preserved is the presence of a rhythmic pattern. With regard to repetitions, the translator has not always managed to stay true to the author's choices, introducing several changes or substitutions; for instance, whereas in the prototext the only word to refer to the character is *baba-jaga*, in the metatext we also find *strega* 'witch'; if our protagonist is *devočka* throughout the narration, in the translation she becomes *ragazza*, *ragazzina*, or *bambina*. All this can be explained by the fact that Russian is a much more tolerant

language than Italian in terms of redundancies; therefore, it is possible to find repetitions of the same word more often in the original text than its Italian translation.

## 8. Conclusion

This analysis proves once again that perfect translation does not exist. The main reason lies in the diversity between the “languages involved in the translation process, namely that languages are not congruent, and that for a word X in one language there is never an identical word in another language” (Carmignani 2019).

In addition, if the text one chooses to translate belongs to the popular and oral tradition, as in our case, the difficulties increase considerably. In fact, when we translate a text of oral origin, we must always take into account the ‘path’ that led it to become a written text, and therefore consider the elements that have been lost, modified, or added. This process is not devoid of complications and obstacles, which are sometimes impossible to avoid. Furthermore, considering that most of these stories constitute what we now define as “children's literature”, we should be aware that translation is rather challenging in terms of its target audience as well.

This is the reason why confronting Afanas'ev's version of the *Baba Jaga* and this translation into Italian by Venturi contained in the collection *Antiche fiabe popolari* proved to be a very difficult task. In fact, we noticed how in some cases it was possible to stay faithful to the original text, while in other situations it was necessary to make some changes in order to transmit the same sense of closeness and familiarity to the target audience of the translation.

In conclusion, translating a text does not only mean dealing with untranslatable terms and changes that do not distort the original message: “Translating means bringing together two realities, two ways of looking at the world, two ways of feeling the world. It is a great pleasure, but also a great responsibility” (Carmignani 2019).

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