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## Russian Translations of Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien as the Stage of their Cultural Reception in Russia

Ellina V. Shustova<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article identifies problems of translation of J.R.R. Tolkien's works to the Russian language. Due to complexity of their reception in the Russian literature and culture, these problems continue at the present time. The purpose of this article is to consider the translational interpretations as a form of reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's works in Russia and perform analysis of relevant stages of the receptive process. The leading approach to the study of this problem is the methodology of receptive aesthetics; this takes into account the development trends of the method. This research shows that it is the translation, in many respects, that sets trends for further understanding of writings by J.R.R. Tolkien in Russia and includes them in a Russian cultural and literary context, as well as set their level of systematic perception. Contents of this article may be used for readings in general and special courses for Western literature at universities, and may be useful to a wide range of readers interested in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien.

**Keywords:** Linguistics, English Language, Education, J.R.R. Tolkien, Fantasy fiction literature genre, Receptive aesthetics, Reception, Translation, Education, Student, Language.

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation. E-mail: [leite@mail.ru](mailto:leite@mail.ru)

## Introduction

Modern cultural and literary space is polyphonic in nature. Irina G. Kondrateva and Anastasia V. Fakhrutdinova note: "Multiculturalism is a prevalent worldwide societal phenomenon" (2016). Concerning interliterary interface, noteworthy is a foreign society reception, when the literary work of one culture becomes the object of reception, and a component in history of the receiving culture's literature (Mashakova, 2010). A key role in this process is the translation as a form of interliterary communication.

Translations of J.R.R. Tolkien's works into the Russian language are the initial stage of their reception in Russia. Translation is a form of interliterary contact and medium (Dyurishin, 1979), as well as an interpretative act reflecting the dialogue between the two national conceptual environments, it is an objective necessity of a different culture at the reception due to the vague nature of receptive process.

Translation, as a result of the reception, embodies intentions of translators as readers, and as creators of the new text. Differences in translations are the variances of perception among adapters of original author's work. N.G. Semenova (2000) writes that differences in artistic translations are related to the perception of works of J. R. R. Tolkien, especially in his novel "The Lord of the Rings" as the all-embracing system, wherein understanding of this tale is beyond its interpretation as a literary work.

Representation of J.R.R. Tolkien's works and their translations into the Russian language is determined by the perception of their translators, and appropriate choices of linguistic resources, which in turn are due to their positions as original readers. In accordance with the theory of reception aesthetics, reader's position is determined by literary expectations and experiences (Jauss, 1995). In this context, it is logical that interpreters were the original readers, and perceived the work from their aesthetic and cultural positions. These positions even appeared in the translation as a result of transliteration work: in the selection of lexical resources, during construction of grammatical and syntactical structures, and via other methods as well.

## Methodological framework

This study is based on the methodological concept of receptive aesthetics. The context of this methodology presents results of the translation of individual reading by the original translator, who in turn is not only the reader, but also the researcher and the interpreter. Taking into account the thesis of receptive aesthetics concept that a literary work acquires meaning only in the completeness of the process of communication with the reader, it can be concluded that the interpreter becomes the coauthor.

Among styles of translations, functional and comparative / contrasting methods can be used for relaying ideas.

## Results

The receptive process of J.R.R. Tolkien's texts in their translations into the Russian language took place in two directions: reception of linguistic component of Tolkien's texts, and reception of national conceptual environment and mentality. These areas complement each other, which indicates that the translation as a form of reception is a systematic occurrence.

### *1. Reception of linguistic component of J. R. R. Tolkien's works*

Reception of the linguistic component of the works by J.R.R. Tolkien in connection with their translations reflects the perception of reality and concepts of the image of the artistic world of the writer and their transformations into the Russian language.

Major aspects of linguistic component of the reception of language structure in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien: the specifics of onomastics and toponymy, and the presence of non-equivalent vocabulary, etc. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien present certain difficulties for the translator in connection with their correlations to ancient European languages and literary canons. Difficulties in transmissions of linguistic and cultural distinctions are determined by controversial points with Tolkien's fictional languages, which are of paramount importance in the framework of author's "secondary world". These difficulties forced translators to look for ways to adapt and transform author's phraseology and style according to the conceptual environment of the Russian language. Summing up translation complexity of works of the fantasy genre, T.M. Timoshenkova and V.Y. Pereverzev state that the difficulties related to translation are due to peculiarities of the text with the presence of "realities associated with the semantic field of magic" (1991). They also highlight such features of primary source text as: "lack of adequate vocabulary and partial discrepancies in the national systems of fantasy characters <...> reality and reality-neologisms, based on allusions and associations in these systems <...> quasi-names – meaningful names invented by the author to denote non-existent in reality objects" (*Ibid.*). These features mentioned by authors are inherent in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

Thus, the method of reception of language in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien is a linguistic analysis. Its specificity is related to the importance of accurate communication of appearance and illustration of the world and correlation with its linguistic representation in the text.

## *2. Reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's works at the level of the national conceptual environment and mentality*

The reception at the level of national mentality and conceptual environment manifests in terms of awareness of foreign linguistic world and accompanying the process of semantic change. Important role was played by "personal views of the translator to reproduce in his / her own language of nonnative artistic values" (Dyurishin, 1979). At this stage, there is an appeal to the problem regarding translational contradictions in J.R.R. Tolkien's books and the Russian national tradition.

The researchers point out that attempts by translators to overcome cultural differences are often not fully realized. Thus, S. Smirnov indicates significant differences unexpressed in translations between the original and translated versions of "The Lord of the Rings". "Instead of sonorous names, inevitably following through the whole stratum of English culture, with all its echoes in the form of thoughts and actions, in manners and stereotypes, especially of English humor, and as a result, we got the assembly of "hanging in the air" nicknames and sobriquets that do not have roots in neither the original culture, nor one under which they were tried to be adapted to by translators" (Smirnov, 2000). A.V. Muraviev discusses the same theme in an interview. He says that some translators of "The Lord of the Rings" consider this book as the "cult text, for which it is particularly important to remain in quasi-religious existence" (Muraviev, 2012); this approach construed its cultural rationale.

Researchers also see a desire for adaption in Russian translations of J.R.R. Tolkien's books. M.T. Hooker in his study of the Russian translations of J.R.R. Tolkien observes that "all of them were adapted to the Russian mentality" (Hooker, 2003). M.V. Kamenkovich believes that the result of this aspiration is the fact that in our country [Russia], a particular specificity of perception was formed for his [Tolkien's] books: "In this case, young readers desire to "expose" Tolkien, reduce him to their own level. <...> However, this attitude comes from translations in which elves often speak as rude teenagers. This is the Soviet legacy in its purest form – the rejection of aristocracy. And no matter how much we repudiate from that time, its spirit is still alive" (Kamenkovich & Kamenkovich, 1995).

Researchers acknowledge the presence of national component in Russian translations of Tolkien's texts, linking it with desires of translators to adapt the original by introducing recognizable to the reader

structures. In this regard, analysis reveals translation of “speaking” names (Baggins / Torbins / Sumniks) [Russian adaptation of name using the “bag” as a root word] or, for example, the relation between Frodo and Sam. In the original story, by the remark M.V. Kamenkovich it is the “attitude of the servant and the master” (*Ibid.*), while in some translations, the characters interact as equal, which is closer to the Soviet mentality. A.V. Muraviev also mentions some linguistic transformations carried out by V.S. Muraviev, in particular, the use of jargon by goblins. The result of this transformation, in his opinion “created a sensation of submergence in the socio-psychological reality” (2012). It can be concluded that the choice made by translators in respect of such “intermediate-moves” is dictated by their belonging to a particular society and their cultural and life experiences.

The reception of national and socio-cultural of components led to the transformations, which is found not only in the language, but also on the conceptual environment. In some cases, this resulted in distortion of the original concept, but to the unfamiliar with originals Russian-speaking readers, it is usually invisible.

Thus, the correlation analysis of Russian versions with originals, and adaptations from the accepting culture contributed to consideration of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, not only as an amalgamation of linguistic structures, but as an integrated system, with its caveats and canons. Aforementioned is due to the specifics of translation as a form of interliterary contact: the change of literary structure occurs in the course of the translation, its systems as all-embodied (Dyurishin, 1979), which in turn may be accompanied by certain transformations. Therefore, the fact that the issue of cultural integration of J.R.R. Tolkien’s work in the Russian-speaking environment was raised in studies devoted to translations, is a natural occurrence.

## Discussions

Reception of J.R.R. Tolkien’s works in Russia has largely contributed to comprehension of translations as a form of reception. This aspect of analysis defines the novelty of this research and has not been previously examined in scholarly papers.

Comprehension of J.R.R. Tolkien’s creativity is a complex process. The outcome is not only a translation as a form of reception, but also articles and comments of translator as a justification. After all, translators were not only in the role of mediators, but also as researchers, as they were some of the first persons to read the original writer's texts. Even translators’ remarks set forth trends for further analysis of the writer's work. N. Grigorieva and V. Grushetsky (1991) indicate visionary component of Tolkien’s text. This view is consistent with the so-called visionary approach to the work of the writer – spread to some extent, but not considered a scientific opinion regarding the “secondary world” of the books by J.R.R. Tolkien being associated with objective reality. M.V. Kamenkovich and V. Carrick remark that the writer’s texts are a kind of “new mythology” which was created by invention of new languages (Kamenkovich & Carrick, 1994). This opinion relates to current, popular and very effective analysis of Tolkien’s work, as the author of mythology. In both cases, the work of J.R.R. Tolkien is seen as a fusion, united by author’s setting, and its reception, expressed in translation, and implies a systematic approach to the original work.

In terms of reception, indicative is the translation work on “The Lord of the Rings” as the most reverberating creation of J.R.R. Tolkien in Russia. Published translations of this novel are often accompanied by articles or comments of their authors-translators, which are typically published as a preface. They reflect on difficulties of the translation and settings for interpretation strategy. Thus, M.V. Kamenkovich and V. Carrick write that they tried to “create accurate translation that would convey the original as much as possible – not only to the letter but also in the spirit” (*Ibid.*). N. Grigorieva and V. Grushetsky (1991) also note the need to follow the original, paying special attention to the semantic component. Hence, the process of self-reflection in translation begins immediately.

Considering translations as forms of reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's texts is expressed in numerous forms: the appearance of critical articles about translations, comparison of several translated versions and their systematization.

### *1. A critical aspect of understanding translations of J.R.R. Tolkien*

In articles with critical discussion on the topic of translation compliance and the similarity of context to the original characteristics of Tolkien's writings, translated text is considered as a means of realizing the author's original intention, in accordance with specifics of the recipient's literature and culture. This form of reflection involves appraisal, and aims to identify aspects requiring translation improvements. In some cases, the criticism concerns stylistic transliteration of its creativity. It focuses on controversial and, accordingly, debatable points: translations of names and places, idioms, poems and the like. Other stylistic aspects of translation are considered in linkage to norms of the Russian language.

The critical approach to current translations indicates the Russian-speaking interpreters of J.R.R. Tolkien are looking for options that would most adequately reflect the intention of the author, and would associate with the Russian-speaking socio-cultural settings. The demand for translation work indicates the interest of Russian readers in understanding the writer's work.

### *2. The comparative aspect of comprehension of J.R.R. Tolkien's translations and their systemization.*

Another variant of reflection in respect of translations of J.R.R. Tolkien's books to the Russian language is to compare several renditions of translated Tolkien's texts, and attempt to systematize the linguistic material in order to improve the quality of the Russian text. The considerations for author's texts are not only viewed as a set of linguistic characters, but also as a creative whole, interpreted by translators in accordance with their cultural and aesthetic experiences. Also, Tolkien's texts continue to attract attention from translators, resulting from factors of diverse stylistic shifts and plot variations. Chronological comparisons emerge as more translations become available. On the subject of five transliterations of "The Lord of the Rings" N.G. Semenova analyzes communication guidelines of translators and typically summarizes their unique features. She concludes: even though pre-defined communicative goals of translators make adaptations partly incomplete, but still capable to reflect on all relevant features of the original work, and determines the specificity of a translation and its differences from others (Semenova, 2001).

Along with the search for most accurate translation solutions, some researchers note the need to adjust existing translations, some of which became conventional versions, linking it with extra-literary context. S.U. Taskaeva and D.O. Vinohodov indicate that many translational problems were caused by the appearance in Russia of books previously unknown to the Russian-speaking audience – the "Unfinished Tales" and the multi-volume novels "The History of Middle-Earth". While working on these translations, now-familiar versions became inaccurate (Taskaeva & Vinohodov, 2001). The example selected by authors describing translation of the "khazad" word (in the traditional sense – dwarves) illustrates this situation.

Thus, the study devoted to comparative and contrasting translations of Tolkien's texts, considers his work as a linguistic phenomenon in real world of the English and the Russian languages, and cultures of their respective realities, as well as in their relation to languages established by J.R.R. Tolkien, their reflections, wonders, and principles. Therefore, not only linguistic concepts, but also to the cultural aspect of the reception of the writer's work are given a particular attention.

The reflection of the comparative style, as opposed to the critical, allows to organize the Russian language translations of J.R.R. Tolkien as a unified impulse, according to their correlation with original works and

highlights “strengths” and “weaknesses” of different versions. Ideas proposed by N. Grigorieva and V. Grushetsky seem very logical regarding the need to have several versions of translation: in their view, it is required by “philological, linguistic, and mythological interests of J.R.R. [Tolkien] fused in an epic novel” (1991).

The question regarding the most successful translation of “The Lord of the Rings” into the Russian language is still relevant. Researchers cannot answer it clearly. A. Khananashvili writes regarding transliterations of proverbs and sayings “to highlight the unequivocal leader is just not possible” (2003). N.G. Semenova writes about non-competitive co-existence of several translated versions, and they are more likely to complement each other, since each version recognizes some, but not all the features of the original work (2001). In this regard, the author expresses hope for the emergence of new translations (*Ibid.*). M.T. Hooker, considers this situation “from position of Western culture”, and summarizes: “Tolkien is still waiting for the Russian translator” (2003).

Reflection on the subject led to the idea that consequent translation work must relate to thorough and consistent implementation of the author’s original intent in view of accompanying the transliteration process of linguistic and cultural transformations. The common point is the question regarding correlation of translations with the accepting culture and its literature. In an interview A.V. Muraviev confirms the importance of this interrelation: “A good translation... gives a sense of connection with the context of the Russian literature” (2012).

## **Conclusion**

The results suggest that translations represent the first stage of J.R.R. Tolkien’s reception in Russia. They facilitate the entry of Tolkien’s texts in the Russian literary and cultural context, act as intermediary, and introduce J.R.R. Tolkien’s work into the Russian literature development process.

The receptive process with respect to translations of works of J.R.R. Tolkien is dual-plane development. On the one hand, the subject of the reception are the interpretations of the original work; in which case they are an aspect to any criticism or comparative and contrasting analysis. On the other hand, the object of the reception is the writer’s work itself; in this case, the main directions of reception is either the linguistic or conceptual environment and the national mentality of the accepting literature.

Translations become the result of reception of persons conducting transliteration work as the original readers, and accordingly implement their aesthetic, literary and social experiences. They largely determine the further reception of books by J.R.R. Tolkien in Russia. Unfamiliar and foreign attributes of the reception nature of Tolkien’s texts require accompanying perception of transformations, which materialize in translation, representing original work as an all-embracing system.

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