

## Between Orality and Literacy. Parallelism in Russian Oral Epics and its Challenge for Translation

This paper will focus on certain aspects and features of oral composition displayed as signs of the complex relationship between orality and literacy involved in the translation of Russian oral poetry.

Oral narratives have been relatively neglected by Translation Studies, for the oral as such is volatile, ephemeral, hard to capture in writing without losing significant elements of its nature made up of an intricate interlacing of different modes of expression, including voice and kinesics. Oral poetry in particular cannot be separated from the context in which it originates, where performance is the primary form of delivery, and a close and dynamic interrelation with the audience is always implied. When this poetry is fixed onto paper, both in transcription and translation, the dimension of performance is lost. The specific kind of oral poetry I am taking into account here, Russian folk epics, died out in the second half of the XX century, surviving only through transcription. Considering the Russian epics in the context of Parry's and Lord's oral formulaic theory, I will try to describe from a linguistic point of view the use of fixed formulae and phrases all interconnected by virtue of parallelism in the shaping of the verses.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to present a sample of the linguistic analysis which will constitute the bulk of my research, dealing with the translation of Russian folk heroic epics and the problems encountered when translating oral poetry of this kind. My analysis is based on Jakobson's concept of grammatical parallelism, and built on a comparative study of parallelism and repetition in several Russian epic poems and their English and Italian translations: three different language and cultural systems are thus involved and compared. I will examine parallelism in the three languages at various levels: phonological, morphological, lexical, and metrical, i.e., parallelism, by virtue of position in the line.

Here is an example of the analysis of two lines (followed by transliteration, glosses, and a literal translation) of the Russian epic I have selected for this paper:

1. Как был Садке купец, богатый гость. [Kak byl Sadke kupets, bogatyi gost']  
*As was Sadke merchant, rich merchant*  
There was Sadke the merchant, the rich merchant

2. А прежде у Садка имущества не было, [A prezhde u Sadka imushchestva ne bylo]  
*And before by Sadka property not was*  
Before Sadko had no property

The two lines are parallel in many ways: *kak byl* of the first line, and *a prezhde* of the second are related, both expressing time, and referring to the hero, Sadko. The verb *byl* "was" at past tense is repeated at the end of the second line. The hero is mentioned in the same position in both lines, followed by nouns relating to his merchant's status. Repetition and parallelism are displayed also at a morphological level within a single line: the same form (-a) of the same (genitive) case occurs in both *imushchestva* "property" and *Sadk-a* for parallel grammatical reasons. This is to show briefly how parallelism is relevant to the composition of Russian oral poetry.

At this early stage, translation is used mainly as a tool to understand the meanings and structures of the Russian texts, but also to point out the main differences and similarities between Russian, English, and Italian languages and cultures. Suggestions and problems arising from this analysis will constitute the basis for a further investigation on the reception of the target texts in the receiving cultures.