

## THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING FANTASY: TWILIGHT IN RUSSIAN

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the challenges of translating Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* into Russian. It focuses on the linguistic and cultural barriers that influence the translator's ability to preserve the original's intent while appealing to a Russian audience. The discussion highlights translation techniques, including etymological, stylistic, and semantic adjustments, as well as the role of cultural adaptation in maintaining the novel’s emotional and thematic resonance.

**Keywords:** fantasy translation, cultural adaptation, linguistic challenges, Russian translation, young adult fiction.

**АННОТАЦИЯ:** Эта статья рассматривает сложности перевода романа Стефани Майер «Сумерки» на русский язык. Основное внимание уделяется языковым и культурным барьерам, которые влияют на способность переводчика сохранить замысел оригинала, одновременно делая текст привлекательным для русскоязычной аудитории. В обсуждении подчеркиваются переводческие приемы, включая этимологические, стилистические и семантические адаптации, а также роль культурной адаптации в сохранении эмоционального и тематического звучания романа.

**Ключевые слова:** перевод фэнтези, культурная адаптация, языковые трудности, перевод на русский язык, литература для молодежи.

## INTRODUCTION

Translating fantasy literature poses unique challenges, particularly when it comes to preserving the immersive qualities of the original text. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight*, a global phenomenon, combines modern romance with supernatural themes, presenting a translator with a complex mix of linguistic, cultural, and stylistic hurdles. In the Russian translation, these challenges become pronounced as the translator must navigate cultural differences, maintain the atmospheric tone, and ensure character voices remain authentic.

This article explores the nuances of adapting *Twilight* for Russian readers, analyzing the linguistic and cultural decisions made by the translator and their impact on the novel's reception in Russia.

The names in *Twilight* carry symbolic weight. For example, "Bella Swan" evokes beauty and grace, qualities that align with her character arc. In Russian, "Bella" translates directly, retaining its original meaning of "beautiful," but "Swan" (symbolizing purity and transformation) may lose its metaphorical depth if rendered as "Лебедь". Translators often retain such names in transliteration to preserve their international familiarity, though this risks losing cultural nuance<sup>1</sup>.

Phonetic considerations also affect how the vampire and werewolf characters are depicted. For example, terms like “vampire” or “werewolf” need to maintain their eerie sound while sounding

<sup>1</sup> Bassnett, S. (2002). *Translation Studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

familiar to Russian readers. In translating a text as emotionally driven as *Twilight*, the subtext of character interactions is just as important as the overt dialogue. Subtle cues about Bella and Edward's growing relationship, their fears, and their longing are often conveyed through small, almost unnoticeable moments in the text.

These moments require particular care to ensure that the emotional subtext is not lost. For instance, the word choices in describing Edward's actions—his protective nature, his sense of guilt, his deep love—need to reflect these complex emotions in Russian without sounding overly sentimental. The translator's role here is to keep these layers intact, using Russian expressions that preserve the delicacy of the characters' internal struggles

Meyer's prose relies heavily on emotional subtext, especially in the romantic tension between Bella and Edward. Translating phrases such as "his smoldering gaze" or "a love as old as time" into Russian (e.g., "его горящий взгляд," "любовь древняя, как само время") requires careful attention to tone. Over-literal translations risk diminishing the depth of the characters' connection, while excessive embellishment may alienate readers<sup>2</sup>.

Certain cultural references in *Twilight*, such as high school dynamics and Pacific Northwest settings, may not resonate with Russian audiences. The translator faces the challenge of making these elements relatable without altering the essence of the story. For instance, the American concept of prom may be unfamiliar in Russia, prompting a need for explanatory phrasing or subtle adaptation.

Translators often preserve key names and terms in their original form to align with global marketing and fandom recognition. For example, "Cullen" and "Volturi" remain unchanged to maintain consistency across translations. Russian critics have occasionally noted that *Twilight*'s translation simplifies or domesticates certain cultural nuances, leading to mixed reactions. However, the accessible language has made the series popular among young Russian readers.

Meyer's descriptive, almost poetic style demands a careful balance between literal translation and creative adaptation. Translators might adjust sentence structures or introduce synonyms to maintain the novel's rhythm and readability in Russian.

Meyer's depiction of high school life includes concepts like "prom," "homecoming," and "cafeteria cliques," which are quintessentially American. Translators must decide whether to explain these terms, replace them with culturally equivalent Russian traditions, or leave them as they are with added footnotes. For example, "prom" might be rephrased as a school dance (школьный бал) to resonate better with Russian readers<sup>3</sup>

Meyer's prose is rich in romantic imagery and heightened emotions, which can be difficult to translate without sounding overly sentimental or artificial. Phrases like "He was my personal brand of heroin" might feel too dramatic in Russian, risking alienation of readers unfamiliar with this intense style. Translators must balance emotional authenticity with cultural norms for romantic expression.

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<sup>2</sup> House, J. (2015). *Translation as Communication across Languages and Cultures*. Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Виноградов, В. В. (1981). *Очерки по теории перевода*. Издательство МГУ.

The Russian language's grammatical structure and vocabulary differ significantly from English. This impacts sentence length, word choice, and even punctuation, all of which contribute to the novel's pacing. Translators must prioritize fluency while retaining the integrity of Meyer's narrative voice<sup>4</sup>.

The Russian translation of *Twilight* received mixed reviews. While many praised its ability to capture the novel's romantic essence, others criticized the loss of cultural specificity and tonal subtlety. Readers noted that certain metaphors and idiomatic expressions felt awkward or overly literal in Russian. Despite these criticisms, the translation succeeded in introducing Meyer's work to a new audience, sparking a wave of interest in young adult fantasy in Russia.

Russian folklore includes a wealth of supernatural beings such as "домовые" (house spirits) and "русалки" (water nymphs), which differ significantly from the Western vampire and werewolf archetypes. This divergence can shape how Russian readers perceive *Twilight*'s supernatural elements. The translator must ensure these elements retain their intended mystique without conflicting with local mythological traditions.

Russian syntax and morphology impose constraints that can affect the tone and pacing of the text. For example: Russian often uses longer, more complex sentences than English. This can make Meyer's short, impactful sentences lose some of their immediacy. Russian's extensive use of diminutives and suffixes could alter character dialogue or narration, potentially changing the tone. Russian nouns and adjectives have grammatical genders, which might complicate the translation of certain neutral or ambiguous terms from English. Phrases like "the lion fell in love with the lamb" might be rendered word-for-word (лев полюбил ягненка), but the metaphor could feel overly direct in Russian. A more culturally resonant phrase or rewording might preserve the romantic metaphor while sounding natural to Russian readers. Edward's dialogue often reflects his formal and archaic manner of speaking, emphasizing his age and Victorian upbringing. In Russian, this requires a mix of older vocabulary and formal sentence structures to convey his personality without making his speech sound unnatural.

Bella's internal monologue is central to *Twilight*'s narrative, often marked by introspection and self-deprecation. Preserving her tone in Russian demands a careful selection of words that capture her vulnerability and wit without exaggerating them. "Swan" is symbolic, reflecting grace and transformation. While the direct Russian translation "Лебедь" (Lebed) conveys the same meaning, its cultural resonance is weaker. This might prompt the translator to retain the English original through transliteration.<sup>5</sup>

Jacob Black's role as a werewolf adds an animalistic and primal layer to his character. Translating this into Russian involves ensuring his dialogue reflects these traits, such as using shorter, more abrupt phrasing to highlight his raw nature. The Italian vampire coven's name reflects their European sophistication and menace. Russian readers might require additional context for their significance, as Italy's gothic imagery might not hold the same connotations in Russia.

The emotional landscape of *Twilight* is crucial to its appeal. The tension between Bella and Edward, their deep emotional connection, and the internal struggles each character faces must be conveyed in a way that resonates with Russian readers. The language of romance, self-doubt, and longing in *Twilight* is poetic and often laden with introspection. Translating such moments involves not only choosing words that capture the original meaning but also ensuring that the emotional tone is preserved.

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<sup>4</sup> Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill.

<sup>5</sup> Kussmaul, P. (1995). *Training the Translator*. John Benjamins Publishing

Bella's internal monologues, full of introspection and self-reflection, are a significant part of the narrative. Translating these moments requires careful attention to the subtle emotional cues that Meyer provides. A direct, literal translation may sound stiff or awkward, so the translator must find ways to make Bella's self-doubt and emotional turmoil feel authentic in Russian, using idiomatic expressions that convey the same tone without being overly dramatic.

Edward's dialogue is formal and archaic, reflecting his long life and Victorian upbringing. In Russian, this formality must be conveyed through the use of older vocabulary and formal sentence structures, which is an effective way to maintain his character's essence. However, balancing this formal tone with Bella's more casual, modern speech is equally important to retain the dynamics between them<sup>6</sup>.

The Twilight series includes a variety of American cultural references that might not be immediately familiar to Russian readers. From high school experiences like prom to Bella's interactions with the modern world, these references may need to be altered or explained to fit within Russian culture.

Vampires and werewolves have deep roots in Western folklore, but Russia has its own rich tradition of supernatural beings. The concept of the vampire, for example, is more grotesque and malevolent in Slavic mythology than the romanticized, brooding figure seen in Twilight. Translating this requires not only a shift in vocabulary but also a consideration of how the Russian audience perceives such characters.

A significant part of Twilight's appeal lies in its eerie atmosphere—captured through its setting in the rainy town of Forks, Washington, and the mysterious aura of the Cullen family. This atmosphere is built on a unique blend of supernatural tension, mystery, and romance, which is essential to the story. The setting in Forks is essential for building the tone of the novel—gloomy, rainy, and isolated. Descriptions of the weather and the landscape need to evoke the same sense of mystery in Russian. In Russian, adjectives and descriptive phrases must be chosen carefully to replicate the same atmospheric effect. Terms like “gray skies,” “cloudy,” and “misty” would be adapted to create the right tone, maintaining the melancholy yet alluring setting.

Events like Bella's first encounter with Edward, where his supernatural abilities are revealed, need to be translated in a way that conveys the awe and fear experienced by Bella. In Russian, terms describing Edward's abilities, such as his “cold” touch or “inhuman” speed, must be precise yet convey the sense of otherworldliness. The difficulty lies in choosing words that evoke the right level of tension without over-explaining, allowing the supernatural elements to remain mysterious.

The metaphor of addiction here is central to Bella's emotional journey but would not necessarily resonate in the same way in Russian. Translators may choose a less literal version that keeps the emotional impact, such as comparing her desire to a forbidden longing or deep infatuation. Sound symbolism is key in fantasy literature, where the sounds of names and terms contribute to the world-building. Names like “Cullen,” “Forks,” and even “Vulturi” carry certain phonetic qualities that shape the reader's perception of the characters or places they represent.

In Russian, the phonetic quality of these names is preserved in transliteration, but the translator must also ensure that the names are easy to pronounce for Russian speakers. For example, “Cullen” becomes “Каллен,” which preserves the sound but is adjusted for Russian phonology. However, some

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<sup>6</sup> Wilss, W. (1996). *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods*. Gunter

terms, like “Volturi,” retain their original form, as it helps keep the association with the Italian origin intact.

## CONCLUSION

Translating Twilight into Russian was a complex process that required navigating linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and the preservation of emotional depth. Through strategies like transliteration, adaptation, and careful consideration of cultural references, the Russian translation manages to capture the essence of Stephenie Meyer’s world while making it accessible to a new audience.

The challenges faced by the translator are reflective of the broader difficulties in translating fantasy literature. It’s not just about finding equivalent words in another language, but also about conveying the same emotional impact, symbolism, and cultural context that makes the original text resonate with readers. The success of the Russian translation of Twilight lies in its ability to maintain the novel’s supernatural atmosphere and emotional intensity, while ensuring that Russian readers could connect with Bella’s journey of love, longing, and discovery.

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