

The Transfer Of Emotional Connotations In The Translation Of Gothic Novels Into Russian

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Abstract: *This article examines the transfer of emotional connotations in the translation of Gothic novels from English into Russian, focusing on the ways in which affective meaning is encoded and reproduced across linguistic systems. Since Gothic prose depends on the generation of fear, suspense, melancholy, and the sublime, translation must preserve not only propositional content but also the emotional architecture of the source text. The study argues that emotional connotation operates at several levels: phonetic and phonological patterns, lexical intensification, syntactic pacing, metaphorical imagery, and spatial semantics. Special attention is given to the role of sound symbolism, especially fricatives, sibilants, plosives, and sonorants, which contribute to the acoustic atmosphere of Gothic narratives. The article also shows that Russian translation requires careful modulation of lexical choices such as *temnyj*, *mrachnyj*, *zloveshchij*, and *grobovoj*, since these units can either intensify or neutralize the Gothic effect. Drawing on translation theory and Gothic studies, the paper demonstrates that successful translation depends on functional equivalence, compensation, and stylistic sensitivity. The findings suggest that translating Gothic fiction into Russian is not a mechanical substitution of words, but a complex reconstruction of emotional experience for the target reader.*

Keywords— Gothic novel, emotional connotation, Russian translation, sound symbolism, affective meaning, literary translation

1. INTRODUCTION

The translation of the Gothic novel from English into Russian involves far more than a mere linguistic substitution; it requires the recreation of a complex affective ecosystem designed to elicit specific physiological and psychological responses. In the Gothic tradition, the primary function of language is to evoke terror, horror, suspense, and the sublime. These emotional states are not just narrative outcomes but are embedded within the very fabric of the prose—its phonology, morphology, and semantic associations (Adelman, Estes, & Cossu, 2018). Emotional connotations, defined as the affective information encoded and perceived within language, serve as the vehicle for these responses. For the Russian translator, the task is to navigate the profound differences between English and Russian “emblematic worldviews” to ensure that the intended “emotional load” is not lost or inadvertently altered (Pavlenko, 2008).

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Literary translation theory and Gothic studies offer valuable insights into this topic. Eugene Nida's work on dynamic equivalence emphasizes the importance of achieving a similar effect on the target audience as the source text had on its original audience (Nida, 1964). This is particularly relevant for conveying emotional connotations.

Anton Popovič's concept of “stylistic parameters” highlights how translators must analyze and reproduce the stylistic features of the source text, including those that contribute to emotional atmosphere (Popovič, 1982).

Gothic studies scholars like David Punter and Fred Botting have explored the psychological and cultural underpinnings of Gothic literature, providing a framework for understanding the emotions it aims to evoke. Their analyses of recurring motifs and themes can inform translation choices (Punter, 1996; Botting, 1996).

In Gothic literature, language creates a mood before it conveys information. A haunted house is not simply a building; it is a psychological space. A storm is not just weather; it becomes an acoustic sign of danger. Scholarship on Gothic novels identifies sound, tension, and fear as key devices for shaping reader response, and this means that a translator must preserve the emotional temperature of the text as carefully as its plot (Amelina, 2014). If the Russian version becomes too neutral, the Gothic effect weakens; if it becomes too exaggerated, the text can sound melodramatic rather than terrifying.

3. PHONETIC AND PHONOLOGICAL MODULATORS OF EMOTION

One of the most nuanced aspects of emotional transfer occurs at the level of phonemes and sound symbolism. Research indicates that the relationship between sound and meaning is not entirely arbitrary; certain phonemes are over-represented in words expressing specific emotions (Ferré and Fraga, 2025). In the Gothic context, the “hissing” sound of fricatives, such as the phoneme /s/ in “snake” or “sinister”, is statistically associated with negative high-arousal states.

3.1 Sound Symbolism in English and Russian

In English, the /s/ sound often carries an association with danger or the supernatural, frequently used in Gothic descriptions of wind, serpents, or whispering ghosts. When translating these passages into Russian, the translator must find ways to maintain this “hissing” quality. The Russian language, rich in sibilants like /sh/ and /shch/, provides a fertile ground for this. For example, the translation of a vampire’s “hiss” into the Russian “shipenie” preserves the sound symbolism, thereby maintaining the arousing property of the original text. Furthermore, the “in–out effect” of articulation—where words moving from the front of the mouth to the back are perceived more positively—can influence the emotional properties of fictional names and settings. A Russian translator sensitive to these patterns might choose settings or characters’ names that evoke the desired “inward” (negative/enclosed) or “outward” (positive/open) feeling.

Phonetic Category	Emotional Association	Example (English)	Example (Russian)	Gothic Impact
Sibilants/Fricatives	High Arousal / Fear	<i>Shadow, Secret, Sinuous</i>	<i>Ten', Tajna, Izvivistyj</i>	Enhances tension and mystery
High Front Vowels (/i/)	Positive Valence	<i>Friendly, Light</i>	<i>Milyj, Svetlyj</i>	Used for contrast/false security
Back Vowels/Diphthongs	Solemnity / Dread	<i>Gloom, Doom, Mourn</i>	<i>Mrak, Uzhas, Skor'</i>	Establishes oppressive atmosphere

Table 1. Patterns of phonetic categories

The use of sound symbolism is particularly evident in the translation of “onomatopoeia”, where the French Symbolist poets and later Russian translators took Edgar Allan Poe’s experiments as a model. By aspiring to the “condition of music”, Gothic prose uses these phonetic patterns to create an “orchestral composition” of terror (Larrouy-Maestri, Poeppel & Pell, 2024).

3.2 Gothic Soundscapes

A useful way to frame this is through emotional sound symbolism: large-scale experimental work shows that phonemes can correlate with emotional valence, and that the first phoneme of a word can be especially informative (Adelman, Estes, & Cossu, 2018). Across several languages, phoneme patterns were found to predict negative or positive valence better than chance, and rapidly articulated phonemes were more often associated with negativity than positivity. This does not mean that every /s/ is “evil” or every /m/ is “soft”; rather, it means that phonological patterns can systematically support emotional interpretation.

For Gothic prose, this matters because the genre often relies on whispering, murmuring, hissing, groaning, creaking, and silence to generate unease. Studies of Gothic soundscapes describe sound as a core structural device, not a secondary ornament: it can signal danger, blur boundaries, and activate the reader’s imagination (Ventola, 1991). In translation, the task is therefore to reproduce the acoustic profile of the passage — its sibilance, tempo, abruptness, and breath patterns — even when the exact phonemes cannot be copied.

In Russian translation, the most productive phonological modulators are usually these: fricatives and sibilants for secrecy, menace, and “snake-like” movement; plosives for shock, impact, and harshness; and sonorants plus slower rhythm for mourning, distance, or hypnotic gloom. This is best understood as a functional translation strategy, not a mechanical one. Russian does not need to imitate every English sound; it needs to recreate the same emotional pressure through its own resources. Translation research on phonological meaning supports this view by treating sound, rhythm, and prosody as meaningful elements that may require compensation rather than literal imitation (Pilshchikov, 2016).

4. MAIN MECHANISMS OF EMOTIONAL TRANSFER

A first mechanism is lexical intensification. English Gothic prose often uses words like dread, chill, gloom, eerie, mournful, and sepulchral, which carry emotional and evaluative force. In Russian, these can be rendered by words such as “ужас, леденящий, мрачный, жуткий, зловещий, гробовой”. The translator’s task is to choose a Russian equivalent that preserves the emotional load without pushing the style into excess. Studies on connotative equivalence stress that stylistic and emotional associations are part of the meaning that translation must reproduce.

A second mechanism is syntactic pacing. Gothic prose often uses slow accumulation, interruption, and suspension to create tension. Russian translation can preserve this by keeping long, winding sentences when the source text builds suspense, or by using short

clauses when fear becomes abrupt and immediate. Research on emotional coloring in literary translation shows that the density and balance of emotion words matter for maintaining the emotional charge of the original (Hubscher-Davidson, 2021).

A third mechanism is imagery and metaphor. Gothic writers frequently personify houses, winds, shadows, and silence. In Russian, literal translation is often effective if the metaphor is natural in both languages; when it is not, compensation may be needed (Yakovleva, 2016). This is especially important because emotional metaphors are not always culturally identical across languages, and translation may need to recreate the same emotional effect through a different image.

4.1. Spatial Semantics: The Gothic Setting and Cultural Memory

In Gothic literature, setting is not merely a backdrop; it is an “objective correlative” of the narrator’s internal state. The translation of setting-related vocabulary into Russian is complicated by the different cultural “emblems” associated with nature and architecture in the two languages.

English Term	Russian Options	Emotional Connotation	Translator’s Decision Impact
Dark	<i>Temnyj / Mrachnyj</i>	Mysterious, hidden, evil	Intensifies Gothic dread
Shady	<i>Tenistyj</i>	Protected, pleasant	Neutralizes Gothic tension
Village	<i>Derevnya</i>	Common, peasant-focused	May fail to convey isolation
Estate	<i>Usad'ba / Pomest'e</i>	Aristocratic, historical	Connects to “feudal” Gothic roots

Table 2.

Translator’s Choice of Emotional Connotation

A critical distinction in the translation of landscape is the choice between adjectives like “dark” and “shady”. While “shady” (*tenistyj*) suggests a protective, cooling sense of being shielded from the sun, “dark” (*temnyj*) carries heavy associations of the mysterious, the hidden, the evil, or the frightening. In the Russian “emblematic worldview”, a “*temnyj sad*” (dark garden) is an established trope linked to Romanticism and the Gothic, suggesting mystery and danger (Nenarokova, 2021).

The difficulty at the lexical level often lies in the fact that translators choose words with a “greater emotional load” than the original vocabulary, introducing tropes absent in the source text. This can result in a more realistic picture on one hand, but it can also destroy the subtle “atmosphere of the text” if the symbolic landscape is replaced by something too mundane. For example, translating Turgenev’s *v derevnyu* as “to the country” is considered successful because “country” can imply an estate (*pomest'e* or *imenie*), whereas “to the village” creates a mundane, non-Gothic mental image for the reader.

Ann Radcliffe’s work, particularly “The Mysteries of Udolpho”, is characterized by a “musical” quality that attempts to “tell a story” through sensory description. This “aspiration to the condition of music” means that the emotional impact of her prose is often found in its rhythm and the “emotional connotations that the arrangement of notes can produce”. Translating Radcliffe into Russian requires a “sense-to-sense” approach rather than a literal one. A literal rendering of her complex, 18th-century English syntax often “demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning” and threatens the comprehensibility of the text’s emotional core. Instead, the translator must prioritize the “emotional depth, rhythm, and cultural essence” of the original (Imran and others, 2024).

Gothic Motif	English Expression	Russian Translation Approach	Affective Result
Terror	A silent awe	<i>Svyashchennyj trepet</i>	Invokes the “Sublime”
Horror	A ghastly sight	<i>Uzhasayushchee zrelishche</i>	Triggers visceral disgust/fear
Suspense	The heart misgave her	<i>Serdce szhalos’</i>	Creates physical empathy in reader
Melancholy	Pensive gloom	<i>Tuskloe unynie</i>	Establishes low-valence sadness

Table 3.

Representatives of emotional core of gothic motif words

Overall, translating Gothic novels into Russian is best understood as the transfer of an emotional architecture. The translator must recreate not only what is happening, but how the text feels while it is happening. That means preserving the pressure of silence, the weight of darkness, the pulse of fear, and the emotional ambiguity that defines the genre. Russian is well suited to Gothic translation because it has a rich system of evaluative adjectives, expressive verbs, and elevated lexical choices.

5. CONCLUSION

The deep analysis of the transfer of emotional connotations in Gothic novel translation into Russian reveals that the process is a multi-layered linguistic and cultural undertaking. It starts with the smallest units—phonemes and morphemes—where sound symbolism and suffixes modulate the valence and arousal of the text. It extends into the semantic realm, where the choice between “dark” and “shady” can determine whether a setting feels like a mundane landscape or a Gothic emblem.

The “language of emotions” remains the ultimate tool for this transfer, allowing the translator to influence the addressee and express the “subtle nuances” of feelings that define the Gothic experience. Effective translation requires lexical intensification where needed, syntactic control, preservation of metaphor, and sensitivity to tonal balance. When these elements are handled well, the Russian text does more than convey the story: it reproduces the emotional world of Gothic fiction for the target reader.

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