

**Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895):  
*Lefty (1881). A Comparative  
Analysis of Russian-to-English  
Translations: Exploring  
Linguistic and Cultural  
Dimensions***

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the translation of Nikolai Leskov's novella *Lefty*, examining the nuances and methodologies employed by five prominent translators: Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna. The study critically analyses how these translators have approached the complex interplay between linguistic and cultural elements in their renditions of Leskov's work, focusing particularly on their handling of neologisms, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references.

The dissertation utilises a comparative analysis framework, assessing the effectiveness of each translator's approach in preserving the essence and stylistic nuances of the original text. Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation is noted for its rigorous adherence to the source material's literal meaning yet sometimes falters in capturing cultural subtleties. In contrast, William Edgerton's translation is distinguished by its creative adaptation and rhythm, reflecting a deep understanding of the source text's cultural and thematic layers. As Edgerton himself notes, "Translation is not a mere act of converting words, but an art of conveying the spirit of the original" (Edgerton, 2023, p. 112).

Isobel Hapgood and George Hanna, while providing clear and accessible translations, often miss the playful and innovative aspects of Leskov's language, rendering their versions less dynamic. The study further explores how Hapgood's and Hanna's choices affect the readability and engagement of the English-speaking audience. The dissertation concludes that while each translation has its merits, Edgerton's work stands out for its nuanced and imaginative approach, offering a richer representation of Leskov's original narrative.

In summary, this research underscores the challenges inherent in translating culturally rich literature and highlights the significance of a translator's creative choices in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. The findings affirm that a successful translation transcends mere word-for-word conversion, capturing the multifaceted essence of the original text.

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# Introduction

Nikolai Semyonovich Leskov, born on February 16, 1831, in the village of Gorokhovo, Russia, was a renowned novelist and short-story writer, widely regarded as one of the finest storytellers in Russian literature. He began his literary career as a journalist in Kiev before moving to St. Petersburg, where he continued to write prolifically. Leskov's first work appeared in *The Northern Bee* in 1862, and he went on to publish many notable short stories and novellas, including *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1864), *The Sealed Angel* (1872), *The Enchanted Wanderer* (1873), and *Lefty* (1881). He died in St. Petersburg on March 5, 1895 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2005). Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* (Левша), first published in 1881, stands as one of the most iconic works in Russian literature. The novella encapsulates the complexities of Russian identity and culture through a vivid narrative that intertwines linguistic innovation, satire, and cultural references. Leskov, known for his unique narrative style and his ability to depict the Russian spirit, uses *Lefty* to craft a tale that is not merely about craftsmanship but also about national identity, social commentary, and the nuanced relationship between Russia and the West during the 19th century. Through the protagonist, a humble yet exceptionally skilled craftsman from Tula, the novella reflects both the ingenuity of the Russian people and the country's struggle to assert itself on the world stage. This duality makes *Lefty* a text rich in meaning and symbolism, and consequently, a challenging subject for translation into English.

This dissertation undertakes a comparative analysis of four prominent English translations of *Lefty* by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna. Each of these translators brings a different approach to rendering Leskov's intricate and culturally specific narrative into English, providing a unique lens through which to examine the strategies and challenges involved in translating such a text. By comparing these translations, the study seeks to understand how well each translator preserved the novella's linguistic creativity, cultural references, and underlying message, as well as the broader implications of these choices on the reader's interpretation of the text.

This dissertation will primarily focus on how Pevear & Volokhonsky, Edgerton, Hapgood, and Hanna dealt with the translation of *Lefty* and will evaluate their success

in conveying the essence of the novella to an English-speaking audience. To facilitate this analysis, ten specific words or phrases will be selected as focal points to obtain the most pertinent data for comparison, enabling a deeper investigation into the nuances of each translation. This approach ensures a thorough examination of key linguistic elements, allowing for an assessment of how these choices impact the preservation of Leskov's distinctive style and the cultural identity embedded in the text.

At the heart of *Lefty* lies a narrative that is as much about Russian craftsmanship and patriotism as it is about the tension between Russia and the West. The story opens with Tsar Alexander I. visiting England, where he is shown a series of remarkable mechanical wonders, the most impressive of which is a steel flea so small that it can only be seen through a microscope. This flea, a symbol of Western technological advancement, is brought back to Russia by the Tsar, who then challenges Russian artisans to surpass the English by improving upon the flea. The task falls to Lefty, a seemingly unremarkable craftsman from the town of Tula, who, alongside his fellow workers, achieves the astonishing feat of shoeing the flea with tiny horseshoes. This act of ingenuity is a metaphor for Russian skill and talent, but it also underscores the novella's critique of the Russian state and its failure to recognise and reward such brilliance. Upon Lefty's return to Russia, his genius goes unappreciated, and he eventually dies in poverty, a tragic ending that serves as a commentary on the country's inability to nurture its own talent.

This poignant narrative is further enriched by Leskov's use of language, particularly his incorporation of linguistic innovations such as neologisms, folk expressions, and wordplay. These elements, integral to the novella's style and impact, pose significant challenges for translation. Translators must not only convey the surface meaning of the text but also navigate the complex interplay of humour, cultural references, and linguistic creativity that make *Lefty* such a distinctive work. The task is further complicated by the cultural specificity of Leskov's satire, which is deeply rooted in 19th-century Russian society and its interactions with the West.

Translation, as scholars such as Susan Bassnett (2002) and Lawrence Venuti (1995) have argued, is far more than a mechanical process of converting words from one language to another. It is an intricate cultural practice that involves transferring meaning, nuance, and context across linguistic boundaries. This is particularly true for

literary translation, where the translator must grapple with the challenge of preserving not only the literal content of the source text but also its cultural and historical resonance. In the case of *Lefty*, the translator faces the dual challenge of maintaining Leskov's linguistic creativity and ensuring that the novella's humour, satire, and cultural commentary are accessible to an English-speaking audience.

The distinction between domestication and foreignization, as outlined by Venuti, is a key theoretical framework for understanding the different approaches to translation. Domestication involves adapting the source text to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience, often at the expense of the original's specificity. In contrast, foreignization seeks to preserve the distinctiveness of the source text, even if it results in a more challenging or unfamiliar reading experience for the target audience. These two strategies reflect the broader tension in translation between fidelity to the source text and readability in the target language.

In analysing the translations of Pevear & Volokhonsky, Edgerton, Hapgood, and Hanna, this study will explore how each translator navigated this tension in their rendering of *Lefty*. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky are known for their commitment to preserving the integrity of the original text, often leaning towards a more foreignized approach. Their translation of *Lefty* seeks to retain the linguistic and cultural richness of Leskov's novella, providing English readers with a version that closely mirrors the Russian original. However, this approach can sometimes result in a translation that feels more foreign and challenging for the reader. By contrast, William Edgerton's translation, while still preserving much of Leskov's linguistic creativity, offers a slightly more accessible version of the text. Isabel Hapgood and George Hanna, on the other hand, adopt more domesticated strategies, smoothing over some of the novella's linguistic peculiarities to create a text that is more immediately comprehensible to English readers but potentially loses some of the richness and depth of the original.

This dissertation will also engage with the specific challenges posed by Leskov's use of *skaz*, a form of oral storytelling that mimics the speech patterns and dialects of Russian folk traditions. *Skaz* is a defining feature of Leskov's narrative style, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the tone and voice of *Lefty*. Translating *skaz* requires a delicate balance between preserving the oral, colloquial nature of the text and ensuring

that it remains readable and engaging for a foreign audience. Each of the translations examined in this study takes a different approach to this challenge, offering valuable insights into the broader question of how oral traditions can be effectively translated into written forms in another language.

In addition to examining the broader translation strategies employed by Pevear & Volokhonsky, Edgerton, Hapgood, and Hanna, this study will also focus on ten specific words or phrases that are particularly representative of the challenges posed by *Lefty*. These terms will serve as focal points for a detailed analysis of how each translator navigated the linguistic and cultural complexities of the novella. By comparing how these key elements were translated, this dissertation will provide a more nuanced understanding of the different approaches to translation and their implications for the reader's experience of the text.

The findings of this research will contribute to the broader discourse on the challenges and strategies involved in translating complex literary works, particularly those that are deeply embedded in their cultural and historical contexts. *Lefty* is not just a story about a craftsman; it is a satirical masterpiece that explores themes of national identity, loyalty, betrayal, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. Translating such a work requires a deep understanding of both the linguistic intricacies and the cultural resonances that give the text its power. By comparing the translations of Pevear & Volokhonsky, Edgerton, Hapgood, and Hanna, this study will shed light on how different translation strategies can either preserve or dilute these elements, and what that means for readers' engagement with the text.

Moreover, this research will make significant contributions to the fields of linguistics, translation studies, and cultural studies by providing practical insights for translators working with Russian - English translation. By examining the origins and translation of Russian words, the study will enrich our understanding of the intricate relationship between language, culture, and translation. It will also foster a deeper appreciation for the cultural nuances embedded within the Russian language, helping translators to navigate the challenges of rendering such texts into English without losing the richness of their original meaning.

Ultimately, the primary objective of this dissertation is to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* and its English translations, focusing on the challenges and strategies involved in translating linguistic nuances, cultural context, and the story's satirical elements. *Lefty*, as a satirical masterpiece that delves into themes of identity, patriotism, and societal perceptions, offers a complex narrative structure and linguistic subtleties that make it a valuable subject for translation analysis. Through this study, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of how these elements are preserved or altered in translation can be achieved, contributing to the broader field of Translation Studies and enhancing our appreciation for the art and science of literary translation.

# Chapter 1

## Literature Review

### 1. Introduction

This chapter will explore the existing research on the topic of the dissertation, putting it in context. It will provide an overview of the studies that discuss *skaz* in Leskov's *Lefty*, examine translation challenges and the grammatical differences between English and Russian. It will present data on these factors and analyse what makes Leskov's style distinctive.

## 1.1 Understanding *Skaz* in Leskov's *Lefty*

The concept of *skaz* is fundamental to understanding Nikolai Leskov's narrative style, particularly in his work *Lefty*. *Skaz* is a Russian literary term derived from the verb *skazat'* ("to speak" or "to tell") and refers to a form of narrative that mimics oral storytelling. This technique is essential in creating the unique voice that characterises much of Leskov's work (Schmid, 2013).

As Richard Pevear explains, *skaz* "includes the teller in the tale, so that we do not simply read the printed word, but also hear the speaking voice" (Pevear, 1992). This narrative approach allows the language to become "physically present," bringing the characters and events to life as if they were being told directly to the reader. The Oxford Reference further elaborates that *skaz* often involves the use of colloquial speech, marked by non-literary features such as slang, dialect, and expletives, giving the narrative an authentic, spoken quality.

The form and position of the narrator in Leskov's texts is often that of a character who directly participates in the events of the fictional world to varying degrees. Additionally, the narrator is often socially or professionally situated, characterised, and defined. Eichenbaum contrasts the language of such a narrator with the expressiveness of written works, arguing that it represents a deliberate distortion of literary language. In Leskov's prose, particularly in *Lefty*, words are frequently altered, and the narrator employs folk etymology to explain unusual foreign expressions. He also uses imperfect or, conversely, exaggerated imitations of the speech of certain social groups—techniques that create a comic effect (Eichenbaum, 1987a). Ten words, phrases, or expressions taken directly from *Lefty* will be used to illustrate Leskov's distinctive style and humour and will be explored in detail in later sections of this thesis.

When Leskov published his tale *Lefty* in 1881, he included a preface that suggested the story originated from the account of a certain Tula gunsmith. He wrote:

*"I cannot say exactly where the myth of the steel flea was born—whether it originated in Tula, Izhevsk, or Sestroretsk—but it clearly comes from one of these places. In any case, the tale of the steel flea is a special gunsmith's legend, expressing the pride of Russian craftsmen in their trade. [...] I wrote*

*down this legend in Sestroretsk, based on the account of an old gunsmith, a Tula immigrant who had settled on the Sestra River during the reign of Emperor Alexander I. Two years ago, he was still in good health, with a sharp memory, and fondly recalled the past. He deeply respected Tsar Nicholas Pavlovich, lived according to the old faith, read religious books, and kept canaries. People treated him with great respect.” (Leskov, 1958: 499).*

Leskov crafted the story so convincingly that many did not recognise it as fiction. Some even accused him of deception, believing *Lefty* to be an authentic folk legend. One reviewer wrote that Leskov’s role in the "destruction" of the original tale amounted to little more than transcription, while another claimed that he had merely reinterpreted an already well-known fairy tale about the steel flea (Benjamin, 2007; Ansberg, 1957).

In response to these claims, Leskov defended himself, eventually removing the preface from later editions of the text. He stated in a letter to the editor of *Severnaya Ptchela* the newspaper that first published *Lefty*:

*"There are no historical records of either the flea or Lefty, and I find it impossible that anyone could have ‘heard of them long ago.’ I must admit—I wrote this story myself in May of last year, and the character of Lefty is my own invention. As for the English flea that the Tula craftsmen supposedly shod, it is not a legend at all, but merely a small joke."*

Leskov also plays with language by deliberately misinterpreting words and repeatedly using them in unusual ways to expand their meaning—this will be explored further later on. Dmitry Likhachev acknowledged Leskov as a stylistic innovator and a preserver of Russian linguistic tradition. In his broader essays on 19th-century literature, Likhachev emphasizes Leskov’s role in capturing the oral and vernacular speech of the Russian people, seeing his works as part of the effort to document and artistically elevate everyday language (Likhachev, 1979). Leskov often introduces and repeats his own invented words and expressions to build suspense and keep the reader engaged. The titles of his works and their subtitles also play a role in shaping expectations. For example, the title *The Tale of Cross-Eyed Lefty from Tula and the*

*Steel Flea* (Сказ о тульском косом Левше и о стальной блохе) signals a folkloric, oral tone through the word *skaz*, while the phrase *from Tula* adds regional specificity. Similarly, *The Sealed Angel: From the Travels of a Builder* (Запечатленный ангел: Из путевых заметок строителя) presents the story as if drawn from an authentic travel account, despite being fictional. Sometimes, Leskov claims that certain words or expressions come from local dialects, but as Likhachev notes, these are often made up rather than taken from real regional speech (Likhachev 1988; 1997).

Leskov's approach to "destruction" in literature appears to be influenced by older forms and traditions of the epic novel. His work can be linked to both oral storytelling—such as chronicles, which exist between spoken and written traditions—and purely literary genres like the picaresque novel. Additionally, the protagonist in Leskov's narratives is shaped simply by his presence in various twists and turns of the story rather than by traditional character development.

This challenges Eichenbaum's argument that Leskov's style is solely rooted in oral traditions and represents a shift away from written literature. Given the complexity of Leskov's work, Eichenbaum's theory appears to be an oversimplification. Instead, Leskov's writing is much more layered, incorporating unexpected influences and connections.

## 1.2 The Challenges of Translating Nikolai Leskov

In the following discussion, the preceding analysis of 'destruction' is extended, with the unique stylistic prowess of Leskov being highlighted, particularly evident in his work *Lefty*, where new lexicons were developed and subsequently integrated into contemporary Russian discourse.

This linguistic innovation, characterised by "a new arrangement of old roots", not only presents a challenge for translators but also unveils previously concealed semantic dimensions within the language. Leskov's assertion that differing circumstances impart distinct meanings to words highlights the complexity of translation, as each individual interprets reality through a unique lens. This philosophical stance permeates Leskov's writing style, complicating the task of translation by imbuing his prose with layers of nuanced meaning. Leskov's deliberate intricacy in his compositions, as exemplified by his commentary on the egalitarian impact of machines, reflects a conscious effort to challenge conventional literary norms, contributing to his originality as an author (Tabachnikova, 2016). In *Lefty*, he employs a narrator from the same social stratum as the protagonist, lending authenticity to the vernacular speech patterns and idiomatic expressions woven throughout the text. This informal, colloquial voice is integral to the story's unique style, breaking away from the polished, educated language typically associated with 19th-century Russian literature. By using a narrator whose language mirrors the common speech of the lower classes, Leskov blurs the boundaries between high and low culture, elevating vernacular speech as a central artistic tool. This stylistic innovation not only enhances the satirical tone of the novella but also underscores its cultural and social themes, such as the critique of hierarchical systems and the tension between tradition and progress.

Leskov's engagement with the socio-economic changes of his time is evident in his exploration of machinery's potential to level societal hierarchies and disrupt established power structures. By incorporating discussions of industrialisation and its implications into his narratives, Leskov demonstrates his ability to weave contemporary issues into layered, intricate plots that reflect the complexity of the world around him.

This intricacy can also be viewed as a statement on the evolving role of literature in a modernising society. For Leskov, literature, like technology, has the power to

democratise knowledge and challenge existing norms. His distinctiveness as an author lies in both his thematic depth and stylistic innovation, which encourage readers to engage critically with his works rather than consume them passively.

Furthermore, Olga Tabachnikova, a literary scholar, in her 2019 study *"Skaz", Stylization and Local Text in the Context of Russian Laughter Culture: From Leskov's "The Lefty" to Andrei Platonov*, posits that the disparity between the authorial and narrative perspectives in *Lefty* serves as a conduit for Leskov's contemplation of the collective national psyche, marred by centuries of servitude, yet endowed with ingenuity. This divergence in viewpoints necessitates a meticulous consideration of linguistic nuances, as language inherently shapes one's worldview. Tabachnikova's assertion underscores the indispensable role of understanding the cultural and historical contexts embedded within the text, particularly crucial in translating works from Russian to English (Tabachnikova, pp. 28-34, 2019).

Additionally, the comedic elements present in *Lefty* pose a formidable challenge for translators, given the inherent difficulty in conveying humour across linguistic and cultural barriers. Humour often relies on wordplay, double entendres, and culturally specific references, elements that may elude translation, thereby risking the loss of authenticity. In *"Perlocutionary Equivalence: Marking, Exegesis and Recontextualisation"* (in *The Pragmatics of Translation*), Leo Hickey points to the challenges of preserving comedic effect, thereby underscoring the broader complexities of translating humour. (Hickey, pp. 217–232, 1998). Thus, achieving fidelity to the original text demands a nuanced understanding of both linguistic intricacies and cultural nuances.

To put it succinctly, the multifaceted nature of Leskov's literary oeuvre, characterised by linguistic innovation, philosophical depth, and comedic flair, presents formidable challenges for translators seeking to capture the essence of his work in English. Navigating these challenges necessitates a holistic approach that encompasses linguistic proficiency, cultural acumen, and a keen appreciation for the intricate interplay between language and meaning (Tabachnikova, pp. 28-34, 2019).

By definition, linguistic-cultural adaptation is the process of adapting any type of content to the culture of the target language. In the realm of cultural translation endeavours, translators may encounter instances where certain elements lack a precise counterpart in the target language. When faced with such challenges, translators must resort to ingenuity, employing strategies such as paraphrasing, incorporating explanatory footnotes, substituting with cultural analogues or equivalents, or modifying the text while endeavouring to preserve its inherent essence to the greatest extent (Angelone, n.d.).

Catford (1965), a prominent British scholar, raised doubts about the distinction between linguistic and cultural untranslatability, suggesting that linguistic challenges arise from the inability to find an equivalent in the target language due to inherent differences in language systems. However, he highlighted cultural untranslatability as a more intricate obstacle, stemming from the absence of situational or functional equivalents in the target culture. This form of untranslatability, Catford argued, poses greater difficulties than purely linguistic ones.

Illustrating the complexities of cultural untranslatability, consider the Russian term '*tsar-batyushka*.' Foreign historians often interpret this as a term of endearment meaning "dear father tsar." Yet, a direct translation like '*dear father tsar*' fails to capture the nuanced connotations of the Russian word '*batyushka*,' which carries a broader semantic range than its English counterpart '*father*'. It conveys a sense of profound patriotic reverence, typically reserved for rulers or the homeland, rather than evoking a purely familial or spiritual connection. This notion is closely tied to the term *матушка*, as in *Матушка Русь* (Mother Russia). The pairing of *Царь-батюшка* (Father Tsar) and *Матушка-Русь* (Mother Russia) is particularly significant, symbolising the deeply intertwined relationship between the ruler and the nation within the cultural and symbolic framework. Dmitry Medvedev (2010a) notably uses the term *батюшка* in a negative context, juxtaposing it with democracy, which he portrays as a bastion of peace. In such cases, the use of the positively charged *батюшка* in a negative light can perplex foreign audiences, making the translator's decision to omit or adapt the term justifiable to ensure clarity and comprehension in the target cultural context. This challenge parallels the difficulties faced by translators of Leskov's *Lefty*, where cultural nuances and linguistic subtleties abound. Such complexities demand

careful adaptation strategies to faithfully convey the author's intended message across cultural boundaries (Kuryleva & Nikiforova, 2012).

### **1.3 Comparative Analysis of English and Russian Grammar**

The attainment of optimal translation quality is contingent upon possessing a profound comprehension of Russian grammar, a task that presents formidable challenges to translators due to the language's unique characteristics compared to English.

One of the primary hurdles encountered by translators stems from the disparity in sentence structure and overall grammatical organisation between Russian and English. Russian language is distinguished by its sensitivity to grammatical cases, mandating the differentiation of word forms according to their syntactic functions within a sentence. Notably, while English employs definite and indefinite articles like "the" and "a," Russian lacks such articles entirely, thus complicating the translation process. Moreover, the divergent usage of participles between the two languages further contributes to the intricacies of translation, as English typically employs participles to signify ongoing actions, whereas Russian frequently utilises imperfective aspect verbs for the same purpose (Osoblivaia, 2022).

The contrast in grammatical structures between English and Russian becomes apparent in their treatment of cases. While English primarily employs subjective and objective cases, which are utilised sparingly, Russian encompasses six cases, demanding a thorough understanding of their semantic nuances and appropriate usage for accurate comprehension and translation of texts. Furthermore, Russian exhibits greater flexibility in word order owing to its extensive inflectional system and cases, enabling a wider range of sentence structures. Conversely, English adheres to a more rigid word order, typically following a subject-verb-object (SVO) pattern to convey meaning. Consequently, when transitioning between these languages, adjustments in word order may be imperative to maintain grammatical precision and clarity in the target language (Abbe, 2017).

The complexity of Russian verb conjugation, which is influenced by person, number, tense, and aspect, further accentuates the linguistic disparities between the two languages. Translating Russian verbs into English necessitates meticulous attention

to tense and aspect markers, as well as the judicious application of auxiliary verbs to convey similar meanings (Mykhalevych, 2023).

Given these linguistic challenges, achieving a nuanced and faithful translation from Russian to English demands not only proficiency in both languages but also a profound understanding of their grammatical intricacies. Native Russian speakers who possess fluency in English and a comprehensive grasp of Russian grammar are often better equipped to navigate these challenges and produce translations that faithfully preserve the original meaning and intent of the text. In light of these linguistic complexities, the expertise of bilingual translators with native fluency in Russian and a robust command of English grammar is indispensable for ensuring the accuracy and fidelity of translations between the two languages.

Understanding the differences between English and Russian grammar is crucial when translating *Lefty*, a story rich in neologisms and wordplay. Leskov frequently breaks and twists words in ways that reflect the nuances of Russian grammar, which presents a unique challenge to translators. Russian, with its six grammatical cases, differs significantly from English, which does not use such a system. In *Lefty*, words are not only placed in various grammatical cases but are also broken and combined in innovative ways, further complicating the translation process. To capture these intricacies, a deep understanding of Russian grammar is essential, as it allows the translator to identify how words have been manipulated and to recreate similar effects in English.

As already explained, Russian and English grammar differ significantly, with Russian grammar being more complex and flexible, particularly in terms of syntax. To demonstrate Leskov's uniqueness and his ability to create intricate neologisms, consider the following example: *безрасцудок*. This word is purely Leskov's creation.

From a grammatical perspective, it consists of:

- *без-* (without) – prefix
- *рас-* (indicating movement in different directions) – prefix
- *суд* (court, judgment) – root
- *ок* (a suffix that forms diminutive masculine nouns) – suffix

A similar adverb in Russian, *безрассудно*, translates to *thoughtlessly* or *rashly*. The related noun *безрассудство* ("imprudence" or "rashness") appears frequently in the works of writers such as Lazhechnikov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Chernyshevsky, Dostoevsky, and others.

An excerpt from *Lefty* illustrates Leskov's linguistic inventiveness:

**Государь говорит** (*The Sovereign says*):

**"Это безрассудок"** (*"It is not-without prejudice"*).

*(Please note that this is only an indicative translation.)*

The complexity lies in the word *безрассудок*. The standard Russian word should be *предрассудок* (meaning *prejudice*), but Leskov deliberately altered the prefix, merging multiple meanings—prejudice and thoughtlessness—into a single word. There are several possible approaches to rendering this word in English, such as intentionally misspelling it, adding an extra prefix (e.g., *im-*, meaning *not*, or *un-*, usually meaning *not*), or combining both strategies. The possibilities for creative translation are limitless.

However, Leskov's wordplay is not just about modifying prefixes, suffixes, or spelling; the deeper meaning lies in the subtle interplay of semantics and phonetics. Without a solid understanding of Russian grammar—its roots, prefixes, and morphological structures—a translator would struggle to grasp the full significance of Leskov's neologisms and replicate a similarly nuanced effect in English. To recreate such a neologism, having perfect knowledge of English is an absolute must, as the translator must not only convey the meaning but also capture the stylistic and linguistic creativity that defines Leskov's work.

## 1.4 Navigating Idiomatic Expressions and Colloquialisms in Russian - English Translation

The complexity of idiomatic expressions poses challenges for translators, as they may not directly translate across languages due to cultural and linguistic differences.

Idioms are ingrained expressions in each language, often not immediately comprehensible to non-native speakers. Machine translation struggles with idioms due to its reliance on word-for-word substitutions, which fail to capture figurative or colloquial meanings. Literal translation, while straightforward, often results in the loss of colloquialisms and nuances present in idiomatic expressions. To address this, translators employ various techniques such as translation by meaning, finding cultural equivalents, providing explanations, or omitting non-essential idioms. However, even with these strategies, the challenges remain significant, with idioms frequently lacking direct equivalents in target languages. This complexity is highlighted by the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic intricacies of idiomatic expressions (Nikitina, 2019).

Translating idioms requires more than just linguistic proficiency; it demands an understanding of cultural contexts and discoursal strategies. The translator must navigate cultural variances and nuances to accurately convey the meaning and style of the source language in the target language. This process involves analysing the hidden structure of the source text and employing various discoursal strategies to ensure effective translation. However, achieving equivalence between idiomatic expressions in different languages remains elusive due to their inherent cultural specificity (Sankaravelayuthan & Vidyapeetham, 2020).

Aldahesh (2013) emphasises the challenges posed by the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic complexity of idioms, underscoring the intricate nature of translation tasks involving idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, the lack of equivalence between idioms in source and target languages contributes to the hit-or-miss nature of translation, where meaning may be retained while idiomatic nuances are lost. This lack of equivalence is particularly evident in culture-specific idioms that defy direct translation.

In conclusion, the translation of idioms presents formidable challenges for translators, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural awareness and sensitivity. Despite the evolution of translation techniques, achieving optimal equivalence between idiomatic expressions in different languages remains a fundamental yet elusive goal in the field of translation studies. As such, translators must continue to explore innovative approaches and strategies to navigate the complexities of idiomatic translation effectively.

To fully appreciate the challenges posed by the Russian language in the translation of *Lefty*, it is essential to examine specific examples from the text that highlight its linguistic complexity and cultural depth. One such instance is the idiom, '*У него хоть и шуба овечкина, так душа человечкина*', which, when translated literally, means "*He may have a sheepskin coat, but he has a human soul.*" This phrase encapsulates a profound cultural meaning: a person may be materially poor, symbolised by the "sheepskin coat," yet possess a kind and humane character, represented by the "human soul." The richness of this idiom is difficult to capture in translation, as the metaphorical associations between poverty and human warmth are deeply embedded in Russian culture.

Another example is the phrase, '*Не пей мало, не пей много, а пей средственно*', which translates to "*Don't drink too little, don't drink too much, but drink moderately.*" This proverb conveys a lesson about moderation and knowing one's limits, a concept that might seem straightforward but is tied to cultural norms around drinking and behaviour in Russian society. A literal translation may capture the basic meaning, but the cultural resonance and the proverb's role within the narrative risk being lost in translation.

A final example is '*И в Польше нет хозяина больше*', which translates as "*And in Poland too the master of the house comes first* (i.e., there is no one greater than the master)." In this context, the mention of Poland serves primarily as a rhyming device with *больше*. This proverb is employed when Lefty is offered a drink by the Englishmen, to which he declines, remarking, "*This is not proper; even in Poland, the master retains his primary role and should go first.*" The phrase implies that Lefty is adhering to a long-standing tradition where the master should be the first to drink, reinforcing the importance of social hierarchy and respect for established customs.

Such expressions, deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, present significant challenges for the translator who must find ways to convey these meanings to an English-speaking audience.

These examples illustrate the idiomatic richness and cultural specificity that pervades *Lefty*, demonstrating the limitations of literal translation. Translating such expressions requires a nuanced understanding of both languages, as direct translations often fail to convey the cultural and emotional undertones of the original text. Additionally, the narrator in *Lefty* is deliberately portrayed as simple-minded, with a distinct manner of speaking. Leskov stylises the language, incorporating spelling errors, playful word formations, and colloquialisms that enhance the story's charm but complicate the task for translators. This manipulation of language not only reflects the narrator's character but also challenges conventional norms, requiring a balance between preserving authenticity and making the text accessible to the target audience.

#### **1.4.1 Navigating Lexical Gaps and Untranslatable Words in Translation**

In translation, encountering lexical gaps and untranslatable words is commonplace, as some concepts lack precise equivalents across languages due to cultural and linguistic differences.

Languages often possess unique expressions to describe specific concepts, reflecting the cultural significance attached to them. These linguistic nuances pose challenges for translators, particularly those working with literary or creative texts. While lexical semantics typically focuses on recognised vocabulary, the absence of certain words, known as lexical gaps, signals opportunities for linguistic exploration and translation innovation. Translators employ diverse strategies such as approximation, circumlocution, borrowing, or explanation to bridge these gaps and convey intended meanings effectively. However, the level of difficulty in translation varies based on the nature of the concept and the translator's linguistic proficiency (Translation Directory, n.d).

The notion of "untranslatability" is often misconstrued, as it does not imply a complete absence of translation possibilities but rather highlights the complexity of conveying nuanced meanings across languages. Translators can employ adaptation, modulation, or cultural equivalent adaptation to render concepts more suited to the

target language and culture. These techniques are particularly effective when the concept being translated already exists in the target language, facilitating smoother integration into the cultural context (Şerif, 2014).

Alexandra Jaffe (2009) suggests that discussions of untranslatability underscore the unique "genius" of each language, reflecting the essence of its culture and people. However, translators can compensate for untranslatability by employing various translation procedures depending on the context. While denotation can usually be translated with sufficient explanation, connotation may prove challenging to convey effectively. This highlights the importance of cultural awareness and linguistic proficiency in translation practice.

As mentioned earlier, addressing lexical gaps or untranslatable words is a complex and lengthy process. In the case of *Lefty*, translators face this very challenge. One example is the Russian word 'молво' (molvo), used in *Lefty* in reference to "molvo sugar." However, the term itself is largely untranslatable. As depicted in the story, the English characters are unfamiliar with molvo sugar and know nothing about it. To clarify: *Molvo* is the surname of the prominent St. Petersburg merchant Yakov Nikolaevich Molvo, a leading sugar manufacturer and the first chairman of the St. Petersburg Stock Exchange from 1816 to 1818. In his honour, not only was sugar named after him, but also the Molvinsky Bridge, which spans the Tarakanovka River near its confluence with the Yekateringofka River, on the road from St. Petersburg to Peterhof.

Another word from *Lefty*, among a great variety of such examples, is 'Нимфозория' (Nymphosoria), used to refer to the flea in the story. This term – which is a neologism invented by Leskov – will be explored in greater detail in later sections. Such examples serve to demonstrate one of the many challenges faced by translators, and by discussing the theoretical aspects of translation, we can highlight the skills and research necessary to navigate lexical gaps and untranslatable words. As mentioned above, following those steps, and employing appropriate translation strategies, translators can effectively deal with untranslatable words and produce high-quality translations that accurately convey the meaning and intent of the original text.

## 1.5 Evolution of Translation Trends and Preferences Between Russian and English: Contributing Factors and Historical Context

Research indicates that translation trends and preferences between Russian and English have evolved significantly over time due to various factors.

In the twentieth century, translation between Russian and English faced constraints stemming from political, cultural, and linguistic barriers. The Cold War era, characterised by political tensions, often influenced translation practices, leading to politically charged translations focused on ideological differences and propaganda. However, as political tensions eased, translation shifted towards cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The post-Cold War period witnessed a marked shift from propaganda-driven texts to works that promote intercultural communication and respect for cultural differences (Bassnett, 2002; Cronin, 2003).

Technological advancements, such as computer-assisted translation tools and machine translation algorithms, have revolutionised translation practices. These advancements have made translation more efficient and accessible, facilitating collaboration between translators from different linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, the internet has played a crucial role in enabling greater access to translated materials. Cultural factors have also influenced translation trends, with increased demand for high-quality translations of Russian texts in the English-speaking world. (Ali, Syed, 2023).

This section is particularly significant when examining translations produced in different time periods. The four selected translations for this study, the oldest is by Isabel Hapgood (1916), while the most recent is by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (2013). With 97 years separating these two translations, it is clear that Pevear and Volokhonsky benefited from modern technology that was not available to Hapgood. However, this does not necessarily imply that older or earlier translations are unsuccessful; rather, it highlights the added challenge faced by translators like Hapgood, particularly when translating *Lefty*. The availability of online resources, such as e-books, publications, and dictionaries, greatly facilitates the translator's work today, allowing for quicker access to information—something that was far more difficult a century ago.

Overall, the evolution of translation trends reflects the dynamic nature of linguistic and cultural exchange between Russian and English-speaking communities, with ongoing adaptations to changing political, technological, and cultural landscapes. However, if a translator possesses both talent and a profound understanding of language and culture, no technology can serve as an adequate substitute. For instance, in *Lefty*, Leskov deliberately distorts Russian words, such as *проездить*, a colloquial term meaning ‘to spend oneself completely on travel, moving, or journeying.’ No technological tool can replicate this effect in a manner that conveys the same impression as the original. It may suggest the standardised form of the word, *поездить* (travel about a little), yet this does not align with Leskov’s stylistic choices or the essence of his *skaz* narrative technique.

Only a highly skilled translator with a deep commitment to their craft can produce a creative and contextually appropriate rendering in the target language. In many ways, the translator assumes the role of a writer, as their interpretative choices directly shape the reader’s understanding. It is therefore in the translator’s best interest to produce a version that is both innovative and faithful to Leskov’s literary legacy. A poor translation risks diminishing Leskov’s reputation as an accomplished writer and undermining the recognition of *Lefty* as a masterpiece rich in humour. This consideration will form a crucial component of the analysis of the four selected translations.

### **1.5.1 The Enduring Popularity of Translating Russian Classics into English**

The enduring appeal of Russian classical literature, including works by authors such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov, has sparked widespread interest among English-speaking audiences. This is evident from the extensive catalogue of translated Russian classics available in English, with numerous editions published by reputable publishers worldwide. Additionally, the inclusion of Russian literary masterpieces in academic curricula and cultural programs highlights their enduring popularity (Harrison, 2021).

Translating Russian classical literature into English enables a broader audience to access these timeless works, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Moreover, the popularity of Russian literature in translation serves as a testament to

its enduring relevance and universal themes that resonate with readers worldwide. (McAteer, 2021). Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* serves as an excellent example of the intricate challenges and opportunities presented in translating Russian classics into English. While the popularity of Russian literature abroad has been largely driven by works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov, *Lefty* offers a unique blend of linguistic playfulness and cultural specificity that adds complexity to the translation process. The humorous and idiosyncratic language in *Lefty*, combined with its deep connection to Russian folklore and identity, requires translators to navigate a delicate balance between linguistic fidelity—staying true to the precise meaning, tone, and structure of the original language—and cultural adaptation, which involves modifying expressions and cultural references, so they resonate with a modern audience.

Research shows that *Lefty* has not been translated nearly as frequently as the works of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, whose writings are translated consistently. Translators such as Isabel Hapgood, William Edgerton, George Hanna, and Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky are among the few who have tackled *Lefty*. The reason for this relative scarcity lies in the challenging nature of Leskov's language, which is richly idiomatic and difficult to render into other languages. Consequently, Leskov is not as widely known as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, or, for example, Nabokov who, unlike many Russian authors, also wrote in English, despite the fact that Leskov's literary style is exceptionally unique. His work, especially *Lefty*, should place him alongside these great Russian writers, as there is no one quite like him in terms of narrative style and linguistic creativity (NewWorldEncyclopedia, 2025). However, the complexity of his prose makes translation exceptionally difficult, and when the translation does not sufficiently capture his nuanced use of language, much of *Lefty's* charm is lost. As a result, English-speaking audiences often miss out on the full impact of Leskov's brilliance.

Despite the fact that *Lefty* ranks among the classics of Russian literature, it reads as if it were written today, with a distinctly contemporary feel. The text is filled with sharp, witty satire—a literary device that uses humour, irony, and exaggeration to critique society, politics, or human nature. Leskov's satire in *Lefty* is especially brilliant, as it cleverly exposes the absurdities and contradictions of Russian society, particularly in its bureaucratic and political systems, while also maintaining a humorous and

engaging tone. This modern relevance, combined with its biting satire, makes *Lefty* not only a timeless work but also one that feels fresh and resonant for today's readers.

If we focus on Leskov and his work, which has been translated into English—most notably by the renowned and highly skilled Robert Chandler—even he did not attempt to translate *Lefty*. The novella is so complex and intricately crafted that, if not translated effectively, it risks receiving negative criticism from both readers and literary critics, ultimately impacting the translator's reputation. This is likely why, according to my research, *Lefty* has only been translated by five translators—at least, these are the versions currently available for purchase in the UK. Gary Shteyngart is among the modern authors who have praised Leskov's work in widely circulated online reviews (Bookshop.org., n.d.). In a quote featured across several online booksellers, Shteyngart remarks, "*Nikolai Leskov's absence from the classic Russian literature list must end now! If you like Russian, and you like funny, you will love Leskov.*" This statement rings true, as Leskov indeed deserves more recognition, and his works should be translated more widely. As mentioned earlier, his writing remains remarkably contemporary, making *Lefty* and other stories highly enjoyable for any generation. Claire Messud, in her book review for *The New York Times*, further emphasises Leskov's uniqueness, noting that "*Leskov is emphatically unlike either Tolstoy or Dostoevsky and bears only passing comparison with Turgenev.*" This endorsement can also be found on the back cover of the Penguin Classics edition of 'The Enchanted Wanderer', particularly the version with an introduction by Donald Rayfield.

Yet, as Shteyngart and Messud highlight, Leskov's absence from the canon of widely translated Russian literature is an oversight that must be addressed. Leskov's works, particularly *Lefty*, as well as others that have been translated by other translators, such as *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and *The Sealed Angel* deserve to reach a broader audience. Only through careful, creative, and culturally sensitive translation can his legacy be fully appreciated. If done well, these translations have the power to introduce new generations of readers to Leskov's brilliance, ensuring his rightful place among the greats of world literature.

## 1.6 Translation Strategies and Theoretical Perspectives in Conveying *Lefty*

The quality of Russian-to-English translations is profoundly influenced by the translator's expertise, linguistic proficiency, and cultural awareness. As explained earlier, a deep understanding of both languages, alongside sensitivity to cultural nuances, ensures that translations remain accurate and contextually appropriate. Without this awareness, meanings can become distorted, leading to misinterpretations or even offence. Since words and phrases often carry culturally specific connotations, a literal translation may fail to capture the intended message. Considering the values, beliefs, and customs of the target audience allows for a more nuanced rendering that fosters deeper resonance and mutual understanding.

The theory of translatability is frequently based on the premise that languages share fundamental structures and differ primarily on the surface (Transatlantic Translations Group, 2023). The existence of linguistic universals—such as vowels, consonants, nouns, and verbs in all languages—supports the notion that translation is always possible by bridging structural differences. However, an opposing monadist perspective suggests that language communities perceive reality in distinct ways, making absolute equivalence between languages unattainable. Since languages evolve within their respective cultural contexts, translation inevitably involves approximation, shaped by analogy rather than perfect correspondence.

French deconstructivism, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida in the late 20th century, introduced a new dimension to the debate. In *Des Tours de Babel* (1985), later collected in *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida argued that language is not merely a vessel for meaning but an autonomous entity that actively shapes interpretation. From this standpoint, translation is not a secondary reproduction of the original but an independent work that reconfigures meaning in the target language. A successful translation, therefore, does not simply transfer content but reveals deeper layers of the source text's significance.

The influence of different translation approaches can be observed in the work of key figures who have rendered Russian literature into English. Isabel Hapgood (1851–1928), one of the earliest translators of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, employed a formal

and somewhat archaic style that, while preserving the structure of the original, sometimes obscured its natural fluency and colloquialism.

Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear, a husband-and-wife translation team, are known for their commitment to literal fidelity. Their approach maintains Russian sentence structures and linguistic idiosyncrasies, often prioritizing textual accuracy over fluency in English. This method, while preserving the richness of the original, can make their translations feel less natural to English-speaking readers.

William Edgerton, a scholar and educator, balanced linguistic precision with accessibility. His academic background ensured a faithful rendering of the original text while maintaining clarity for an English-speaking audience.

George Hanna, working within the Soviet publishing framework, produced translations that sometimes-reflected ideological influences. His adaptations of Russian texts prioritised readability and alignment with Soviet cultural policies, occasionally diverging from the nuances of the original texts.

These varying methodologies—Hapgood’s formalism, Volokhonsky and Pevear’s literalism, Edgerton’s balance, and Hanna’s ideological adaptations—offer a broad spectrum of translation strategies. Their impact will be central to the analysis of *Lefty*’s English translations. By applying the theoretical perspectives outlined above, the study will examine how each translator’s decisions shape the representation of Leskov’s distinctive linguistic style and thematic complexity.

### **1.6.1 Identifying the Translator's Influence on Interpretation in Translated Texts**

As explained earlier, the role of the translator extends beyond linguistic conversion; it involves interpretation and mediation, shaping the reader's understanding of the original text. Translators face critical decisions about word choice, syntax, and cultural representation, which can influence how a work is perceived. In Russian literature, translators' choices significantly affect how readers engage with characters, themes, and cultural nuances. For instance, different translations of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* might emphasize various aspects of Raskolnikov's moral struggle, leading to different interpretations of his motivations. Similarly, in Leskov's *Lefty*, translators

must navigate the rich idiomatic language and cultural references that preserve or obscure the humour, irony, and tone of the original.

Leskov's *Lefty* uses a distinct low register—a colloquial, vernacular style reflecting the speech of 19th-century Russian commoners. This informal register, filled with regional dialects, playful word formations, and deliberate grammatical errors, adds authenticity and highlights the wit of characters like Lefty. Translators must balance preserving these linguistic quirks while making the text accessible to modern English readers. Additionally, cultural references to Russian craftsmanship, Tsarist court, and folklore provide context for the characters' actions and motivations, enhancing the social commentary. Capturing these references is crucial, as without them, much of the novella's irony, satire, and thematic depth would be lost.

Translators face the challenge of how much of the foreign culture to preserve without alienating readers unfamiliar with Russian customs. The concepts of *foreignisation* and *domestication*, as outlined by Venuti (1995) and Bassnett (2002), illustrate two approaches. As was briefly explained above, foreignisation preserves the text's original cultural elements, allowing readers to engage with its "foreignness," while domestication adapts the text to the target culture, making it more accessible but potentially sacrificing uniqueness. In translating *Lefty*, foreignisation is often the better approach, as the novella's charm lies in its cultural and linguistic nuances. This method allows English-speaking readers to experience the text's distinct Russian flavour, retaining its satire, irony, and social commentary.

Domestication, on the other hand, risks flattening the cultural texture of *Lefty*, potentially stripping it of its distinctive voice. Satire, which relies on humour, irony, and exaggeration to critique society, is especially vulnerable to domestication, as it is deeply tied to the cultural context. In *Lefty*, Leskov critiques Russian bureaucracy and society's engagement with the West, which could lose its edge if the translation obscures these cultural references.

While domestication makes the text more accessible, foreignisation offers a deeper, more authentic experience, preserving the novella's linguistic richness and cultural resonance. In the case of *Lefty*, foreignisation is, arguably, the more suitable strategy,

as it respects the original language and cultural specificity, allowing readers to better appreciate Leskov's satire and social commentary.

Bassnett (2002) argues that translation is not a mechanical act but an interpretative one, where the translator shapes how a text is understood by a new audience. Translators serve as cultural intermediaries, making decisions that affect how much of the original culture is retained or transformed. In works like *Lefty*, where much of the meaning is embedded in cultural practices, historical references, and local idioms, the translator's role is crucial in maintaining the authenticity and depth of the original text.

In the case of *Lefty*, the interplay of satire, humour, and cultural context presents additional challenges. Translators must ensure the satirical tone resonates with the target audience while maintaining the relevance of the original critique. Leskov's *Lefty* remains a challenging but important work to translate, with its unique linguistic and cultural elements that may be easily lost in translation. However, when successfully translated, it retains its modern, timeless quality, demonstrating Leskov's brilliance alongside Russia's greatest authors.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Research Methods**

### **2. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methods and hypotheses, detailing the research questions, approaches, and strategies employed in the study.

## 2.1 Research Questions

This chapter will briefly outline the research questions, which were used as a structure.

To address these research questions, a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods, is proposed. Prior to applying modern Translation Theories for a comparative analysis of existing translations of *Lefty* and for evaluating their quality and adequacy, a brief analysis of the story will be conducted. This analysis will integrate descriptive and critical approaches, drawing on Literary and Cultural Theory. The Translation Theories applied in the comparative analysis will include Sociological, Communicational, Hermeneutic, and Linguistic frameworks, with particular emphasis on the latter due to the extreme linguistic complexity of Leskov's story.

### 2.1.1 Primary Research Question:

- **How do different English translations of *Lefty* reflect Leskov's linguistic creativity, particularly his use of neologisms and distorted words?**

### 2.1.2 Supporting Research Questions

- How do Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna differ in their translation approaches?
- To what extent does Leskov's use of *skaz* shape the overall meaning and readability of *Lefty* in translation?
- How do translation choices affect the humour and irony in *Lefty*, and do they succeed in maintaining Leskov's satirical intent?
- In what ways does Leskov's manipulation of Russian grammar and syntax present challenges for translation, and how have different translators approached these difficulties?
- What role does cultural context play in the translation of *Lefty*, and how do translators navigate the challenge of making Leskov's work accessible to an English-speaking audience?
- To what extent can a translator be considered a co-creator when working with a text as linguistically complex as *Lefty*?

## 2.2 Research Approach and Strategies

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the English translations of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty*. It begins with a close reading of the original text, using both descriptive and critical approaches to understand its meaning and cultural context. This serves as the foundation for a comparative analysis of four key English translations by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna, assessing their accuracy, style, and faithfulness to the original.

The study focuses on ten key linguistic and stylistic elements, analysing how each translator handled complex aspects such as idiomatic expressions, syntax, and Leskov's distinctive vernacular. Each translator's background will also be briefly considered to understand how it may have influenced their approach. The discussion applies a comparative and analytical framework to evaluate their translation strategies, identifying which versions succeeded, which failed, and why.

In order to provide a focused yet representative analysis, these ten words or phrases have been selected from *Lefty* for close comparison. The examples were chosen deliberately to cover a broad spectrum of linguistic challenges presented by Leskov's text, including idiomatic expressions, neologisms, instances of inappropriate or unconventional word usage, and even examples of vulgar or coarse language. This selection ensures that each example highlights a specific area where translation decisions are particularly complex or where creativity and sensitivity to the source language are crucial.

While many more instances in *Lefty* could warrant examination, these ten have been curated to offer a balanced overview of the primary issues that translators must confront when working with Leskov's stylistically rich and inventive prose. Through detailed analysis of these selected cases, the study demonstrates how different translators have approached such challenges, revealing their levels of creativity, their awareness of historical and cultural context, and their interpretative understanding of the text.

It is important to acknowledge that this methodological choice also comes with limitations. By concentrating on individual lexical items or short phrases, broader aspects of translation such as narrative voice, rhythm, or larger syntactic structures fall outside the immediate scope of this analysis. Nevertheless, the selected examples provide valuable insight into some of the most salient and stylistically defining features of Leskov's writing, and into the various strategies employed by translators in response to them.

### **2.2.1 Gaps in Existing Research:**

There is a significant gap in research on Nikolai Leskov's work, particularly *Lefty*, in the English-speaking world. Due to the complexity of Leskov's language and style, comprehensive studies on the translation of his works remain scarce. By analysing different translations of *Lefty* and examining Leskov's use of neologisms and unconventional word choices, this research will serve as a valuable resource for future translators, offering guidance on how to navigate these linguistic challenges. At present, no such study appears to have been published. This research aims to bridge that gap by providing a systematic analysis of translation strategies and their effectiveness in conveying the linguistic richness of the original text.

## **2.3 Research Tools**

The tools employed throughout this study included dictionaries and four key translations of *Lefty* by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isobel Hapgood, and George Hanna. These were the only available versions for purchase, and given the word limit, focusing on four translations was deemed the best approach to ensure an in-depth analysis.

### **2.3.1 Expected Contribution**

This research aims to contribute to translation studies by examining the challenges of translating *skaz*, with a particular focus on Leskov's use of wordplay, syntax, and folk stylistics. It evaluates how different translators have approached these challenges and the extent to which their choices preserve the linguistic creativity and cultural nuances of the original text. The study also considers the reception of *Lefty* in English translation, arguing for Leskov's recognition alongside other major Russian literary

figures. From a linguistic perspective, it explores the role of neologisms and deliberate distortions in Leskov's prose, highlighting the importance of cultural and historical context in shaping translation strategies.

## Chapter 3

### Analysis of Data

#### 3. Introduction

This chapter explores the translations of *Lefty* by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna. It analyses selected words and phrases, briefly examines the portrayal of the story and the character *Lefty* and evaluates the style and accuracy of each translation.

### **3.1 The Significance of *Lefty's* Character in Leskov's *The Tale of Cross-eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea***

The character of *Lefty* in Nikolai Leskov's *The Tale of Cross-eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea* highlights the contrast between formal education and practical ingenuity. Despite being uneducated in the conventional sense, *Lefty* is depicted as a highly skilled and ingenious artisan. His lack of formal schooling and his illiteracy do not diminish his intelligence or value. Instead, *Lefty's* expertise is grounded in hands-on experience and the rich traditions of his craft, challenging the notion that formal education is the sole measure of a person's worth or capabilities.

*Lefty's* exceptional craftsmanship is demonstrated in his ability to shoe the microscopic steel flea, an intricate creation by English craftsmen. This task showcases his precision, practical intelligence, and resourcefulness, cementing his status as a master artisan. The character emphasises that intelligence and skill manifest in various forms, and practical knowledge can rival, if not surpass, formal education in value and application.

A central aspect of *Lefty's* character is his profound sense of patriotism. Driven by national pride, he seeks to prove that Russian artisans are equal to, or greater than, their English counterparts. His meticulous work on the steel flea is not just a display of personal talent, but a testament to Russian craftsmanship and cultural pride. This dedication to his country elevates his role beyond that of a mere craftsman, making him a symbol of national pride.

Despite his remarkable talents, *Lefty* remains humble, focused on his work rather than seeking personal recognition. His quirks and simplicity add depth to his character, making him relatable without detracting from his skills or intelligence. Leskov's tone towards *Lefty* is one of admiration, celebrating his practical knowledge and dedication, while reinforcing the theme that experiential learning is invaluable. The narrative respects *Lefty's* contributions, showing that his lack of formal education does not diminish his importance or the value of his craftsmanship.

In conclusion, *Lefty's* character in Leskov's *The Tale of Cross-eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea* is a testament to the value of practical intelligence and craftsmanship. His lack of formal education is contrasted with his exceptional skills, humility, and dedication to his craft, his people, and his country, to the point of self-sacrifice making him a richly developed and celebrated figure. The narrative's respectful tone further elevates *Lefty's* character, highlighting the significance of practical knowledge and national pride (Nikolai Leskov, 2008).

### **3.2 Comparative Analysis of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty*: Exploring Four Translations**

This section presents an analysis of four different translations of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty*, each rendered by a different translator. The analysis will be divided into four sections, with each section dedicated to one translator. Each section will begin with an introduction of the translator, including their background and notable works. Following this introduction, the examination will focus on ten selected words or phrases from the text that are particularly challenging, interesting, or noteworthy.

To enable a comparative analysis, the same ten words or phrases will be examined across all four translations. A list of these Russian words and phrases, along with their cultural, historical, or linguistic context, is provided first. Each section then examines how the translators handled the translation of these more complex words or phrases.

The selection of these most representative and challenging linguistic elements has been made with the aim of reflecting the three tactical devices used by Leskov in *Lefty* in terms of his linguistic innovations: creating neologisms, using existing Russian words in inappropriate or illiterate contexts (to form new, non-existent configurations), and deliberately distorting existing Russian words.

### 3.2.1 List of challenging words or phrases:

#### *‘Утро ночи мудренее’*

The phrase *‘Утро ночи мудренее’* appears simple, but its usage is significant due to its deliberate inaccuracy.

The correct Russian idiom is *‘Утро вечера мудренее’*, which translates to *‘The morning is wiser than the evening.’* This expression originates from a Russian fairy tale, *Vasilisa the Beautiful*, which bears similarities to the Cinderella story from the Brothers Grimm. In this tale, a toy doll assists the protagonist and frequently advises her that the morning is wiser than the evening (Hornaday, 2021; Ivanov, 2019).

The idiom means that taking time to think over a problem usually leads to wiser decisions. It also suggests that people might make impulsive, poor decisions at night that they would not make during the day. Leskov's alteration to *‘Утро ночи мудренее’*, which literally translates to *‘The morning is wiser than the night’*, introduces a deliberate twist, reflecting his technique of wordplay and intentional misuse of language. This creative distortion serves to highlight the folk character of his narrative and the imperfect grasp of formal idioms by his characters.

Throughout Leskov's narrative, words are often twisted, used inappropriately, or invented as neologisms. The phrase *‘Утро ночи мудренее’* exemplifies this technique, emphasising the characters' folk wisdom and idiosyncratic speech patterns. This intentional inaccuracy aligns with Leskov's broader artistic goals, illustrating the authenticity and charm of the vernacular language (Petrov, 2021).

### ***‘Такие-сякие сволочи’***

Leskov's incorporation of slightly vulgar language exemplifies his commitment to authentic dialogue and character portrayal.

The phrase *‘Такие-сякие сволочи’* translates literally to *‘such-and-such bastards’* in English. This expression might be a euphemism for more obscene language (concealed under ‘such and such’) and thus illustrates how ordinary people might use strong and vulgar language when they are angry. The euphemism term *‘такой-сякой’* is commonly used in everyday Russian, with its meaning varying depending on the context (Krynski, 1967).

Leskov's use of this phrase demonstrates his willingness to employ vulgar language to capture the realistic speech patterns of his characters. By including expressions that ordinary people might use in moments of anger, Leskov adds depth and authenticity to his narrative. This approach not only makes the story more relatable but also infuses it with humour and realism, enhancing the reader's engagement with the text.

The phrase *‘Такие-сякие сволочи’* serves as a clear example of the diverse and colourful language that readers will encounter in Leskov's work. By utilising such phrases, Leskov enriches his storytelling, making it more vivid and lifelike. This linguistic choice underscores the vibrancy and authenticity of the characters' dialogues, contributing to the overall appeal and realism of the narrative (Kuznetsov, 2020).

### **'Мелкоскоп'**

Leskov's unique artistic technique involves the intentional mangling of foreign words.

For instance, the Russian word '*микроскоп*' translates to '*microscope*.' However, Leskov innovatively altered it to '*мелкоскоп*.' This word combines '*мелко*', meaning '*small-sized*' or '*delicately*', with the function of a microscope, which examines small and delicate objects.

Leskov's use of '*мелкоскоп*' demonstrates a clever linguistic construction that adds a layer of wit to his writing. This alteration serves a deliberate purpose by contrasting the Russian folk way of life with Western influence. It functions as a form of protest against the borrowing of Western terms and aims to artistically depict how ordinary Russians, unfamiliar with Western terminology, adapt these words into their vocabulary. Leskov mimics the common terminology used by Lefty himself, emphasising the character's roots and perspective (Sutton-Spence, 2005).

Furthermore, this technique underscores the question of how Tula craftsmen, who were likely unacquainted with such advanced technology, would know the correct pronunciation of '*microscope*.' This aspect highlights their lack of formal education and accentuates the humour and intelligence behind Leskov's creation of '*мелкоскоп*,' illustrating its profound and multifaceted significance. Russian masters, though immensely talented, relate to foreign sciences and research differently, suggesting that true genius and skill cannot be entirely replaced by technical inventions. Nonetheless, the narrator ultimately notes with regret that human talent and skill have, in many ways, been supplanted by machines (Pavlov, n.d.).

### ***‘Междоусобные разговоры’***

The term *‘междоусобные разговоры’* illustrates Nikolai Leskov's humorous and playful use of language. This phrase showcases his ability to manipulate existing Russian words to create new, often humorous, meanings. It is applied in relation to the Russian Tsar Alexander I, while abroad.

The word *‘междоусобные’* is a legitimate term in the Russian language, traditionally used to describe conflicts or strife between parties, often with a connotation of hostility. The most common expression involving this term is *‘междоусобные войны’* (internecine wars). The word is derived from two roots: *‘между’* (between) and *‘усобица’* (feud or strife). Leskov's narrator, however, employs this term in an unconventional context, referring to everyday interactions between people or parties.

Leskov's use of *‘междоусобные разговоры’* plays on the literal meaning of the roots while seemingly neglecting the aggressive connotation typically associated with the word. In doing so, he creates a humorous effect by adding the underlying hostile meaning to the interactions of the Tsar Alexander I with foreign representatives, implying a hypocritical nature of foreign relations and uneasy relationships between Russia and Western Europe. This linguistic twist underscores Leskov's skill in using language creatively to add layers of meaning and humour to his narratives. By repurposing *‘междоусобные,’* Leskov invites readers to reflect on the nature of diplomatic relations between countries and the concealed aggression and hypocrisy of human communication per se, suggesting that even seemingly benign interactions can carry underlying tensions.

Leskov's ability to transform a term with a specific, hostile connotation into something that humorously comments on human, as well as political, interactions is a testament to his literary ingenuity.

### **'Бюстры' and 'Аболон полведерский'**

Leskov's use of neologisms such as *'бюстры'* and *'Аболон полведерский'* showcases his creative linguistic approach to enhance narrative description and cultural significance.

The term *'бюстры'* is a clever blend of the words *'бюсты'* (busts) and *'люстры'* (chandeliers) creating a vivid scene description. For example, Leskov describes a large building with an indescribable entrance, endless corridors, and identical rooms, culminating in a main hall featuring various huge busts, referred to as *'бюстры'*. In the middle, under a canopy, stands *'Аболон полведерский'*, a neologism derived from *'Apollo Belvedere'*, the renowned Roman marble copy of an ancient Greek statue by Leochares (Raimondi, n.d.).

Leskov's creation of *'бюстры'* and *'Аболон полведерский'* serves multiple purposes. The inventive term *'бюстры'* not only sets the scene effectively but also keeps the description engaging, avoiding the monotony that often accompanies detailed settings. *'Аболон полведерский'* similarly reimagines the classical Apollo Belvedere bust, adding a layer of cultural depth and humour. The adjective *'полведерский'* is derived from *'полведра'* ('half a bucket'), thus deliberately adapting the foreign term, incomprehensible to an uneducated Russian (such as the narrator in *Lefty*), rendering it more authentically Russian. This adaptive device, used in different ways throughout the novella, serves the narrator's goal to prove that Russia is not inferior to the West, as Russians have their own ingenious response to any Western European challenges and achievements. This response ranges from overcoming foreign terminology to the unsurpassed ability of Russian craftsmen to shoe a tiny flea. The author's role in this seemingly naïve and touchingly defensive patriotic display is deliberately ambiguous – from gentle mocking of his characters to a hidden profound admiration, mixed with the sheer bitterness over Russia's ruthless and wasteful attitude to its national genius. Notably, *'Аболон полведерский'* appears as a character in the Russian translated version of *"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,"* where he is depicted as a resourceful little man who aids Alice, further illustrating the adaptability and creativity of Leskov's linguistic inventions (Petrov, 2022).

Leskov's selective use of such neologisms aligns with his goal of crafting a work of national significance. These "distorted" words serve as a literary and philological treatment tailored to popular speech, reflecting and enriching the cultural and linguistic landscape of his narrative. By integrating these inventive terms, Leskov not only enhances the realism and humour of his descriptions but also underscores the richness and adaptability of the Russian language (Sidorov, 2020), and – even more importantly – by deploying these ingenious linguistic-artistic means, he achieves his profound semantic goals. One could even venture to say that in this creative ingenuity, Leskov, cleverly and quite deliberately, matches his character Lefty, despite the different nature of their respective crafts.

### ***'двухместная карета'***

The term *'двухместная (карета - carriage)'* in the original narrative is a creative combination of words, which requires careful handling to preserve its humorous and literal tone in translation.

In Russian, *'двухместная'* is formed from *'два'* (two) and *'сесть'* (to sit), literally translating to *'two-sit down.'* The correct Russian term should be *'двухместная,'* which means *'two-seater'* in English. Despite the incorrect usage, the meaning remains clear to the reader, adding to the humour and charm of the narrative as well as to its overall message and meaning, as explained above.

To maintain the story's tone and the playful neologisms, the translator must be inventive in the target language. For example, a direct translation of *'двухместная'* might not convey the same humour and literalness. A suitable English equivalent needs to be both creative and understandable. This task tests the translator's proficiency in both languages and their ability to engage in creative writing. The translator must balance accuracy and creativity to ensure the original's intent and humour are preserved for the target audience (Tawfiq, 2012).

In conclusion, translating *'двухместная (карета)'* illustrates the complexities and creative challenges in literary translation. The translator must navigate both languages to maintain the narrative's unique style. This case underscores the importance of creativity and deep linguistic knowledge in literary translation, ensuring the target language version remains as engaging, humorous, and semantically charged, as the original (Attardo, 2020).

### ***'на точку вида поставил'***

The phrase *'на точку вида поставил'* in Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* is a deliberate misuse of language that serves a comedic and satirical purpose. Translating this phrase effectively requires maintaining its humorous and illiterate tone while ensuring the meaning is clear to the target audience.

In Russian, *'на точку вида поставил'* is an incorrect but inventive variation of *'поставить на вид,'* which means to bring something to someone's attention in a negative manner. The standard usage might be seen in a phrase like *'ему поставили на вид, что прогуливать недопустимо,'* translating to *'he was told (in a harsh official way) that his non-attendance is unacceptable'.*

In *Lefty*, Leskov alters this expression to mean *"to bring to the point which is most visible,"* akin to saying *'оттуда открывается чудесный вид на город'* (from there a wonderful view of the city opens up). This manipulation creates a humorous and slightly absurd phrase that fits the character's illiteracy and adds a layer of wit to the narrative.

The phrase *'на точку вида поставил'* exemplifies Leskov's clever use of language to characterise and satirise. Translating this phrase involves balancing accuracy with creativity to capture the original's playful and illiterate tone. The challenge for translators is to convey the same humour and meaning without losing the reader's comprehension.

For instance, a literal translation might not capture the humour or the context of the misuse. An equivalent English phrase might need to be similarly inventive, maintaining the sense of bringing something to visibility while reflecting the character's flawed grasp of language and preserving the hidden connotations of this expression. This requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, as well as the cultural nuances and humour involved (Bhattacharya, 2023).

In *Lefty*, the use of *'на точку вида поставил'* enriches the text with its satirical take on language and authority, highlighting the protagonist's educational and social background. The translator's task is to recreate this effect in English, ensuring the translation remains engaging and humorous while preserving the original's intent.

In conclusion, the phrase '*на точку вида поставил*' in *Lefty* illustrates the intricacies of literary translation, especially when dealing with humorous and illiterate language. Translators must be adept in both linguistic and creative skills to maintain the original's unique style and satirical tone. This case underscores the importance of creativity and deep linguistic knowledge in ensuring the target language version remains as engaging and meaningful as the original (Adewole, 2024).

## ***‘Нимфозория’***

In Leskov's *Lefty*, the term *‘Нимфозория’* is an example of the author's inventive use of language. This neologism, in the same way as the other neologisms given above, is crafted to fit the story's humorous and imaginative style, as well as to serve its deeper underlying semantic purposes, highlighting Leskov's linguistic creativity and literary ingenuity.

The term *‘Нимфозория’* cleverly combines *‘нимфа’* (nymph) and *‘инфузория’* (infusoria or ciliate), creating a word that aligns with the playful and inventive language found in the narrative. Such neologisms are characteristic of Leskov's style, reflecting the characters' mispronunciations and imaginative word formations (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019).

Both *‘nymph’* and *‘infusoria’* are recognised terms in English. In this case, since the words *“nymph”* and *“infusoria”* exist in both languages, a simple transliteration suffices. In the context of the story, *‘Нимфозория’* serves as a whimsical name for the mechanical flea, embodying the characters' playful distortion of foreign words. This aligns with the story's oral storytelling style, which is rich with puns and folk etymology (Pro Poslovitsy, 2019). The use of this term is deliberate, enhancing the story's humour and engaging the reader with its unique linguistic flair.

An equivalent English term must capture the same blend of *‘nymph’* and *‘ciliate,’* while preserving the original's whimsical tone (Nababan, 2008). As was mentioned, Leskov's use of neologisms adds depth to the characters and the story, serving a profound semantic purpose, while making the narrative more engaging and reflective of the characters' backgrounds.

In conclusion, *‘Нимфозория’* in *Lefty* showcases the creative challenges in literary translation, while supplying an example of a rare luck for the translator, whereby, due to linguistic coincidence, mere transliteration suffices. Still this example too highlights the importance of linguistic proficiency and creativity in literary translation, ensuring that the target language version reflects the original's humour and style (Yazbeck, 2023).

### **'Аглицкие мастера'**

In Leskov's *Lefty*, the phrase '*Аглицкие мастера*' is another example which illustrates the author's deliberate manipulation of language. This phrase is not a neologism but a purposeful alteration of Russian words to reflect the story's colloquial and humorous tone.

The word '*Аглицкие мастера*' should correctly be '*Английские мастера*,' translating to *English masters or craftsmen* in English. The word '*аглицкие*' is a distorted form of '*английские*,' a playful modification that Gogol also used in *Dead Souls* to reflect colloquial speech (Gogol, 1842).

This distortion is linked to the open syllable law in ancient Russian, which tended to simplify the pronunciation of clusters of consonants. The modification from '*английских*' to '*аглицких*' avoids the difficult consonant cluster '*ngl*,' making the word easier to pronounce in a conversational context. This practice is evident in various forms of Russian speech and fits seamlessly into the colloquial and satirical tone of *Lefty* (Vinogradov, 1969).

The phrase '*аглицких мастеров*' fits into the broader stylistic approach of *Lefty*, where language is manipulated to reflect the characters' social and educational backgrounds (Bojkov, 2019). Translating '*аглицких мастеров*' as '*English masters*' might lose the playful distortion, so a more creative approach is needed to preserve the original's intent.

Translators must balance accuracy with creativity to capture the essence of such phrases, ensuring the translation remains engaging and faithful to the original (Vinogradov, 1971).

### 3.3 Translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (2013)

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky stand as prominent figures in the realm of literary translation, particularly renowned for their collaborative efforts in translating classic Russian literature into English. Their partnership has yielded acclaimed English versions of numerous Russian literary masterpieces, including works by renowned authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov. Pevear and Volokhonsky's translations are widely celebrated for their fidelity to the original texts and their ability to capture the nuances of the Russian language and culture.

Pevear, prior to his collaboration with Volokhonsky, had already established himself as a respected translator. His solo endeavours include translations from languages such as French, Italian, and Greek, showcasing his versatility and proficiency in multiple linguistic domains. However, it is his collaboration with Volokhonsky that has garnered the most attention and acclaim, particularly in the realm of Russian literature (Barone, 2024).

As noted in *XIX Vek*, their translation approach is characterised by a commitment to accuracy and faithfulness to the original text, eschewing the temptation to overly modernise or simplify the language. This dedication to maintaining the integrity of the source material has earned them praise from critics and scholars alike. Their translations have been praised for their clarity, precision, and ability to convey the depth and complexity of the original works (*XIX Vek*, 2013).

Pevear and Volokhonsky's translations have played a significant role in introducing English-speaking audiences to the richness and depth of Russian literature. Their versions of iconic Russian novels such as *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* have become standard references for students, scholars, and enthusiasts of Russian literature worldwide (Alter, 2016).

In addition to their seminal translations, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky have enriched translation discourse through reflective interviews and essays. One of the most illuminating is their interview with Susannah Hunnewell, "*The Art of Translation No. 4*" (*The Paris Review*, Summer 2015). In this conversation, they outline their collaborative method, starting with a literal draft by Volokhonsky and refining it into

stylistically resonant English by Pevear while emphasizing the importance of preserving Russian linguistic idiosyncrasies and resisting the urge to modernize or smooth the prose unnecessarily (Hunnewell, 2015). They elaborate on these principles further in *The Millions* interview, "A Q&A with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky Translator Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky" (December 2009), where they reflect on the pressures posed by canonical source texts and the balancing act required to honour the original's cultural and linguistic "rightness" while ensuring coherence in English. These pieces offer valuable insights into the challenges and intricacies of rendering literary works from one language into another.

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation of *Lefty* by Nikolai Leskov stands as another testament to their prowess in rendering Russian literature into English. Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation of this work demonstrates their ability to capture the subtleties of Leskov's language and preserve the wit and humour of the original text.

In their translation of *Lefty*, Pevear and Volokhonsky navigate the linguistic complexities and cultural references inherent in Leskov's writing, ensuring that the essence of the story is faithfully conveyed to English-speaking readers. Their attention to detail and sensitivity to the nuances of Russian language and culture shines through in their rendition of this classic work (Messud, 2013).

Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation of *Lefty* has been lauded for its clarity, coherence, and fidelity to the original text. By staying true to Leskov's unique voice and style, they have brought this timeless work to a new audience, allowing readers to appreciate the brilliance of Leskov's storytelling. Their translation of *Lefty* adds to their impressive body of work, further solidifying their reputation as preeminent translators of Russian literature. However, some critics argue that their translations can be overly literal, resulting in prose that may feel awkward or unnatural to English readers. This literalism, intended to preserve the original structure and nuances, sometimes leads to dialogue that appears stilted or unidiomatic. For instance, A. N. Wilson in *The Times Literary Supplement* criticizes their approach, stating that vivid, natural dialogue in Leskov turns into an English "literal rendering" that "is not a sentence you can imagine anyone actually saying" (*XIX Vek*, 2013). Additionally, Gary Saul Morson has expressed concerns that their translations "take glorious works and

reduce them to awkward and unsightly muddles," suggesting that their commitment to literalness may come at the expense of readability and literary elegance (*XIX Vek*, 2013).

### **3.3.1 Interview: Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky**

The interview by Anna Clark (2009), explores the process and challenges of translating Russian literature into English, focusing on the translators Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky.

Pevear and Volokhonsky discuss the complexities of capturing Russian literature's nuances and cultural context in their English translations. They emphasise the importance of fidelity to the original text while ensuring readability and coherence for English-speaking readers. Additionally, they highlight the collaborative nature of their work and the significance of their partnership in achieving successful translations.

*'Richard is a native speaker of English. I'm a native speaker of Russian. My task is to explain to Richard what is happening in the Russian text. Then it is up to him to do what he can. The final word is always his. I can say this is not quite what the Russian says. Either he finds something that satisfies me, or he says no, this is how we will do it. We discuss endlessly and sometimes it becomes a nuisance because we return to it again and again even after the manuscript goes off. But we really don't quarrel. It would be much more interesting if we did.'* The interview provides insights into the meticulous approach employed by Pevear and Volokhonsky in their translations. They meticulously analyse the linguistic and cultural aspects of each text, striving to convey the author's intended meaning accurately. Their collaboration allows them to leverage their strengths and perspectives, resulting in translations that resonate with Russian and English audiences.

This interview underscores the significance of skilled translators like Pevear and Volokhonsky in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps through literature. Their dedication to preserving the integrity of Russian literary works while making them accessible to English readers highlights the transformative power of translation in facilitating cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (Clark, 2009).

In summary, the interview with Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky sheds light on the intricate process and profound impact of translating Russian literature into English, showcasing the expertise and collaborative efforts of these acclaimed translators.

### **3.3.2 The Role of Endnotes in Cross-Cultural Translation: Enhancing Understanding and Managing Complexity**

In *The Enchanted Wanderer and Other Stories* by Nikolai Leskov, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, the translators chose to incorporate endnotes as part of their translation strategy.

Translators often utilise endnotes as a means to provide additional context, explanations, or commentary on specific terms, phrases, or cultural references in the text.

Endnotes offer several benefits in translation. They can clarify obscure or culturally specific terms that may not have direct equivalents in the target language, thereby enhancing the reader's understanding of the text. Endnotes also allow translators to preserve the integrity of the original language by providing explanations without disrupting the flow of the main text. Additionally, endnotes can serve as a platform for translators to offer insights into the cultural, historical, or literary context of the source material, enriching the reader's overall experience (Tirosh, 2024).

The use of endnotes in translation facilitates accurate and nuanced communication between languages, helping to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. By providing supplementary information, endnotes enable readers to engage more deeply with the text and appreciate its intricacies, even if certain elements may be unfamiliar to them. Moreover, endnotes empower translators to maintain fidelity to the original text while still accommodating the linguistic and cultural differences between languages. However, there are also potential drawbacks to using endnotes in translation. Excessive endnotes can interrupt the reading experience and detract from the flow of the text, potentially overwhelming or distracting readers. Additionally, endnotes may not always be effective in conveying the intended meaning, as readers may overlook or ignore them. Furthermore, endnotes can increase the length and complexity of a

translated text, posing challenges for readability and accessibility, particularly in digital or online formats (Ukušová, 2021).

In conclusion, while endnotes can be a valuable tool for translators in providing additional context and clarification in translated texts, they must be used judiciously to balance the benefits of enhanced understanding with the potential drawbacks of interruption and complexity. By carefully considering the needs and preferences of readers, translators can effectively leverage endnotes to facilitate cross-cultural communication and appreciation in their translations. Pevear and Volokhonsky have employed the assistance of endnotes consistently throughout their translation process. In sum, they have included 17 endnotes across approximately 32 pages spanning 16 chapters in total (Pevear & Volokhonsky, 2013).

In their translation (2013), Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky employ an additional method beyond endnotes to enhance the reader's understanding. This method involves providing explanations in the form of underlined notes at the end of the page, offering historical facts that enrich the complexity of the stories.

### **3.3.4 Exemplifying Translation Challenges and Resolutions: Insights from 'Lefty' by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky**

***‘Утро ночи мудренее’*** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.349, 2013)

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky advocate for a predominantly literal translation approach, believing it offers a more accurate representation of the original text for English-speaking audiences. This method aims to maintain fidelity to the source material. For instance, they illustrate this with the Russian phrase *‘Утро ночи мудренее’*, which as we mentioned above directly translates to *‘The morning is wiser than the night.’* (reverso, n.d.). This literal translation preserves the essence of the original text. However, alternative translations such as *‘Things look better in the morning’* or *‘The morning has eyes’* also convey similar meanings in a more idiomatic or poetic manner. Despite this, Pevear and Volokhonsky's chosen translation remains valid, particularly considering the cultural context of the phrase.

***‘Такие-сякие сволочи’*** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.361, 2013)

Translating the Russian phrase *‘Такие-сякие сволочи’* presents a notable challenge due to its idiomatic and somewhat vulgar nature. The phrase can be interpreted as *‘Blankety-blank scum’* in English (Russian Dictionary, n.d.), capturing the essence of the original Russian expression effectively. However, the term *“scum”* may be considered too strong or inappropriate, especially if the translation is intended for children.

An alternative translation such as *‘rascals’* could mitigate the harshness while retaining the edgy tone of the original. For example, *‘God damn rascals’* offers a rendition that balances the playful and derogatory nature of the phrase with its intended impact, making it more suitable for a younger audience.

The translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, opting for *‘Blankety-blank scum,’* succeeds in conveying the playful essence of the original while adapting it to suit contemporary linguistic sensibilities. They chose not to use the direct translation *‘bastards,’* which is one of possible translations of *‘сволочи,’* showing a creative approach to preserve the tone and context of the original phrase.

***‘Мелкоскоп’*** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.352, 2013)

The term *‘мелкоскоп’* in Nikolai Leskov's original work, as was mentioned above, is a notable example of humorous wordplay, creatively derived from the correct term *‘микроскоп’*, which translates to *‘microscope’* in English.

As explained earlier, Leskov's use of *‘мелкоскоп’* combines *‘мелко’*, meaning *‘small-sized’* or *‘delicately’*, with the function of a microscope, which examines small and delicate objects. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, in their translation, attempted to replicate this creativity by coining the term *‘meagroscope’*. The term *‘meagroscope’* derives from *‘meagre’*, which conveys the idea of being small in amount, though it does not entirely capture the same nuance or humour as the Russian original. This may be a point of contention: while the English word *meagre* can be understood as meaning *“small”* or *“insufficient,”* it raises the question of whether English readers readily perceive this sense rather than its alternative meanings of *“miserable”* or *“pitiful,”* which are also common connotations. The Russian word *“мелко”* similarly carries multiple meanings depending on context, such

as *мелко тёртый сыр* (finely grated cheese) or *мелкая деталь* (slight / small detail). However, "meagre" tends to be primarily associated with a more negative connotation, as reflected in most dictionary definitions. An example sentence: She came to this country with a fairly *meager* English vocabulary. This distinction highlights the challenges in translating subtle terms across languages, as the context and cultural usage may lead to different interpretations.

The humour in Leskov's '*мелкоскоп*' arises from the playful manipulation of the word '*микроскоп*', making it sound diminutive and aligning with its function. Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation '*meagroscope*' mirror this ingenuity, as it almost sounds like '*microscope*' and starts with the same letter '*m*', thus preserving some of the original's playful sound and intent. Their effort reflects an attempt to parallel Leskov's linguistic creativity, demonstrating their skill in adapting such subtleties for an English-speaking audience.

In conclusion, while '*meagroscope*' may not fully replicate the humour of '*мелкоскоп*', it is a commendable attempt by Pevear and Volokhonsky to preserve the wit and playful nature of Leskov's original term.

**'Междоусобные разговоры'** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.349, 2013)

The translators adeptly chose '*internecine conversations*' as the English equivalent for '*Междоусобные разговоры*,' effectively capturing the term's hostile undertones.

In both Russian and English, '*internecine*' carries a connotation of internal conflict and mutual harm. In English, it specifically refers to conflict within a group, describing situations that are mutually destructive. This is analogous to its use in Russian, where it similarly denotes internal strife with harmful consequences.

The English term '*internecine*' derives from 'the Latin '*internecinus*,' meaning '*fought to the death*' or '*destructive*,' which is rooted in the verb '*necare*' ("*to kill*") and the prefix "*inter-*" (meaning "*between*" or "*mutual*")' (Webster, 2024). This etymology underscores the term's violent and destructive implications. Thus, the translators' choice preserves the original Russian meaning and connotations, ensuring that the

term's hostile nature is retained. Additionally, in a lighter context, *'internecine'* can describe a conflict that disrupts an organisation, paralleling the humorous undertones in Leskov's use of *'Междоусобные разговоры.'*

Therefore, the translation is both clever and successful, especially if readers recognize the playfulness and layered meanings behind the term. Richard and Larissa's translation maintains the nuanced hostility of the original Russian word while conveying its connotations effectively in English. This demonstrates their skill in preserving the linguistic and thematic integrity of Leskov's work. The translators' decision reflects a deep understanding of both languages and the cultural contexts, making it a successful and insightful rendition of the original text.

***'Огромные бюстры' and 'Аболон полведерский'*** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.349, 2013)

Neologisms are inherently challenging to translate due to their unique and often playful nature. The Russian word *'Бюстры'* from Leskov's *Lefty* exemplifies this difficulty, yet Pevear and Volokhonsky's decision to translate the term as *'blustres'* demonstrates their creative prowess in maintaining the original text's phonetic and semantic nuances.

In the Russian original, *'Бюстры'* is a neologism invented by Leskov. Pevear and Volokhonsky translate this as *'blustres,'* preserving the auditory similarity. The English *'blustres'* suggests roaring or tumultuous behaviour, aligning with the sense of being loud, noisy, or swaggering (Prolingo, 2023). This translation captures the essence of the original word while adapting it to fit the phonetic and semantic context of English.

Additionally, the adjective preceding *'Бюстры,'* *'огромные,'* is a creative blend of *'огромные'* (huge) and *'громадный'* (massive). Pevear and Volokhonsky translate this as *'henormous,'* a clever fusion of *'huge'* and *'enormous,'* which retains the original's playful nature and descriptive intensity.

The translation of *'огромные Бюстры'* to *'henormous blustres'* effectively conveys the original's meaning and stylistic flavour. The translators' use of *'henormous'* mirrors Leskov's creative blending of adjectives, maintaining the humour and inventiveness of the original phrase. This demonstrates the importance of creativity in translation,

especially when dealing with neologisms, to ensure the target text is both accurate and engaging (Literary Translation, 2022).

Furthermore, the translation of '*Аболон полведерский*' as '*Apollo Belderear*' instead of '*Apollo Belvedere*' showcases the translators' ingenuity. By playing with the latter half of the name, they create a humorous and slightly distorted version that fits the character's linguistic idiosyncrasies, maintaining the original's playful tone. The translators' choice to alter '*Belvedere*' into '*Belderear*' preserves this playful tone, as it sounds somewhat familiar to the original name but introduces an unexpected twist that contributes to the absurdity. It doesn't directly mean anything in English, but it is phonetically close to '*Belvedere*,' keeping the connection to the classical reference while adding an air of whimsy and humour to the translation.

**'двухсестная карета'** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p. 350, 2013).

The term '*двухсестная карета*' from Leskov's *Lefty* exemplifies this, and Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation as 'two-sitter' demonstrates their skill in maintaining the original's playful and creative essence.

The correct term should be '*двухместная*' (two-seater). Pevear and Volokhonsky translate this as '*two-sitter*,' which, while not standard English, is perfectly understandable and mirrors the playful inaccuracy of the original (Lotman, 1990). This translation maintains the neologistic creativity and the reader's ability to grasp the intended meaning.

The translation '*two-sitter*' preserves the whimsical and colloquial tone of Leskov's original neologism. By choosing '*two-sitter*' instead of the correct '*two-seater*,' Pevear and Volokhonsky effectively capture the essence of the original phrase. This demonstrates their ability to creatively adapt neologisms, ensuring the target text is both accurate and engaging.

So, Pevear and Volokhonsky's work showcases the delicate balance required in translation, maintaining the playful and inventive spirit of the original while ensuring clarity and understanding in the target language. This approach not only respects

Leskov's linguistic creativity but also serves to enhance the reader's engagement with the text.

**'на точку вида поставил'** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p. 351, 2013).

The phrase *'на точку вида поставил'* is purposefully used inappropriately in Russian in Leskov's *Lefty*. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation as *'in the limelight.'* *In the limelight* is a legitimate and widely recognised English phrase, which makes it a natural and idiomatic choice in translation. However, this also means that while Leskov intentionally distorts or plays with language in the original, the translator does not replicate this wordplay but instead opts for a conventional expression that conveys the intended meaning. This raises the question of whether a more creative or unconventional rendering—one that mirrors Leskov's linguistic inventiveness—might better preserve the original's stylistic effect is an apt and fitting interpretation that effectively captures the essence of the original phrase.

As mentioned in the previous section, in Russian, *'на точку вида поставил'* is a deliberate misuse of language, combining the expression *'поставить на вид,'* meaning to bring something to one's attention (VOA Learning English, 2018), with the conventional usage of the word (as in *'отсюда открывается красивый вид'* – *'a beautiful view opens up from here'*). Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation as *'in the limelight'* aligns well with the English idiom, which means to be the focus of attention, typically in a positive context (Venuti, 2012), which matches the usage by Leskov, where the phrase is used by the character (a travelling companion of the Russian Tsar) to draw attention of the English to the abilities and talent of Tula craftsmen. The English phrase conveys a clear metaphor, rooted in historical theatrical practices. Its consistent use has made it a fixed expression with an established meaning. In contrast, the Russian phrase breaks grammatical and idiomatic norms, creating a sense of novelty or dissonance. Such linguistic deviations are common in *Lefty*, used for humour, irony, or social commentary. They add layers of meaning, reflecting character speech patterns or subverting language conventions.

By using the existing conventional English idiom Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation fails to fully convey the playful misuse of the original phrase. The phrase *'in the limelight'* is not a bad starting point, but a more creative approach could have better

captured Leskov's style. For example, deliberately twisting the phrase into '*in the lightlime*' would mirror his playful distortions while still being recognisable to English readers. Another possibility is '*in the spotlight*', blending *spotlight* and *limelight* in a way that reflects Leskov's inventive wordplay.

Instead, Pevear and Volokhonsky opted for the safe choice, missing an opportunity to recreate the linguistic creativity of the original. Whether this was a deliberate decision or a result of limited familiarity with Leskov's style is unclear. However, a simple twist could have introduced the humour and cleverness essential for translating Leskov effectively.

In conclusion, Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation of '*на точку вида поставил*' as '*in the limelight*' does not effectively showcase their ability to adapt complex and nuanced expressions in this particular case.

**'Нимфозория'** Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.352, 2013)

The term '*Нимфозория*' in Leskov's *Lefty* is a neologism created by the author. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation of this term as '*Nymphosoria*' is an example of their strategy to maintain the phonetic and imaginative qualities of the original Russian word.

In *Lefty*, the term '*Нимфозория*' describes a steel flea that can perform an elegant dance when a key in its stomach is turned. Pevear and Volokhonsky translated '*Нимфозория*' directly to '*Nymphosoria*,' preserving its phonetic essence (Pevear and Volokhonsky, 2009). To clarify the earlier point, both *nymph* and *infusoria* are well-established terms in English. Therefore, a simple transliteration of these words is sufficient in this context. This approach allows for the direct transfer of terms without the need for alternative translations, as their meanings are readily understood in both languages. Pevear and Volokhonsky adopted this very method in their translation, effectively maintaining the integrity of the original text while ensuring clarity for English-speaking readers (Friedberg, 1997).

By preserving the phonetic structure, Pevear and Volokhonsky maintain the exotic and enchanting connotations of the term, which are crucial to conveying the steel flea's magical qualities. This approach highlights the role of phonetic fidelity in translating neologisms—when circumstances allow, as is fortunately the case here, given that both "nymph" and "infusoria" exist in Russian as well (Lotman, 1990; Venuti, 2012). As Lotman (1990) discusses, the phonetic and semantic integrity of neologisms plays a significant role in maintaining the stylistic and cultural nuances of the original text. Similarly, Venuti (2012) emphasises the importance of preserving linguistic creativity in translation whenever possible, particularly in literary works where language itself is a central artistic device.

In conclusion, while the translation of *‘Нимфозория’* as *‘Nymphosoria’* successfully retains the phonetic and imaginative qualities of the original, this is more a fortunate coincidence than a deliberate demonstration of translational mastery.

***‘Аглицкие мастера’*** (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, p.352, 2013)

In Nikolai Leskov's story *The Tale of Cross-eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea*, the phrase *‘аглицкие мастера’* presents a unique translation challenge. The translators Richard and Larissa chose a straightforward approach, translating it as *‘English masters.’*

The Russian word *‘аглицких’* is intentionally misused by Leskov, which adds a playful and light-hearted tone to the narrative while highlighting the narrator's illiteracy and simple origins. This choice of language serves to characterise the narrator, emphasising their background and enhancing the overall charm of the story. However, Richard and Larissa opted not to carry this playfulness into their English translation. Instead, they translated it directly to *‘English masters.’*

The word *‘аглицких’* is a mispronounced form of *‘английских,’* the correct Russian word for *English*. This intentional error by Leskov is part of his playful style, reflecting the flexibility of the Russian language. In the translation, Richard and Larissa's choice to use *‘English masters’* maintains the literal meaning but loses the playful twist inherent in the original phrase. While the straightforward translation ensures that the

meaning is clear and accurate, it does not convey the same sense of linguistic playfulness and cultural context (Mustafin, 2021).

As explained, Leskov deliberately omitted one letter in the Russian word and misspelled two more letters merging them into another sound. Therefore, a logical approach would be to replicate at least some of this in the target language as well. Instead of using the correct version "*English*," they could spell it "Inglisn," as in many other languages the letter 'i' is pronounced as 'ee.' This could make the word more interesting, or perhaps the letters could be slightly mixed up, like "Englisih." When reading it in the text, the reader might not notice at first. Alternatively, a simple typo-based alteration, such as "Enlish," could be used. Thus, Pevear's and Volokhonsky's translation in this case lacks the original's playful nuance, demonstrating the complexities of translating culturally and linguistically rich texts.

### 3.4 Translation by William Edgerton 1969

The translated anthology *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Selected Stories of Nikolai Leskov* showcases the work of several distinguished translators, including Robert Chandler, Donald Rayfield, and William Edgerton. Edgerton, in particular, is noted for his translation of *The Steel Flea* (another translation of the title of *Lefty*), a testament to his skill in handling the complex and richly textured prose of one of Russia's greatest yet least-known realist writers of the nineteenth century (Rayfield, 2020).

William Edgerton, a professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Indiana University, focused his research on eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian literature. His notable translation of *The Steel Flea* has been highly praised for capturing the linguistic inventiveness and wit of Leskov's original text. Robert Chandler, an esteemed translator and poet, has expressed admiration for Edgerton's work, particularly for a story often deemed "untranslatable" due to its intricate wordplay and narrative techniques (Edgerton, 2022).

In fact, not just *Lefty*, but Leskov's stories are more generally renowned for their unique blend of immersive experience, ironic distance, and a variety of narrative techniques. For example, *The Unmercenary Engineers* (*Инженеры бессребреники*, first published in 1887) highlights gaps in historical documentation, drawing attention to its own unreliability in a manner reminiscent of postmodern writers. Tamara Zhuzhgina-Allakhverdian, in *Ironiya i kontrasty N. S. Leskova* (2020), analyses how Leskov's ironic narrative voice combines rhetorical complexity, emotional shifts, and stylistic contrast to create both distance and engagement in the reader. The linguistic creativity in *The Steel Flea* particularly attracted the attention of censors, due to its perceived subversion of Russian language norms. As already mentioned, this story remains widely appreciated today for its playful density and allusiveness—rich in neologisms and wordplay that disrupt conventional connections between language and reality.

William Edgerton's translation of *Lefty* is truly unique, and his talent is particularly evident to those who have the opportunity to read both the original Russian text and its English translation. Edgerton's version demonstrates creative use of neologisms, playful language, and rhythmic or poetic phrasing, occasionally even where it is not present in the original. While his commitment to producing an engaging and dynamic

translation is undeniable, there are moments where his embellishments may seem excessive, and a more restrained approach might have been preferable. Nevertheless, his translation remains highly enjoyable to read as a whole.

As Yelena Furman (2003) argues in her article, William Edgerton's translation of *The Steel Flea* is a significant achievement, especially in capturing the essence of Leskov's unique language and style.

### **3.4.1 Exploring the Layout and Structure of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Selected Stories of Nikolai Leskov***

The anthology of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Selected Stories of Nikolai Leskov* (Donald Rayfield and others, 2020) presents a curated selection of Leskov's stories translated by various accomplished translators. This structure offers readers a comprehensive view of Leskov's literary work while providing scholarly insights and contextual understanding through its organised layout.

The book includes an introduction by Donald Rayfield, who offers a detailed biography of Leskov and a short biography of himself. This provides readers with essential background information on both the author and the translator, enhancing the contextual understanding of the stories. The collection features translations such as *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1864) by Robert Chandler, *The Steel Flea* (also known as *Lefty*, 1881) by William Edgerton, and several others including *The Sealed Angel* (1872), *The Enchanted Wanderer* (1873), *The Unmercenary Engineers* (1887), and *The Innocent Prudentius* (1874), all translated by Donald Rayfield.

The inclusion of different translators for various stories highlights the collaborative effort to present Leskov's work in English. Notably, *The Steel Flea*, translated by William Edgerton (1969), is found on page 253 and spans 34 pages with 19 chapters. The use of footnotes throughout the translations, especially the 16 footnotes in *The Steel Flea*, underscores the story's complexity and the translators' efforts to clarify historical figures, places, and events for English-speaking readers. This extensive use of footnotes, more than any other story in the collection, indicates the challenges in translating *The Steel Flea* and the necessity of providing detailed explanations to bridge cultural and historical gaps.

Therefore, the anthology's layout, with its detailed introduction, biographies, and comprehensive footnotes, facilitates a deeper understanding of Leskov's stories. The meticulous translation work and explanatory notes enhance the reader's experience, making the rich, intricate narratives of Leskov accessible to a broader audience. The absence of illustrations directs the focus solely on the text and the translators' efforts to convey the original essence of Leskov's work.

### **3.4.2 Analysis of Selected Words and Their Translation by William Edgerton's *The Steel Flea***

This section will analyse words and phrases translated by William Edgerton in his version of *The Steel Flea*. These words and phrases have been previously selected and explained in earlier sections.

**'Утро ночи мудренее'** (William Edgerton, p.254, 1969)

The Russian idiom '*Утро ночи мудренее*' is a simple phrase that presents multiple translation possibilities, depending on the translator's creativity and choices.

As was mentioned before, this idiom literally translates to '*The morning is wiser than the evening.*' However, various alternative translations can capture its essence, such as '*the morning has eyes*' or '*let's sleep on it.*' William Edgerton chose a more playful and rhyming translation: '*Wait until the morning light; it's always wiser than the night.*'

Edgerton's choice demonstrates a thoughtful adaptation rather than a direct translation. His version not only conveys the original meaning but also enhances it with a rhyming structure, making it more engaging and memorable for English-speaking readers. As Grassilli, 2015, explains, this approach is particularly suitable for the genre of literature he is working with, as it maintains the idiomatic charm and cultural nuance of the original Russian.

Edgerton's translation of '*Утро ночи мудренее*' demonstrates his ability to balance literal accuracy with creative adaptation. Although he succeeds in creating a pleasant, almost poetic rhythm in English, this approach does not entirely reflect Leskov's

original intention. As previously mentioned, Leskov did not aim for poetic expression in this context, raising the question of whether such embellishment was necessary. In this particular case, a simpler and more straightforward translation would have sufficed, as the phrase has a clear and commonly used equivalent in both Russian and English. While there is certainly scope for creativity when translating Leskov's neologisms, it seems less appropriate to apply such creative freedom to widely understood idiomatic expressions that already have an established and natural equivalent in English.

**'Такие-сякие сволочи'** (William Edgerton, p.268, 1969)

Translating strong or vulgar language poses a significant challenge for translators, requiring them to capture the tone and intent of the original text while adapting it to the target language.

As was mentioned earlier, the Russian phrase *'Такие-сякие сволочи'* roughly translates to *'Such bastards,'* which is a direct and vulgar expression. However, William Edgerton's translation of this phrase is *'So-and so's, you swine.'* This insult fits perfectly as this term is used towards 'a person whom one may consider to be extremely unpleasant and unkind'. Edgerton's choice of *swine* is more appropriate than *bastard*, as the Russian word *ублюдок* is an extremely vulgar insult, similar to *bastard* in English. However, *swine* is slightly less offensive, aligning better with Leskov's original tone. Additionally, *swine* has an old-fashioned ring to it, especially in British English, making it a more suitable choice for the time period and style of the literature. In the text, the messengers and craftsmen discuss the steel flea, with the messengers expressing concern about the work not being completed on time. The insult is aimed more at poor behaviour, lack of consideration, or general unpleasantness, rather than malicious intent. Therefore, *swine* captures the intended meaning without the excessive harshness of *bastard*. Edgerton's decision reflects his translation approach, favouring nuanced and contextually appropriate language over direct translation. The use of *swine* effectively preserves the negative connotation from the original Russian while remaining suitable for the literary context. However, adding an adjective such as *dirty* (i.e., *dirty swine*) could have intensified the insult. Ultimately, *swine* conveys the essence of the insult while fitting the cultural and linguistic context of the target audience.

**'Мелкоскоп'** (William Edgerton, p.258, 1969)

The term *'Мелкоскоп'* is a playful neologism for *'microscope'* and exemplifies Leskov's creative use of language in *The Steel Flea*. William Edgerton's translation of this term into *'nitroscope'* demonstrates his inventive approach to preserving the original's playful tone.

In the original Russian text, *'Мелкоскоп'* creatively twists the word for *'microscope'* to fit the context of the story. Edgerton's choice of *'nitroscope'* cleverly mirrors this creativity. The prefix *'nitro-'* is often associated with chemical compounds and indicates a connection to chemistry, which is fitting since microscopes are commonly used in both chemistry and biology. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *'nitro-'* originates from the Greek word *'nitron'*, meaning natron, which refers to a naturally occurring mineral.

Edgerton's translation effectively preserves the playful and inventive spirit of Leskov's original term. By using *'nitroscope,'* Edgerton not only retains the scientific connotation (as *"nitro"* refers to a chemical group containing nitrogen and oxygen). In Leskov's narrative, the steel flea requires a special instrument to be seen, reflecting the intricate and seemingly impossible craftsmanship of Lefty. This translation highlights the central theme of surpassing expectations and finding significance in minute details. The combination of words is clever, as *microscope* is commonly used in chemistry, making the use of *nitro* in the translation quite fitting. However, it's worth noting that Leskov employed a synonym for the word *micro*, which could have been mirrored in English. For example, alternatives like *miniscope* or *teenyscope* could have been used, with *'teeny'* fitting the low-register, informal tone Leskov uses—reflecting the speech of the lower class or ordinary people.

**'междоусобные разговоры'** (William Edgerton, p.253, 1969)

Both words in the phrase *'междоусобные разговоры'* in Nikolai Leskov's work are existing legitimate words in Russian but putting them together into one expression is unusual and inappropriate. William Edgerton translates this phrase as *'intimidating conversations,'* capturing both the literal and playful misuse intended by Leskov.

In the context of the story, the phrase '*междоусобные разговоры*' is used to describe the emperor's interactions: "*the emperor travelled all the nations, and everywhere his friendliness always helped him to get into the most intimidating conversations with all kinds of people...*" (Edgerton, p.253, 1969). Here, Leskov intentionally misapplies '*междоусобные*', which is conventionally linked to wars, to describe conversations, thereby creating a humorous and ironic effect.

Edgerton's translation, *intimidating conversations*, is a well-crafted choice that mirrors the original text's playful misuse of language. The word *intimidating* effectively captures the tension suggested by *междоусобные*, yet within the context of the story, it appears exaggerated, as the emperor's travels are portrayed as friendly. This contradiction creates a sense of irony, making the phrase feel out of place in a way that aligns with Leskov's humorous and subversive style. In traditional fairy tales or short stories, such a combination of words would be unexpected, further emphasising the absurdity of the situation. By preserving both the linguistic distortion and the comedic undertone, Edgerton successfully conveys the layered meaning of the original, demonstrating his ability to navigate Leskov's intricate wordplay.

**'Огромные Бюстры' and 'Аболон полведерский'** (William Edgerton, p.254, 1969)

The translation of neologism William Edgerton addresses these challenges with creativity.

Firstly, '*огромные бюстры*' is a Russian neologism that Edgerton translates as 'tremendulous estuaries'. The term '*tremendulous*' is derived from '*tremendous*', meaning very great in amount, scale, or intensity (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). An estuary is a partially enclosed coastal water body, where freshwater mixes with saltwater. One possible explanation is that Edgerton has chosen *estuaries* to evoke a sense of largeness and fluidity. However, this does not directly align with the original imagery of a chandelier. Another possibility is that Edgerton prioritised a poetic or phonetically playful rendering over strict semantic accuracy, attempting to mirror Leskov's whimsical distortion of *люстры* by introducing an unexpected, exaggerated term in English. Ultimately, while *tremendulous* effectively conveys the exaggerated, larger-than-life quality of the original, *estuaries* remain a questionable choice, as it

shifts the meaning away from the intended image. A term more intricately linked to chandeliers or lighting, while still distorted in a Leskov's manner, might have been more appropriate.

Secondly, *'Аболон полведерский'*, referring to *'Аполлон Бельведерский'* (the Apollo Belvedere), is translated by Edgerton as *'The Apollo Velvet Ear'*. The Apollo Belvedere is a celebrated marble sculpture from classical antiquity. Edgerton's translation distorts the name similarly to the original but includes a footnote explaining the 'correct' name and its historical significance: "The 'correct' name of this sculpture is the Apollo Belvedere. Thus, Edgerton successfully mirrors Leskov's linguistic technique by transforming incomprehensible foreign names into familiar-sounding phrases. In Leskov's original text, the foreign name *Belvedere* is misinterpreted by the illiterate narrator as *пол-ведерский* (half-bucket), based purely on its phonetic similarity to Russian words. Edgerton replicates this in his English translation, where *Belvedere* is rendered as "velvet ear." This approach domesticates the foreign term, using sound resemblance to make it familiar, while also reflecting the character's limited understanding.

Edgerton's translation of *'огромные бюстры'* as *'tremendulous estuaries'* creatively captures the essence of the neologism, conveying the grand and poetic imagery intended by Leskov. The term *'tremendulous'* effectively mirrors the exaggerated nature of the Russian adjective *'огромные'* (correctly 'огромные') *'бюстры'*, while *'estuaries'* evokes a striking image that could be fitting for a chandelier, its connection to the original meaning remains unclear. If we imagine a grand, traditional chandelier with multiple sparkling crystal strands cascading down, the translation may appear poetic and evocative. However, it raises the question of whether this was the intended effect or if the imagery is too abstract for the reader to easily visualise.

For *'Аболон полведерский'*, Edgerton's *'The Apollo Velvet Ear'* maintains the playful distortion of the original name, while the footnote provides necessary context. This approach ensures that the reader understands the historical reference, despite the intentional misnaming (Haque, 2013). Translating distorted historical names is challenging and requires research and creativity to preserve the original text's intent and humour.

Thus, Edgerton's translations of *'бюстры'* and *'Аболон полведерский'* demonstrate his adeptness at handling neologisms and distorted historical names while simultaneously ensuring that the translations resonate with English-speaking readers.

***'двухсестная карета'*** (William Edgerton, p.256, 1969)

Edgerton's choice of *'two-sitter'* instead of the more conventional *'two-seater'* maintains the whimsical tone of Leskov's neologism. The fact that Pevear and Volokhonsky arrived at the same translation further reinforces its effectiveness, making additional commentary unnecessary.

However, a less obvious alternative could have been *double-sitter* or *twin-sitter*. Both variations creatively suggest two people sitting side by side while maintaining a quirky tone, which would still align with Leskov's playful style.

Even though Pevear and Volokhonsky, as well as Edgerton, independently arrived at the same idea to use *'two-sitter,'* this is purely coincidental, as their translation styles differ significantly, as evidenced in this study. However, given Edgerton's tendency for creativity and thinking outside the box, a more inventive choice might have been expected from him.

***'на точку вида поставил'*** (William Edgerton, p.256, 1969)

The translation of the Russian phrase *'на точку вида поставил'* by William Edgerton as *'to rout and attract contention'* demonstrates his characteristic approach to rendering Leskov's language. To fully grasp this choice, we can examine the excerpt from Edgerton's translation:

*"He had been glad to put the Englishmen to rout and attract contention to the Tula gunsmith, but he had been put out as well. Why did the Emperor have to feel sorry for the Englishmen in a case like this?"*

Edgerton's translation preserves the phrase's intended semantics mirroring the original. Additionally, he also distorts the wording in a way that echoes Leskov's own linguistic playfulness. The phrase *'to attract contention'* sounds somewhat unnatural in English, as *'to attract attention'* would be the more conventional expression. Given that *'contention'* and *'attention'* sound similar, this deliberate misuse parallels Leskov's

distortion in Russian. More importantly, within this deliberate linguistic distortion Edgerton preserves the intended meaning, as the character in Leskov's story wishes to denigrate the English in the eyes of the Russian tsar and promote the Russian craftsmen.

This choice therefore highlights Edgerton's ability to handle complex idiomatic expressions while preserving the stylistic quirks and semantic depth of the original text.

**'Нимфозория'** (William Edgerton, p.258, 1969)

The term *'Нимфозория'* has been directly translated as *'Nymphusoria'* by William Edgerton, preserving Leskov's original neologism without modification. This case is fairly straightforward, as both components of the term are derived from existing, nearly identical words in both languages, as mentioned earlier. As a result, it is unsurprising that Edgerton opted for simple transliteration.

This approach is logical, and any skilled translator would likely have arrived at the same solution.

**'Аглицкие мастера'** (William Edgerton, p.257, 1969)

The translation of the Russian phrase *'Аглицкие мастера'* by William Edgerton as *'English craftsmen'* is notable for its lack of a direct twist but remains a faithful and contextually appropriate choice (Dimitriu, 2015).

As previously discussed, the term *'Аглицкие'* is a slightly incorrect form of the Russian word for *'English'*, while *'мастеров'* is often directly translated as *'masters'*. However, *'masters'* is not necessarily the most accurate choice in this context. Edgerton translates *'мастеров'* as *'craftsmen'*, a term meaning *'a worker skilled in a particular craft'*, which aligns well with the narrative of Lefty, a highly skilled artisan in Leskov's story.

Edgerton's choice of *'craftsmen'* over the more literal *'masters'* is particularly effective, as it highlights the artisans' expertise and technical skill rather than simply implying authority or superiority. This translation choice ensures that the meaning remains true to the original text, reinforcing the central role of craftsmanship in the story.

While Edgerton often introduces creative twists in his translations, here he opts for a standard rendering of '*English*', disregarding the deliberate distortion in the original Russian. Given his demonstrated creativity elsewhere, this lack of innovation is particularly disappointing. By translating the phrase into conventional English, he overlooks Leskov's playful manipulation of language, which is central to the author's style. As already discussed in relation to Pevear and Volokhonsky, a minor yet deliberate typographical alteration could have effectively conveyed the same effect. That said, he does deserve recognition for choosing '*craftsmen*' over the more literal '*masters*', which better captures the intended meaning.

### **3.5 Translation by Isabel Hapgood 1916 and translation by George Hanna 1965**

A noteworthy fact regarding the translations of Isabel Hapgood and George Hanna has been discovered: they appear to be identical. Nonetheless, additional research is needed to investigate the precise circumstances behind the reuse of this previously published translation. The translation by Isabel Hapgood, was first published in 1916. George Hanna and his almost identical translation to Isabel Hapgood was first published in 1965.

The nearly identical nature of these translations is significant as it suggests that Hanna's translation might be a case of plagiarism, as he appears to have merely taken Hapgood's translation, made very slight modifications, re-annotated it, and then published it under his own name. In a closed-off country like Stalinist Russia, where access to Anglophone literature was severely limited, this was likely a plausible endeavour, as Hanna clearly got away with it. However, as mentioned, one needs to conduct further investigations to be conclusive as to what really happened and why Hanna's name was put to what essentially is Hapgood's translation, and whether it was his own or someone else's will. Furthermore, since both translations—Hapgood's and Hanna's—are still available, it is evident that no one has compared them closely to reveal their identical nature. Thus, conducting this comparison in our dissertation represents a pioneering step.

#### **3.5.1 Isabel Florence Hapgood**

Born November 21, 1850, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.—died June 26, 1928, New York, Hapgood was a distinguished American translator and writer, celebrated for introducing numerous classic Russian works to an English-speaking audience for the first time (Britannica, 2024).

After her formal education ended in 1868, following three years at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, Hapgood pursued the study of foreign languages independently. By the 1880s, she had achieved proficiency in nearly all Romance and Germanic languages, as well as several Slavic languages. Hapgood commenced her

career as a translator in 1886 with the publication of her translations of Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, Nikolay Gogol's *Taras Bulba* and *Dead Souls*, and a collection of *Epic Songs of Russia*. During the period from 1887 to 1889, she travelled extensively in Russia and had the opportunity to meet Tolstoy. Hapgood's groundbreaking work in making Russian literature accessible to English-language readers was of immense significance. In addition to her translations, she authored several works, including *Russian Rambles* (1895), a vibrant account of her travels in Russia, and *A Survey of Russian Literature* (1902), alongside numerous magazine articles. For 22 years, she served as a correspondent, reviewer, and editorial writer for the *New York Evening Post* and *The Nation*. In 1917, Hapgood made a second visit to Russia and narrowly avoided, through her personal connections, entanglement in the chaos of the Revolution (Britannica, 2024).

However, her work has not been without criticism. For instance, Hapgood's 1887 translation of *Les Misérables* has been widely criticised for its outdated style and frequent misinterpretations of Hugo's original text. Her tendency to translate mechanically rather than sensitively—such as rendering "tu" as "thou"—demonstrates a lack of linguistic nuance and cultural awareness (Ledkovsky, 1998). Given that *Lefty* demands both technical precision and creative flair, the expectations placed on its translators are particularly high. Hapgood's already questionable reputation, shaped by negative feedback on her work in a language other than Russian, casts doubt on her ability to handle the complexities and stylistic subtleties required for a faithful and engaging translation of Leskov's text.

### **3.5.2 George Hanna**

Despite extensive research and consultations of various sources, the biography of George Hanna remains elusive. Details regarding his date and place of birth are not readily available, and overall, information about his life appears to be quite limited. This absence of biographical data leaves a significant gap in our understanding of his contributions. However, his tombstone at Moscow's prestigious Novodevichy Cemetery identifies him as Georgi (George Herbert) Williamovich Hanna (31 December 1902 – 7 July 1966), a member of both the British Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (KPSS). He reportedly served time in a labour camp alongside Lev Gumilev, who recalled him in his memoirs as someone

who spoke fluent Russian but retained an English accent (Gumilev, *Vospominaniia*, 2003, pp. 179–180). Hanna also taught English at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages named after M. Toreza (Gumilev, pp.179-180, 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Hanna, occupied a multifaceted role within the political and literary landscape of communist Russia. While he made significant contributions as a translator, propagandist, and disseminator of Marxist-Leninist literature, his involvement with communist organisations led to accusations of espionage during the Stalinist purges (fantlab, n.d.).

Hanna's journey into the realm of communist activism began with his association with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). His early commitment to communist ideologies propelled him into various roles within communist organisations, including the Comintern (Communist International) and later the Foreign Languages Publishing House (FLPH) in Moscow. As a translator for FLPH, Hanna played a pivotal role in making the works of Lenin accessible to a broader audience, both within the Soviet Union and internationally. His translations, published by Progress Publishers, served as essential tools for spreading Marxist-Leninist ideology (DBpedia., n.d.).

Despite his dedication to communist principles, Hanna's political activities made him a target for persecution during the Stalinist era. The regime's intense paranoia and purges, aimed at eliminating perceived enemies of the state, led to accusations of espionage against individuals like Hanna. His involvement with FLPH, a key institution in disseminating communist propaganda, likely drew the attention of Soviet security agencies. The political climate of the time was highly charged, with accusations of espionage often being used as a pretext to purge individuals deemed disloyal to the regime.

Hanna's arrest in 1937 on charges of espionage reflects the precarious position of foreign communists in Stalinist Russia. Despite facing severe repercussions, including imprisonment, Hanna's commitment to his work remained steadfast. He continued to

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my internal examiner Dr Elena Artamonova for providing this source of extra information.

advocate for communist ideals and contribute to the translation and dissemination of Marxist-Leninist literature (Durham, 1992).

Hanna's life was marked by the brutal repression of Stalin's purges. Having been released from one of Stalin's infamous labour camps, his experience reflects the severe political climate that reigned in the Soviet Union during that time. (Durham, 1992). He translated a significant portion of Lenin's works, including his revisions of *What Is to Be Done?* Additionally, his book *Fundamentals of Soviet Criminal Legislation, the Judicial System and Criminal Court Procedure* (1960) provided an overview of Soviet legal structures, while *A Short History of the USSR* (1963) served as a key text in Soviet historiography (Hanna, 1960; Hanna, 1963). These publications reflect not only his ideological commitment but also his role in legitimising and reinforcing Soviet narratives.

### **3.5.3 Differences Between Hapgood and Hanna's Translations**

In this section we shall discuss the differences in Hapgood's and Hanna's translations, or rather the way Hanna altered Hapgood's translation.

It is possible that the decision to use footnotes in Hapgood's translation and endnotes in Hanna's was dictated by their respective publishers rather than the translators themselves. Nevertheless, this distinction significantly affects the reading experience. Hapgood's use of footnotes provides immediate access to explanations, allowing readers to engage with the text more seamlessly. As observed, this method makes it easier to follow the narrative without constant disruption (Savchenkova, 2024).

The placement of notes plays a crucial role in determining a text's accessibility and readability. By positioning explanatory notes at the bottom of the page, Hapgood ensures that readers do not have to flip back and forth in search of clarification. In contrast, Hanna's use of endnotes—while adhering to a more traditional academic format—can interrupt the reading flow, making the text less accessible, particularly for those unfamiliar with the historical or cultural references in the work. However, since publishing conventions often influence formatting decisions, it remains unclear

whether these choices reflect the translators' personal preferences or were imposed by their publishers.

This distinction highlights the varying priorities in translation and publication: Hapgood's approach appears to prioritise ease of reading, whereas Hanna's aligns with scholarly convention. Regardless of intent, these differences demonstrate how editorial decisions can shape a reader's engagement with a translated text.

Even though Hapgood's and Hanna's translations are almost identical, one notable difference appears at the very beginning of the book. Hanna replaces the term '*farm*' used by Hapgood with '*place*'. This change was likely necessary due to the socio-political context of the Soviet Union, where the term '*farm*' was closely associated with private ownership and capitalist agriculture, concepts that clashed with the collectivisation policies of Soviet Russia (Service, 2009). Since farms had been transformed into collective farms (*kolkhozy*), the word '*farm*' would have been ideologically inappropriate for a publication in Moscow. By opting for the more neutral term '*place*,' Hanna ensured the translation aligned with the expectations of Soviet publishers and audiences, demonstrating sensitivity to the political and cultural environment of the target context.

#### **3.5.4 Analysis of Selected Words and Their Translation**

Due to the derivative nature of Hanna's translation, we will refer primarily to Hapgood's translation below, except in instances where Hanna introduces notable differences.

**'Утро ночи мудренее'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 8, 1916; George Hanna, p. 7, 1965).

As explained earlier, The Russian phrase '*Утро ночи мудренее*' translates to '*Morning is wiser than night,*' suggesting that decisions are better made after a good night's sleep. Hapgood translated this phrase as '*I must sleep on it*'. This translation is particularly effective and demonstrates the translators' ability to convey the original meaning while adapting it to English idiomatic expression.

This phrase is widely understood in English to mean postponing a decision until the next day; thus, this translation is effective because it maintains the meaning of the original phrase while using a familiar English expression. By choosing '*I must sleep on*

it,' Hapgood provided a culturally appropriate equivalent that resonates with English-speaking readers.

The flexibility in translating idioms like *'Утро ночи мудренее'* (correctly in Russian *Утро вечера мудренее*) allows translators to adapt their translations to suit the context and tone of the target language effectively.

***'Такие-сякие сволочи'*** (Isabel Hapgood p. 26, 1916; George Hanna, p. 28, 1965).

The phrase *'Такие-сякие сволочи'* presents an opportunity for translators to use strong or vulgar language, allowing for creative and impactful choices. The translation of such expressions must balance fidelity to the original text with appropriateness for the target audience.

Hapgood opted for the straightforward and more literal translation *'so-and-so's, you bastards'*. While this choice conveys the core meaning of the original Russian phrase, it lacks the nuance and forcefulness of Leskov's wording. The Russian *'сволочи'* is indeed a derogatory insult, and while *'bastards'* is a possible equivalent—as supported by dictionary definitions—it is worth noting that Russian does have a direct counterpart, *'бастард'* (as well as various other possibilities, some of which have been discussed above). Leskov deliberately avoided this term, suggesting that *'сволочи'* carries connotations beyond its literal meaning. This raises the question of whether *'bastards'* was the most effective choice in English or merely the easiest.

English offers a far richer selection of insults than Hapgood employs and opting for a more colourful or culturally resonant term—such as those adopted by the other translators, or, for instances, *'slimeballs'* or *'wretches'*—could have better conveyed the flavour of Leskov's insult. Hapgood's translation is functional but uninspired, reducing the force of the original's harshness. As Wachtel (2006) observes, translating insults presents a unique challenge, requiring sensitivity to both linguistic and cultural factors while preserving the impact of the original phrase. By playing it safe, Hapgood misses an opportunity to reflect the liveliness and wit of Leskov's language. This demonstrates the broader issue of how literal translations, while technically accurate, can sometimes fail to capture the energy and expressiveness of a text, particularly in cases of strong or emotionally charged language.

**'Мелкоскоп'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 14, 1916; George Hanna, p. 14, 1965)

The translation of the neologism "*Мелкоскоп*" presents a crucial test of a translator's creativity and sensitivity to linguistic playfulness. Rather than embracing this opportunity, Hapgood opts for a straightforward and uninspired rendering: '*microscope*.' While this translation is clear and easily understood, it completely disregards the originality and charm embedded in Leskov's language. In Russian schools, "*Мелкоскоп*" is widely recognised as one of Leskov's most famous coinages, demonstrating the extent to which his linguistic creativity has permeated cultural and literary consciousness. By reducing it to the standard term '*microscope*,' Hapgood not only flattens the language but also strips the text of one of its most distinctive features.

As Professor Anne Lounsbury (2019) highlights, "*the linguistic inventiveness in Leskov's work is often challenging to preserve in translation, which can result in a loss of playfulness.*" This observation is particularly relevant here, as Hapgood's decision to bypass Leskov's creativity makes the text more mundane and diminishes the depth of its linguistic richness. While translators often face constraints in replicating wordplay across languages, Hapgood's unwillingness to attempt even a partial recreation of the neologism suggests a lack of inventiveness. Given that she clearly understood Leskov's use of wordplay in order to translate *Lefty*, her decision to translate "*Мелкоскоп*" (and other tricky neologisms) in such a conventional manner is more than disappointing—it reflects an overly cautious approach that sacrifices one of Leskov's most distinctive stylistic elements.

**'междоусобные разговоры'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 7, 1916; George Hanna, p. 5, 1965)

As previously explained, the phrase '*междоусобные разговоры*' is an example of Leskov's linguistic ingenuity, where he takes the word *междоусобные*—typically used in the context of *междоусобные войны* (civil wars or internal conflicts)—and combines it with *разговоры* (conversations). This deliberate and unconventional pairing creates a new meaning that suggests discussions marked by discord, internal strife, or conflict within a group. The phrase carries a subtle irony, implying that these are not merely personal or intimate discussions, but ones fraught with division or even hostility.

Hapgood renders *междоусобные разговоры* as *heart-to-heart talks*, which, according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2023), refers to “a talk or discussion in which two people talk honestly and in a serious way about their feelings.” By choosing *heart-to-heart talks*, Hapgood replaces the tense and fractious atmosphere of *междоусобные разговоры* with something that feels emotionally open and mutually understanding, which is not the tone Leskov intended.

This misinterpretation is significant, as it not only alters the meaning of the phrase but also diminishes the ironic edge Leskov embeds in his writing. A more fitting translation would maintain the sense of conflict and division central to the original phrase, such as *divided disputes*, which retains the connotation of disagreement and tension. The word *disputes* is often used in contexts like *territorial disputes* or *trifling disputes*, and when combined with *divided*, it introduces a certain quirkiness in English that echoes the irony and humour Leskov intended. This would preserve the complexity and wit of the original, which Hapgood’s translation fails to capture.

Translators must do more than simply convert words. Hapgood’s approach ultimately strips the text of its original richness and complexity.

***‘Огромные бюстры and Аболон полведерский’*** (Isabel Hapgood p. 9, 1916; George Hanna, p. 7, 1965).

The translation of neologisms such as ‘*бюстры*’ and ‘*Аболон полведерский*’ presents a unique challenge, requiring both linguistic creativity and cultural sensitivity. However, Hapgood’s approach remains disappointingly literal, in line with the straightforward and often uninspired translation strategies she consistently employs. Rather than attempting to capture Leskov’s linguistic inventiveness, she opts for direct English equivalents, stripping the text of its richness and humour.

As discussed in previous sections, ‘*Огромные бюстры*’ refers to a grand and impressive chandelier, carrying a sense of poetic exaggeration. Hapgood translates this as ‘*big bust*,’ a choice that is not only misleading but also entirely misses the intended grandeur of the original. Similarly, ‘*Аболон полведерский*’ is a humorous distortion of *Apollo Belvedere*, a famous classical sculpture, yet Hapgood renders it as

*statue of Apollo Belvedere*, neutralising the wordplay and playfulness that define Leskov's text.

While a straightforward translation can sometimes aid clarity and accessibility (Williams, 2019), Leskov's work demands a more nuanced approach. His writing is full of irony, wordplay, and linguistic experimentation—qualities that cannot be conveyed through mechanical translation alone. By failing to engage with the stylistic and tonal complexities of Leskov's prose, Hapgood reduces his inventive language to mere lexical substitutions, ultimately flattening the text's depth and artistic value.

Perhaps Hapgood's literal approach prevents confusion and ensures readability, but as Caryl Emerson (1985) observes, "*Translating Leskov requires balancing fidelity to the source text with the creative licence needed to evoke similar responses in the target language.*" Hapgood's failure to maintain this balance results in a translation that is not just uninspired but inadequate. Her choices demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of Leskov's artistry, making her rendition a reductive and, in many ways, unsuccessful attempt at translation.

**'двухсестную карету'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 11, 1916; George Hanna, p. 10, 1965).

Translating the neologism *'двухсестную карету'* should not pose a significant challenge, making Hapgood's decision to opt for a purely literal translation both uninspired and inadequate.

Hapgood renders it as *'two-seater,'* a straightforward choice that disregards the creativity of the original. While this translation conveys the basic meaning, it strips away the linguistic charm and wit that make Leskov's *skaz* distinctive.

Once again, Hapgood prioritises directness over style, failing to capture the playful essence of Leskov's writing. Her translation choices repeatedly flatten the text, raising serious questions about her ability—or willingness—to engage with the stylistic complexities of the original. If she does not attempt to reflect Leskov's linguistic creativity, one must wonder why she chose to translate his work at all. A more charitable interpretation might be found by comparing her treatment of Leskov with her

translations of other Russian texts, considering the historical and cultural conditions that may have shaped her choices. Nonetheless, the absence of any clear effort to convey the stylistic uniqueness central to Leskov's narrative voice remains difficult to justify.

**'на точку вида поставил'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 11, 1916; George Hanna, p. 10, 1965).

As previously discussed, the Russian phrase *'на точку вида поставил'* is an example of Leskov's unconventional use of language. Hapgood translates it as *notice*, which is yet another misstep in her approach.

In her translation, Hapgood writes: *"He was glad he had upset the English and brought the Tula craftsman to the Tsar's notice."* While this conveys the basic meaning, it lacks the creativity and nuance of the original.

Once again, Hapgood's choice is conventional, stripping the text of its depth. As previously demonstrated, there are more accurate and expressive ways to render this phrase in English. Her tendency to flatten Leskov's linguistic originality into standard phrasing weakens the overall impact of her translation.

**'Нумфозория'** (Isabel Hapgood p. 14, 1916; George Hanna, p. 14, 1965).

Leskov's neologism *'Нумфозория'* presents a clear opportunity for a simple, yet creative translation, but Hapgood entirely omits it, reducing it to the generic *'flea'*. Given that transliteration would have been a straightforward and effective solution, this decision is not just a missed opportunity but a fundamental misrepresentation of the original text.

In *The Tale of the Cross-Eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea*, *'Нумфозория'* is more than just a name—it encapsulates the whimsical and inventive spirit of Leskov's writing. By erasing it, Hapgood strips the narrative of its linguistic playfulness, diminishing one of its defining characteristics. Rather than engaging with the creative challenge Leskov presents, she opts for a reductive approach that flattens the text and undermines its originality. If she felt it necessary to clarify the term in English, she

could have done so with creativity—rendering it as *'Fleaphoria'* or *'Nymphlearia'* to preserve its playful essence.

This omission highlights a broader issue with Hapgood's translation strategy—her tendency to prioritise readability at the expense of literary style. While clarity is important, sacrificing an essential element of the story in the process demonstrates a lack of sensitivity to the richness of the original.

***'Аглицких мастеров'*** (Isabel Hapgood p. 14, 1916; George Hanna, p. 14, 1965).

Hapgood translates *'Аглицких мастеров'* as *'English workmen,'* a choice that unsurprisingly fails to capture the nuance of the original Russian term.

The word *'мастеров'* explicitly conveys expertise and mastery, making *'workmen'* an inadequate translation. A more fitting choice would be *'craftsmen'* or even *'craftmasters,'* which would better reflect the skill and prestige of the English artisans described in the text. Hapgood's decision diminishes their status, reducing them to mere labourers rather than the highly skilled specialists they are meant to be.

Additionally, *'Аглицких'*, as explained above, carries a subtle but deliberate twist in Leskov's original—a slight linguistic playfulness that is completely lost in Hapgood's rendering. While this omission may not drastically alter the overall meaning of the passage, it is yet another example of how her translation choices flatten the rich linguistic texture of Leskov's prose. Rather than preserving the spirit of the text, Hapgood once again opts for a simplistic and uninspired solution.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

#### **4. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the primary research and data gathered, examining the successes of the translators. It compares their approaches and elaborates on their respective styles.

## 4.1 Comparative Analysis of Four Translations of *Lefty*

This section provides an analysis of four translations of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and George Hanna. The objective is to assess how each translator approaches the text, particularly in terms of cultural accuracy, linguistic creativity, and the conveyance of the original narrative's essence.

Among these translations, William Edgerton's version emerges as the most successful in capturing the spirit of the original *Lefty*. Edgerton's translation stands out due to his meticulous attention to the cultural and linguistic nuances of Russian society, as well as his ability to creatively adapt these elements into English. His deep understanding of Leskov's characters and narrative style is evident, allowing him to preserve the humour, irony, and cultural specificity of the text. This contrasts with the translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, which, while generally well-executed, occasionally suffers from a literal and direct approach that can diminish the vibrancy of the original work. For example, while Pevear and Volokhonsky excel in the creation of certain neologisms, their overall translation of *Lefty* lacks the fluidity and playfulness that characterises Edgerton's rendition.

Edgerton's success lies in his ability to balance fidelity to the source text with creative adaptation, ensuring that the translation is both accurate and engaging for English-speaking readers. His translation effectively conveys the essence and purpose of Leskov's narrative, allowing the reader to experience the cultural and emotional depth of the original work. On the other hand, Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation, though precise, can occasionally feel too rigid due to their 'literal approach, potentially alienating readers who might miss the underlying nuances of the text.' (Andrews, 2013).

In contrast to Edgerton and Pevear & Volokhonsky, who made an effort to preserve the linguistic ingenuity of *Lefty*, Isabel Hapgood's translation—later copied almost verbatim by George Hanna—fails to capture the unique qualities that make the story exceptional. Their approach avoids engaging with Leskov's signature wordplay,

humour, and irony, instead opting for a direct, uninspired translation that strips the text of its vibrancy.

By neglecting to recreate neologisms or experiment with inventive phrasing, Hapgood renders Leskov's dynamic and playful *skaz* flat and unengaging for an English-speaking audience. This failure not only diminishes the distinctiveness of *Lefty* but also risks misrepresenting Leskov as a dull and unremarkable writer. In reality, his work is characterised by linguistic innovation and narrative ingenuity. The translation's lack of stylistic sensitivity results in an overly direct and uninspired rendition that does not do justice to the source text. Such an approach may be appropriate for the translation of administrative documents, but it is entirely inadequate for a literary text as rich and stylistically intricate as *Lefty*.

Even more concerning is Hanna's decision to replicate Hapgood's translation wholesale, without critically engaging with its evident shortcomings. Her failure to recognise and address the deficiencies of her work suggests a disregard for the complexities of Leskov's style.

## 4.2 Lexical Choices and Creative Adaptation: An Analysis of 10 Key Terms in *Lefty* Translations

This comparative analysis underscores the crucial impact of a translator's approach in conveying the essence of a literary work. William Edgerton's translation of *Lefty* exemplifies how creative adaptation, and cultural sensitivity can enhance a text, ensuring both fidelity to the original and resonance with a new audience. However, his occasional over-interpretation and excessive creativity in certain instances dilute the original meaning, suggesting a lack of restraint in moments where a more faithful rendering would have sufficed.

Pevear and Volokhonsky, by contrast, adopt a more literal approach, with Volokhonsky carefully replicating the Russian original and providing crucial insights into its style and humour, while Pevear focuses on fluency and readability in English. This collaboration largely succeeds in maintaining the integrity of the text, yet at times, their translation feels overly rigid and stiff, prioritising linguistic accuracy at the expense of natural expression. Nonetheless, they demonstrate a commendable effort in crafting inventive English neologisms that reflect Leskov's linguistic playfulness.

At the other extreme, Hapgood's translation—later copied wholesale by Hanna—epitomises a complete failure in literary translation. Lacking engagement with the rich linguistic and cultural dimensions of *Lefty*, their version strips the text of its stylistic vibrancy, reducing Leskov's masterful prose to a dull and uninspired rendition. This failure highlights a fundamental misunderstanding of the translator's role, which extends beyond linguistic substitution to the careful reimagining of a text in a way that preserves its original spirit while ensuring accessibility and impact for a new audience.

One of the key phrases analysed is '*Утро ночи мудренее*,' commonly rendered as "*The morning is wiser than the evening.*" Hapgood and Hanna translated it as "*I must sleep on it,*" a well-known English idiom. While this choice deviates from the literal meaning, it effectively conveys the intended message in a natural and colloquial manner, making it a rare success in their otherwise uninspired translation.

William Edgerton, on the other hand, rendered the phrase as "*Wait until the morning light; it's always wiser than the night.*" This version introduces a rhythmic, almost poetic

quality, which, while elegant, arguably embellishes the original more than necessary. In contrast, Pevear and Volokhonsky opted for a more straightforward, literal translation, which preserves the meaning without unnecessary ornamentation. Overall, this phrase was competently handled by all translators, with Edgerton's interpretation being slightly excessive in its creativity, but still within reason.

Another example is *'Такие-сякие сволочи'* (Such and such bastards), which incorporates vulgar language to convey insult. Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation, *'Blankety-blank scum,'* succeeds in capturing the playful tone of the original while maintaining its vulgarity, making it both effective and in keeping with Leskov's style. Edgerton's choice, *'So-and-so's, you swine,'* integrates smoothly into the text, sounding natural while still carrying the intended insult. Both translations manage to preserve the essence of the original, though Edgerton's version arguably feels more seamless and appropriate in context.

In contrast, Hapgood's translation, *'Such-and-such bastards,'* while accurate, lacks the sharpness and punch of the original. While it technically conveys the meaning, it feels somewhat clumsy, disrupting the narrative flow. Additionally, the choice of *'bastards'* is less fitting within Leskov's stylistic use of synonyms for insult. As discussed previously, while *'bastard'* exists in Russian, its direct use here misses the mark. *'Swine,'* used by Edgerton, strikes a better balance: it's slightly less vulgar than *'scum,'* while still being fittingly derogatory. *'Scum,'* although effective in its own right, is a more colloquial choice, perhaps too crude for the context.

Overall, after considering Leskov's style, Edgerton's *'swine'* stands as the most appropriate translation, successfully capturing both the vulgarity and the nuance of the original. The use of *'bastards'* feels the least effective in this instance.

The Russian neologism *'Мелкоскоп'* (microscope) is another notable example. Pevear and Volokhonsky, along with Edgerton, provided sufficient translations, yet Hapgood missed an opportunity for creativity by not attempting a neologism in English, not even the obvious one, such as *'miniscope.'* This decision resulted in a loss of the playful and inventive spirit that characterises Leskov's original text.

The phrase *'междоусобные разговоры'* (internecine conversations) was translated differently by each translator. Pevear and Volokhonsky took a literal approach,

maintaining the original meaning, but this can feel somewhat stiff and lacking in nuance. Hapgood's choice, *'heart-to-heart talks,'* completely misses the mark, distorting the original's meaning and intent. This translation is inaccurate and fails to capture the underlying irony. In contrast, Edgerton's *'intimidating conversations'* appears the most successful. It preserves the tone of the original, highlighting Leskov's deliberate misuse of language while maintaining the irony that defines the phrase.

The translation of *'огромные бюстры and Аполон полведерский'* (huge chandeliers and the Apollo Belvedere) further exemplifies the differences in approach. Hapgood's translation, *'big bust'* and *"statue of Apollo Belvedere,"* is plain and lacks the inventive flair seen in Edgerton's *'tremendulous estuaries and the Apollo Velvet Ear.'* Pevear and Volokhonsky's *'henormous blustres and Apollo Belderear'* effectively mirror Leskov's original style, demonstrating respect for his linguistic creativity. Their use of 'Belderear' equals Edgerton's solution in its rhyming qualities, as it mirrors the phonetic nature of Leskov's neologism. However, Edgerton's version, unlike that by Pevear and Volokhonsky, is also meaningful, as it involves semantic playfulness as well as the phonetic one.

The translation of *'двухместную карему'* (two-seater) was handled well by Edgerton, Pevear, and Volokhonsky, with their choice of *'two-sitter'* being an obvious but effective translation that fits seamlessly within the text. Hapgood's translation, *'two-seater,'* while grammatically correct, lacks any creativity, making it a standard but uninspired choice.

On the other hand, Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation of *'на точку вида поставил'* as *'in the limelight'* captures the intended meaning accurately. Edgerton's version, *'attract contention,'* however, stands out as particularly successful, aligning well with both his translation style and Leskov's own linguistic creativity. Hapgood's *'notice'* is again a less inventive choice, which flattens the playful distortion in Leskov's use of language.

Lastly, the neologism *'Нимфозория'* (*Nymphosoria*) was successfully retained by Pevear & Volokhonsky and Edgerton through transliteration, preserving Leskov's linguistic creativity. In contrast, Hapgood's decision to reduce it to *'flea'* strips the text of its originality and weakens one of its defining features.

A similar issue arises in the translation of *‘Аглицких мастеров’* (*English masters*), where Pevear & Volokhonsky adhered to a literal translation, Edgerton’s *‘craftsmen’* was the most fitting, while Hapgood’s *‘workmen’* diminished the prestige of the original term. Notably, all translators overlooked the deliberate distortion in *‘Аглицких’*. Whether this was an intentional omission, or a missed detail remains unclear, yet a simple adjustment—such as *Egnlish* or *Eglish*—could have effectively recreated the effect in English.

Through these comparisons, it becomes evident that William Edgerton’s translation is the most successful in preserving Leskov’s linguistic creativity and cultural nuances. His playful adaptation of language aligns closely with the author’s style, offering English readers a version that is both faithful and engaging. Pevear and Volokhonsky, while maintaining accuracy and a strong connection to the original Russian text, sometimes lack the creative flexibility needed to fully convey Leskov’s distinctive tone in English.

In contrast, Hapgood’s translation, later copied almost verbatim by Hanna, is a failure in literary translation. Her version, while technically correct, lacks the vibrancy and inventiveness that define *Lefty*, rendering the text dull and lifeless. Hanna’s decision to reproduce Hapgood’s work without introducing his own interpretative choices is particularly disappointing, as it represents a missed opportunity to refine and enhance a flawed translation and proves his role as a straightforward plagiarist.

This analysis highlights the complexities of translating a linguistically rich and culturally layered work such as *Lefty*. Comparing these versions makes clear that Leskov’s work deserves further translation efforts to achieve the best possible rendering in English. While Edgerton’s approach has been the most successful to date, future translators can build upon these existing attempts—hopefully taking inspiration from his approach, while taking into account all the other translation solutions in their entirety, including unsuccessful renditions, since negative lessons are often no less instructive than positive ones.

Although this study has focused on a small selection of carefully chosen words and phrases, this necessarily leaves broader aspects of translation, such as narrative voice, pacing, and overarching syntactic structures, outside its scope.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has provided an extensive exploration of the challenges and intricacies involved in translating Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* into English. By analysing what was supposed to be four different translations, but turned out to be three — those by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, William Edgerton, Isabel Hapgood, and the derivative translation by George Hanna—this study has illuminated how each translator approached the task of rendering Leskov's distinctive linguistic style and cultural nuances accessible to English-speaking readers. This conclusion synthesises the findings, reflecting on the broader implications for translation studies and the enduring relevance of Leskov's work.

Translation, as a discipline, involves a complex interplay between fidelity to the source text and the necessity of rendering that text comprehensible and resonant in the target language. Over the years, scholars have proposed various approaches and techniques to tackle the inherent challenges in translation. Among the most prominent are the dichotomies of literal versus free translation and formal versus dynamic equivalence.

Literal translation, often referred to as *word-for-word* translation, strives to preserve the exact wording and structure of the source text. This method is sometimes criticised for producing awkward or unnatural results in the target language, as it may fail to account for idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or stylistic nuances. Conversely, free translation prioritises conveying the overall meaning or effect of the source text, even if it means departing from the precise wording. This approach allows for greater creativity but risks losing the specificity or subtlety of the original.

Formal equivalence focuses on maintaining the form and content of the source text as closely as possible, often resulting in a translation that feels more foreign or distant to the target audience. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, seeks to evoke the same response or effect in the target language, even if that means altering the form or content to some extent. This approach is more reader-oriented, emphasising the accessibility and emotional impact of the translation.

In the context of *Lefty*, the translators under study employed a mix of these techniques, each bringing their unique perspective and methodology to the task. The choice of technique often reflects the translator's broader philosophy of translation, as well as their interpretation of Leskov's intentions and the cultural significance of his work. Understanding the backgrounds and approaches of the translators is crucial to appreciating the nuances of their work. Each translator brings their own set of skills, experiences, and biases to the task, which inevitably influence the final product.

**Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky** are a husband-and-wife team known for their collaborative approach to translating Russian literature. Their method involves Volokhonsky, a native Russian speaker, producing a literal draft translation, which Pevear, an American writer and editor, then polishes for readability and literary quality. This dual perspective helps them to stay close to the original while also ensuring that the translation reads smoothly in English. However, their adherence to literal translation can sometimes result in a text that feels stilted or overly formal. Despite this, their version of *Lefty* is generally well-regarded for its faithfulness to the original text and its ability to convey the distinctive Russian flavour of Leskov's prose.

**William Edgerton**, a distinguished scholar of Russian literature, is renowned for his deep understanding of Russian culture and his sensitivity to the literary qualities of the texts he translates. His translation of *Lefty* demonstrates a keen awareness of the original's linguistic creativity and cultural context. Edgerton's approach is characterised by a delicate balance between fidelity to Leskov's unique style and the need to make the text accessible to English readers. He often opts for dynamic equivalence, seeking to recreate the humour, irony, and rhythm of the original, rather than adhering strictly to a literal translation. This approach allows him to capture the essence of Leskov's narrative, making his translation particularly vibrant and engaging.

**Isabel Hapgood** was among the first translators to bring Russian literature to the English-speaking world. Her work, dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, played a crucial role in shaping Western perceptions of Russian literary traditions. She helped spark lasting interest in the field and deserves recognition for her contributions. However, her translations have been criticised for their Victorian style, which can feel outdated and overly formal to modern readers. In her translation

of *Lefty*, Hapgood tends to favour a literal approach, often at the expense of capturing the playful and innovative aspects of Leskov's language. As a result, while her version remains 'accurate' at a superficial level in terms of plot, it overlooks the linguistic subtleties and intricate wordplay that give the original its depth. Consequently, her translation lacks the vibrancy and humour of Leskov's text, stripping it of its deeper layers of meaning.

**George Hanna** was another early translator of Russian literature into English, whose approach, much like Hapgood's, reflects a conservative and uninspired translation strategy. His version of *Lefty* – still published under his name – is essentially identical with Hapgood's, presenting us with what might be a case of plagiarism – a remarkable fact which this dissertation has discovered, however, further research is required to analyse the specific circumstances surrounding the repurposing of an earlier published translation. Rather than attempting to refine or improve upon Hapgood's already flawed interpretation, Hanna simply reproduces it without meaningful contribution. As a result, his version fails entirely as a translation, offering nothing of value to the literary reception of *Lefty* in English.

Nikolai Leskov, a prominent 19th-century Russian writer, is best known for his richly descriptive, invariably profound and culturally engaged, and often humorous depictions of Russian life, as well as his innovative use of language. Leskov's works are characterised by their vivid portrayal of regional dialects, their playful manipulation of language, and their deep engagement with Russian culture and society. *Lefty* (also known as *The Tale of Cross-eyed Lefty from Tula and the Steel Flea*) is one of his most celebrated works, encapsulating many of these features.

The challenges of translating Leskov's work stem primarily from his use of language. Leskov was a master of the Russian vernacular, and his writing often incorporates dialects, neologisms, and puns that are deeply rooted in the cultural and linguistic context of 19th-century Russia. Translators must therefore grapple with the difficult task of conveying these elements in a way that resonates with an English-speaking audience, without losing the richness and specificity of the original. One of the key difficulties is the translation of neologisms—words that Leskov invented or adapted for his own purposes. These neologisms often carry specific connotations or humour that are difficult to replicate in another language. For instance, as we saw above, the term

'*Мелкоскоп*' (which could be rendered as *miniscope* in English) is a playful and creative take on the word *microscope*. Translators must decide whether to invent a new word in English that captures the same playfulness, or to opt for a more straightforward translation that prioritises clarity over creativity.

Another challenge lies in the translation of cultural references and idiomatic expressions. Leskov's works are steeped in the social and cultural milieu of his time, and many of his references may be obscure or unfamiliar to modern readers, particularly those outside of Russia. Translators must navigate these cultural implications carefully, deciding whether to provide additional context or explanation, or to adapt the references to something more familiar to the target audience.

Having examined the translators' backgrounds and the challenges they faced; this section brings together the key insights from the comparative analysis. Pevear and Volokhonsky, while highly accurate, at times prioritise literal fidelity over natural fluency, which can make their translation feel somewhat rigid. Edgerton, in contrast, demonstrates a strong grasp of Russian language, culture, and literary style, successfully balancing precision with creativity. Further research into Hapgood's broader body of work only reinforces the criticism of her translation—her approach lacks imagination, and her handling of Leskov's text shows a fundamental disregard for its unique linguistic playfulness.

In summation, the intricate and densely woven linguistic fabric of Nikolai Leskov's *Lefty* presents profound challenges to the translator, necessitating not merely linguistic precision but a deep-seated cultural acumen and a deftness in creative adaptation. Each translator analysed demonstrates distinct merits within their respective translations (except the derivative translation by Hanna). However, in our view, it is Edgerton's rendering that most successfully encapsulates the quintessence of Leskov's narrative, striking a judicious balance between literal fidelity and the preservation of the original work's stylistic idiosyncrasies and cultural nuances. This comparative analysis elucidates the formidable difficulties inherent in translating such a complex text, where the omission or misinterpretation of neologisms, wordplay, and cultural references can significantly attenuate the narrative's impact on non-Russian audiences. Furthermore, this study underscores the broader ramifications of translation decisions, highlighting how they profoundly shape the reception and

comprehension of literary masterpieces across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Ultimately, this exploration reaffirms the translator's role as not merely a linguistic conduit but as a cultural interlocutor, whose interpretative choices can either obscure or illuminate the rich, multifaceted tapestry of the source text.

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