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From Ukrainian Folklore to Global Audience: The English Translation of Mavka: The Forest Song

Abstract

This article examines the challenges of translating *Mavka: The Forest Song*, a culturally rich Ukrainian animated film. It explores how translators must balance linguistic creativity, character integrity, and cultural specificity while ensuring accessibility for global audiences. As a children's film, the English translation of *Mavka* plays a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural understanding. The study highlights instances where culturally embedded expressions were simplified or replaced, resulting in a more neutral text as well as a partial loss of its educational and cultural value. Additionally, it discusses how elements like colloquialisms, creative wordplay, and humor could have been better preserved. The paper critiques how the translation compromises the depth of the original by substituting culturally meaningful elements with more general expressions, particularly for young audiences who benefit from exposure to diverse traditions. Ultimately, it argues that while adaptation is inevitable, translation should prioritize cultural and narrative fidelity whenever linguistically possible.

Keywords: translation, adaptation, culture, expressive language, colloquialism, word-building techniques, style, *Mavka: The Forest Song*, Мавка. Лісова пісня

1. Introduction

Mavka: The Forest Song is a landmark in Ukrainian animation and culture, captivating audiences with its vivid storytelling and universal themes of ecology, love, and self-identity. Inspired by Lesya

Ukrainka's poetic play, *The Forest Song*, the film combines expressive animation with Ukrainian mythology and literature, portraying the country's natural beauty and mystical creatures. However, the English translation of the dialogues in *Mavka: The Forest Song* does not consistently reflect the meticulous attention paid to the film's visual and symbolic details. This occasionally limits the film's ability to convey the cultural nuances, as well as the atmosphere and emotions it evokes for native viewers.

This article aims to explore the linguistic profiles of the characters in *Mavka: The Forest Song* and evaluate the pragmatic adequacy of the English translation of their dialogues. While no official information is available, the creators have confirmed that the script was originally written in Ukrainian and later translated into English, despite the English lip-syncing and subsequent dubbing into Ukrainian. This claim is further supported by linguistic evidence (see example 45). Given that English lip-syncing was prioritized, the subsequent analysis will not consider the length of the translated text as a restrictive factor in the translation process. The authors assume that the film production followed traditional steps, with the script, dialogue, and character interactions serving as the foundation for the story before the visual elements were developed. In this process, the characters' lip movements and facial expressions would have been synchronized to the pre-recorded dialogue.

2. Theoretical Background

Extensive research exists on literary translation (Bassnett, 1991; Baker, 1992; Lefevere, 1992; Venuti, 1995; Hermans, 1999; Gambier and Van Doorslaer, 2010), audiovisual translation (Gambier and Gottlieb, 2001; Chaume, 2012; Chiaro et al., 2008; Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2009; Mayoral and Orrego-Carmona, 2016; Gottlieb, 2018), and children's literature translation (Christiansen, 1997; O'Connell, 2006). Moreover, recent studies have explored sociolinguistic and semiotic dimensions involved in translating culture-specific items, emphasizing their importance in foreign language acquisition (Tkachivska et al., 2025). However, studies on English-Ukrainian literary translation remain scarce, with notable contributions from Povoroznyuk (2021), Krupko and Pidhrushna (2024), and Borysenko et al. (2024).

The translation of animated works such as *Mavka: The Forest Song* presents unique challenges, requiring a balance between linguistic creativity, character integrity, and cultural specificity while ensuring accessibility for global audiences. This study applies Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), which focuses on the purpose (or skopos) of translation as a guiding principle; the concepts of foreignization and domestication (Venuti, 1995) that refer to the extent a translation retains foreign elements or adapts to the target culture; and the cultural turn in translation studies (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990), which emphasizes the sociocultural context of translation. These theories provide the framework for analyzing how *Mavka*'s English translation balances between fidelity to Ukrainian identity and accessibility for international audiences. It highlights how strategies were shaped by the need to engage children while introducing Ukrainian traditions.

The key focus is on dialogues, which are crucial for character development and cultural authenticity. Translation scholars (Bassnett, 1991; Baker, 1992; Venuti, 1995; Hatim and Mason, 1997; Munday, 2008; 2012) emphasize its role in conveying both plot and emotional depth. This study therefore examines how dialogue translation interacts with visuals to preserve humor, emotion, and cultural nuances.

3. Results and Discussion

In the animated film *Mavka: The Forest Song*, the characters' speech patterns and distinctive combinations of lexical elements evoke a wide range of emotional responses from the audience, ranging from poetic admiration to genuine amusement at cleverly crafted humor. While the film is designed for a broad audience, including children (rated 0+), the characters' manner of expression remains relatively simple yet retains unique features that underscore their individuality and enhance the film's overall appeal.

The following analysis examines the characters' speech styles individually, beginning with those exhibiting the most stylistically expressive and creative language.

3.1. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Hush's Speech

Hush's distinctive mode of communication is defined by frequent allusions to well-known proverbs, colloquial expressions, exclamations, creative word formations, as well as the use of linguistic devices such as pejoratives and euphemisms. His speech is marked by unexpected and unconventional expressions that contribute to the creation of vivid imagery and metaphorical meaning, underscoring his intrinsic connection to the forest and natural elements. The associative framework of his language draws on the imagery and symbolism of the natural environment, including sounds such as rustling leaves, the processes of nature, and the whistling wind. These linguistic and symbolic features elicit strong emotional responses from the audience, reinforcing his role as a magical forest entity within the narrative. Furthermore, this characterization is enriched by the intonational nuances provided by the voice actor, the expressive gestures, and facial animations integrated into the character's design.

It is worth noting that there are several instances in which the linguistic creativity of Hush's speech is preserved in the English version. This is indicative of the fact that both Ukrainian and English permit the playful and creative use of language, employing various word-formation strategies, such as compounding, wordplay, and blending: Table 1

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
1 (00:34:16)	Так-так, двадцяти-п'яти-з-половинкою-юридний брат по матері. Пукаш його звати.	A very, very many-times-removed cousin. Shmucas is his name.

Hush modifies the first part of the word “двоюрідний” (“cousin”) in order to explain to Lisovyk why his “relative” does not resemble him. Additionally, we observe a comic alteration in the main character's name from “Lukash” (as presented in Lesya Ukrainka's *Mavka*) to “Pukash” (for a child audience, “Pukash” sounds humorous because it resembles the word “пукати,” which means ‘to fart’). The English version successfully retains both the concept of the relative's remoteness and the comedic effect of the modified name “Lukash” by using the combination of letters shm, which, by replacing the initial consonant or consonant cluster, is often employed to create a mocking or derisive effect. Table 2

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
2 (00:05:43)	Скаже, я головою лелекнувся.	He'll think I'm stork-raving mad.

These words are spoken by Hush while flying on a stork, in response to Mavka's admiration of his aerial maneuvers. In this instance, Hush once again employs the technique of blending to replace the idiomatic expression “вдаритись головою” (“to go mad” or “to lose one's mind”). Ultimately, we

observe a fusion of the noun “лелека” (“stork”) and the verb “гепнувся” (“fell” or “crashed”). The English version effectively preserves the humor by coining the phrase “stork-raving mad,” a playful adaptation of the idiom “stark raving mad.” Thus, while the technique differs, the effect and original linguistic creativity are well preserved.

The distinctiveness of Hush’s speech, which demonstrates his unique use of language, is not, however, always rendered in the translation, as can be observed in the following instances. Table 3

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
3 (00:23:47)	Звідсіля лунали якісь свисто-гуко-тутунясті звуки...	A lot of weird, whistly, raspy sounds coming from this exact area...

Hush employs a hyphenated compound adjective to create a multi-layered description of a sound he heard, essentially using word formation based on onomatopoeia. In the English version, however, this is replaced with a series of adjectives that correspond to the description. While, in this particular case, it cannot be said that this approach to sentence adaptation is unsuccessful since it works well in terms of clarity, it nonetheless fails to evoke the same sense of creative sound description that the original does. The translation could be closer to the original by also rendering one of the mentioned sounds, namely the one produced by a train, which is in Ukrainian tu-tu (the element of the word “тутунясті” [tutunyasti], combined with the non-standard suffix [-nyasti] ‘some kind of’). The more nuanced translation might be “Some whistly-raspily-choo-chooish sounds were coming from here,” which would preserve the playful and creative nature of the original Ukrainian sentence. Table 4

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
4 (00:23:59)	Я чув, в ліс втараторилися підлі...	Our forest has just been incursionated by...

The word “втараторилися” is a neologism created by Hush, likely derived from the verbs “вторгнутися” (“to intrude, to force one’s way in with malicious intent”) and “тараторити” (“to speak rapidly”). The English translation also introduces an occasionalism, “incursionate,” but in doing so, the implication of rapid speech is lost due to the neutralization of the “тараторити” component, which diminishes Hush’s inherent sensitivity to sounds. While the English language allows for flexible blending, which could retain both components—incursion and rapid, indistinct speech—this is not fully realized in the translation. An alternative rendering, “babblevaded,” could better capture the original wordplay. This blend, formed from “babble” and “invaded,” conveys the idea of speech intrusively overtaking or disrupting a situation. Such a term would offer a playful yet

vivid representation of speech that not only “babbles” but also “invades” or overwhelms the space in a forceful manner, preserving the original creativity of Hush’s linguistic style. Table 5

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
5 (00:25:17)	Я знав, що у смертних очі заgreбуші, руки завидючі!	I knew that all humans were selfish and greedy!

In the Ukrainian version, there is an idiomatic play on words with “очі заgreбуші, руки завидючі,” which can be roughly translated as ‘envious eyes and grabby hands,’ a phrase typically used to denote greed. In the original script, Hush misplaces the nouns, likely due to being in an emotionally heightened state, resulting in a slip of the tongue. However, in the translation, we observe the omission of the idiomatic element, leading to a simplification of the expression, despite the availability of several English equivalents, such as “eyes bigger than one’s stomach,” “all eyes and hands,” “grabby hands,” “eyes filled with longing,” and “hands reaching out.” Table 6

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
6 (00:24:12)	О, це гарно, кліщ мені в бороду.	Oh, I like that very much.
7 (00:29:25)	І не мрій, жук мене точи.	No way!

These humorous exclamations employ imagery characteristic of the character: “кліщ” (“mite”), “борода” (“beard”) and “жук” (“beetle”), and are coined in Ukrainian to function as a stylized “curse.” They convey a dramatic or exasperated desire for some minor misfortune to befall the speaker. However, in the English translation, these expressions are entirely neutralized without clear linguistic justification. An analogous form of “swearing” could have been employed in the English version to preserve the original’s wordplay and expressive tone. For instance, the rendering “Oh, wonderful—mite in my beard!” in example 6, and “You wish! Over my worm-eaten stump!” in 7 would maintain the original meaning while adding a layer of linguistic creativity. Table 7

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
8 (00:25:09)	Нащо ти приперлось у ліс?	Why have you trespassed here?
9 (00:28:40)	І чухай давай!	Now leave.

In examples 8 and 9, the word “припертись” (“to show up”) and the exclamation “чухай давай” (“go away”) represent elements of colloquial vocabulary common in spoken Ukrainian. The verb “приперлось” in example 8 conveys an intrusive or unwelcome arrival, typically expressed in an informal or slightly disapproving tone. While the English translation uses “trespassed” to capture the sense of intrusion, this choice carries a more formal and legalistic connotation, diverging from the original’s colloquial nature.

Similarly, in example 9, “чухай давай” functions as an informal and somewhat dismissive command, analogous to expressions such as “scram,” “beat it,” or “get going.” It conveys a sense of urgency and irritation, urging the addressee to leave quickly or cease being a nuisance.

However, the English translation simplifies the emotional and semantic nuances embedded in the original, rendering Hush’s exclamations lexically neutral. Consequently, the character’s mood is left to be inferred solely through the voice actor’s performance. Table 8

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
10 (00:34:30)	В мене аж кора пухне! Ти хоч в курсі наскільки це все нелегально?!	What do we do now? Do you realise how illegal this is?

The Ukrainian phrase “кора пухне,” which literally translates to ‘my bark is swelling,’ involves a play on words derived from the colloquial expression “мозок/голова пухне” (“my brain/head is swelling”), which denotes a state of intense mental strain. In this instance, Hush adapts this expression to reflect his own physiology. However, the English translation is considerably simplified. The focus shifts from the speaker’s emotional reaction to a question about what action to take. A more direct translation, such as “my bark is swelling up,” or an analogous wordplay like “My bark is about to explode” (echoing the idiom “my brain is about to explode”), would better preserve the original’s playful tone. Additionally, the colloquial expression “бути в курсі” has been neutralized in English as “to realise,” thereby losing some of the informal nuance. Table 9

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
11 (00:39:11)	Прошу, стули заради лісу своє дуплисько, поки не пізно.	Please close the knothole on the front of your face.

The expression “стули пельку” represents another element of Ukrainian phraseology used to harshly instruct someone to be quiet. In this instance, Hush employs his characteristic associations with wood, as the only type of hole in a tree that can be closed is a hollow. Furthermore, the word “дупло” (“hollow”) is altered with the pejorative suffix -иськ- to form the word “дуплисько,” thereby intensifying the negative tone. The exclamation “заради лісу” in this context is also noteworthy, echoing the sentiment of the phrase “For the sake of God!” However, in the English translation, the phrase is softened and recontextualized visually: Lukas’s wooden “helmet” contains several holes, and Hush politely requests that he cover the one in the front, implicitly referring to the mouth. While this visual adaptation works in the context of the English version, it fails to capture the urgency and crude humor of the original phrase. A more faithful translation might retain these elements by rendering the line as “Please shut your knothole of a mouth for the sake of the forest before it’s too

late.” This would preserve the original’s humor and intensity while maintaining its thematic connection to the forest. Table 10

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
12 (01:24:35)	Братику, ти куди? Корінці склеїти хочеш?	Where are you going? You’re gonna die!

This line from Hush is particularly interesting, as his address to Lukas as “brother” may indicate the emergence of warm feelings toward someone he had previously tolerated with disdain. This shift in the relationship between the two characters reflects an internal change in the hero, which is effectively conveyed through his speech. The English version of this address, however, fails to capture this nuance, instead rendering only the neutral question, “Where are you going?” To convey this significant transformation in the character’s development, terms such as “fellow,” “lad,” or “buddy” could have been employed.

The modified slang expression “склеїти ласты” (“to die”), which literally translates as ‘glue one’s flippers,’ is transformed into “корінці склеїти” (“glue one’s roots”), but lacks an analogous expression in the English version, which instead provides its neutral meaning. While informal English expressions such as “to kick the bucket,” “to buy the farm,” “to meet one’s maker,” or “to push up daisies” (preserving the nature-related context) could have been used, any of these would have more effectively preserved the intended tone within the narrative.

Domestication is the dominant strategy in the analyzed examples, particularly in examples 3, 5-10, and 12, where idiomatic expressions, metaphorical imagery, and expressive slang are neutralized or omitted, often resulting in the flattening of stylistic nuance and character tone. Partial domestication occurs in examples 4 and 11, where creative structures or visual cues are partially preserved, yet the original intensity or semantic layering is weakened. Conversely, examples 1 and 2 exemplify foreignization, as the translator successfully recreates playful neologisms and idiomatic humor, maintaining cultural specificity and expressive uniqueness of the source text.

3.2. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Frol’s Speech

Frol’s speech, as the assistant to the main antagonist Kyлина, is distinguished by a pronounced accent and the extensive use of foreign words, setting it apart from that of other characters. This linguistic feature functions as a significant tool for characterization, as it suggests a specific cultural

context while endowing the character with a distinctive and memorable voice for the audience. Frol, portrayed as a designer or aspiring stylist, positions himself as an exceptional figure in his field. His visual identity reinforces this persona through his rebellious fringe, brightly colored clothing, and the striking addition of a fox fur draped around his neck (fig. 1).

In the original Ukrainian version of the film, Frol's speech incorporates a French accent, emphasizing Paris's status as one of the fashion capitals—a milieu to which he eagerly aspires to belong. Table 11



Figure 1. Frol. (Mavka: The Song of Forest, 00:12:40)

This accent is further enhanced through the strategic use of foreign words and altered stress patterns, contributing to the character's distinctive vocal identity. However, in the English version, this unique element is lost. The translation process not only omits the foreign vocabulary but also strips the voice actor's performance of the pronounced French accent, thereby erasing the originality and cultural nuances embedded in the original portrayal. Numerous instances illustrate how Frol's speech is entirely neutralized, rendering it devoid of its distinctive French inflection and flavor.

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
13 (00:08:51)	О, мон Дьйо, який жаж!	How positively tragic!

The original Ukrainian exclamation directly incorporates a French phrase, "Oh, mon Dieu" ("Oh, my God"), to evoke a sense of melodrama and sophistication, consistent with Frol's characterization. In contrast, the English translation opts for a slightly ironic phrase, "How positively tragic!", which maintains the dramatic flair but loses the French linguistic element that is central to the character's identity and the cultural context of the original. To preserve the original flavor, a more faithful translation could have been: "Oh, mon Dieu, how dreadful!" Alternatively, the widely known French expression "Oh là là" would have also worked well in English to express a similar shock or distress, while keeping the French flavor. Table 12

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
14 (00:12:53)	Бьен сьюз, мадам. Лечу а-ля куля.	Oh, ma'am. Right away. Just a second.

This translation, stripped of its French coloring, fails to capture the intensity and stylistic nuances of the original phrase. The use of the French expression "bien sûr" or even the widely recognized "bien," along with the Ukrainian simile "Лечу а-ля куля" ("I'm flying like a bullet"), could have been easily retained. A rendering such as "Bien sûr, on my way – like a bullet!" with the stress on the final syllable would have preserved the playful tone, French influence, and sense of urgency conveyed in the original Ukrainian phrase. Table 13

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
15 (00:13:15)	Кутюр'є моє! Який старомодний треш.	Oh, my God This is so old-fashioned.

In the original, we encounter a coined exclamation that echoes the phrase "Боже мій!" ("Oh, my God"), where the word "God" is substituted with "couturier," transcribed into Ukrainian. This substitution underscores the character's purported sophistication and aligns with his stylistic

persona. In contrast, the English version employs a generic exclamation of surprise, losing this nuance entirely. Additionally, the Ukrainian phrase “старомодний треш” (“old-fashioned trash”) is stripped of its expressiveness in the translation, as the “trash” component is omitted, thereby diminishing the original phrase’s impact. The phrase, “Oh my Couturier! What an old-fashioned garbage,” could have effectively preserved these nuances, maintaining both the character’s stylistic sophistication and the expressive impact of the original text. Table 14

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
16 (00:13:58)	То ви щодо цієї роботи? Прошу, сельве пле.	Oh, about THAT job offer? Please come in.

In the Ukrainian version, the phrase “сельве пле” is a playful transcription of the widely recognized French expression “s’il vous plaît” (“please”). This element is entirely omitted in the translation, which neutralizes the character’s personality and diminishes the comedic effect derived from the mixing of languages. A more faithful translation could have been: “Oh, about THAT job offer? Please, s’il vous plaît, come in.” Alternatively, a playful tone could have been preserved by adapting the English expression “Pretty please with a cherry on top!” into the phrase “Pretty, pretty plea,” which echoes a well-known, playful way to ask for something politely. This adaptation could serve as a humorous rendering of “s’il vous plait,” maintaining both the playful and exaggerated qualities of the original.

In the Ukrainian version, during moments of emotional distress when Frol loses control, his speech shifts to a conversational, straightforward style characteristic of everyday communication. This nuance is not preserved in the English version. The loss stems in part from the contrast present in the original, where Frol’s typical speech, enriched with French nuances, abruptly transitions to colloquial Ukrainian interspersed with prestigious French elements. Since this linguistic feature is not carried over into the target text, the impact of these lines is significantly diminished, resulting in their neutralization, for instance: Table 15

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
17 (00:34:55)	Бі. Це маніфік. Таке...чорті шо!	Yeah. Lovely portrait. Totally... horridness.

In the original, the phrase combines French-inspired transcribed elements “Бі. Це маніфік” (“Yes. It’s magnificent”) with the colloquial Ukrainian “чорті шо” (“a mess”), which evokes the imagery of a demon. This juxtaposition creates a humorous and ironic contrast, reflecting the character’s dramatic and inconsistent personality. The English translation, however, fails to preserve this

contrast. Furthermore, the phrase “Totally... horridness” is an awkward combination of an adverb and a noun, which does not effectively convey the humor or tone of the original. A more faithful translation could have been: “Oui. C’est magnifique. Such a... disaster!” This alternative would have retained the ironic shift and remained true to Frol’s voice and style.

Interestingly, in the Ukrainian version, Frol exhibits a particular fondness for “pantaloon” (“панталони”), which are frequently referenced in his speech, primarily for comedic effect. In contrast, the English version leans more heavily toward elements such as lace, silks, and ribbons, emphasizing these as distinctive components of his wardrobe. This shift reflects a divergence in the linguistic and cultural framing of Frol’s stylistic identity: Table 16

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
18 (00:46:20)	І в мене буде свій власний бутік з панталонами?	With my own Soul of Frol Manly Lace Boutique?
19 (01:02:50)	Ох, все втрачено. Мої заповітні мрії, нова ікона моди, світова мережа бутиків, найкращі панталони. Фініта.	All is lost! My strong silks, my robust ribbons, my manly laces, the Soul of Frol – gone!
20 (01:00:25)	Ця відьма прийшла нас всіх убити, забрати...нашу їжу і панталони!	She’s come to kill our loved ones and destroy our food crops!
21 (00:46:49)	“Не страшні нам перепони, якщо дупа в панталонах.” Слоган бутіка Фрола.	Silks, ribbons and laces don’t have to be disgraces. That’s the Soul of Frol.

In all these examples, alongside other unjustified instances of divergence from the source text, pantaloons have either been replaced with different clothing items, as seen in examples 18 and 19, or omitted altogether, as in examples 20 and 21.

However, what the translation manages to retain are the rhyme (example 22) and metaphorical elements (example 23) of Frol’s speech: Table 17

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
22 (00:46:30)	Що ж, шпигунський світе, знай: Фрол в усьому є най-най!	Then, if you need a spy, why, Frol is your guy!
23 (01:16:51)	Я зараз тебе на стрічки розчикрижу!	I will slice you into robust little ribbons!

Examples 13-21 mainly illustrate domestication, as stylized phrases, foreign-language elements, and cultural references are neutralized. French-influenced exclamations in examples 13-17 are simplified into plain English, which reduces sociolect nuance, while the recurring “pantaloon” motif (examples 18-21), central to the character’s identity and humor, is replaced with generic fashion terms, weakening cohesion and comic effect. In contrast, examples 22 and 23 show successful foreignization, preserving rhyme, rhythm, and metaphorical intensity to retain the character’s exaggerated style.

Although the speech of Hush and Frol can be considered the most distinctive in the film, other characters also possess traits that are integral to their personalities, which are outlined both intonationally and lexically.

3.3. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Kylina's Speech

The speech of the villainess, Kylina, demonstrates lexical variation depending on the context, which allows the audience to perceive her as insincere, hypocritical, and immoral. Kylina's speech is rich in epithets, pejoratives, slang, profanity, and other lexical elements, forming a multifaceted portrait of the character. These linguistic features reveal her rhetorical skills, level of education, disdain for ordinary people, and vanity. It is particularly important to convey such lexical markers of personality effectively to the target audience, as they are integral to understanding her character and motivations.

In her conversations with the villagers, she adopts a polite and empathetic tone, expressing her desire for the prosperity and wealth of her homeland. When analyzing her speech in relation to the real world, it becomes evident that she employs manipulative strategies commonly used by politicians, such as feigning an understanding of the population's needs, advocating for restoration and prosperity, promising material well-being (24), fostering cooperation against a common "enemy" (25), and subtly shifting responsibility (26). Table 18

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
24 (00:08:55)	Та зараз я повернулася, щоб село, де я виросла, процвітало. Я пропоную усім роботу. У вас буде стільки монет, що вам більше не доведеться працювати.	But now I am back to make our village prosperous again. I'm offering you all a job. You'll have so much money that you'll never have to work again.
25 (01:01:16)	Браття співвітчизники, я помилялась. Лісове чортівиння, погань і нечисть – це не вигадка.	My fellow villagers, I was wrong. The evil spirits of the forest are very real.
26 (01:03:16)	Нещасні мої, стражденні, зневажені й принижені земляки, ми недооцінили потенціал клятої погані, і наслідки болісні й трагічні.	My poor, dear, terrified fellow villagers, we underestimated the demon's power and the results were tragic.

In the English version, the "kind" Kylina retains the Ukrainian essence of her speech, albeit with certain transformations achieved through the use of semantic-functional equivalents. For instance, "браття співвітчизники, земляки" is rendered as 'my fellow villagers,' and "лісове чортівиння, погань, нечисть" becomes 'the evil spirits of the forest, demons' (26), among others. Some nuances of "kind" Kylina's speech are adapted or adjusted in the English version due to the lack of direct equivalents and the cultural specificity of the source material.

In contrast, when alone (or in the company of her sycophants), Kylina reveals her true nature. The “evil” Kylina, on the other hand, employs more vivid and expressive language, often drawing on vulgar vocabulary and colloquial terms, not always retained in English: Table 19

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
27 (00:12:36)	Терпіти не можу цю хибару. Збіговисько малодушної шушвалі. Мій план по швах тріщить. Тому що ці пітекантропи бояться лісу немов вогню.	Ugh, it's just a revolting hovel. A bunch of pathetic cowards! All my plans are at risk just because this primitive mob is terrified by the forest.

This translation captures the general meaning of the original text but loses some of its stylistic nuances and expressive intensity. The phrase “Терпіти не можу цю хибару” (“I cannot stand this hovel”) is rendered as “Ugh, it’s just a revolting hovel,” which reflects the general disdain but lacks the directness and emotional force of the original. Similarly, “збіговисько малодушної шушвалі” is translated as “a bunch of pathetic cowards.” While this communicates the general idea, the translation dilutes the vulgarity and sharpness found in the original “шушваль” (“scum”) and “збіговисько” (“mob”).

Additionally, the translation tends to omit idioms and similes that contribute to the text’s expressive quality. In this instance, the phraseological unit “по швах тріщить” (“fall apart at the seams”) and the metaphorical imagery of fire as a prototype of fear are lost. To better preserve the original’s tone, vivid imagery, and colorful language, an alternative rendering could be suggested: “I can’t stand this miserable hovel! A mob of spineless scum! My plan is falling apart at the seams because these pithecanthropes are terrified of the forest as if it were fire.”

Examples 24-27 demonstrate a prevailing use of domestication, with varying degrees of adaptation that reduce the rhetorical intensity and cultural specificity of the source text. Example 25 reflects partial domestication, where folkloric terms such as “чортовиння” and “нечисть” are translated as evil spirits, conveying the general meaning, but losing the dense cultural and mythological associations of the original.

3.4. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Lukas’s Speech

Lukas represents the younger generation, characterized by boundless energy, enthusiasm, and a zest for life. His speech closely reflects real-life communication. For instance, he skillfully and

naturally adapts his responses to the specific situations in which he finds himself. For example,

Table 20

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
28 (00:22:05)	Ну і де цей листок шукати, трясця його трясі?	Where in the haunted heck is this tree?

In the Ukrainian cultural context, expressions such as “бий його трясця” (literally, “may fever beat him”), “трясця йому в печінки” (literally, “may he have fever in his liver”), and “хай йому трясця” (literally, “may he have fever”) are commonly used to convey negative attitudes toward a situation or as ill wishes. The term “трясця” itself carries connotations of illness or affliction. To avoid employing “трясця” as a direct curse, Lukas uses the phrase “трясця його трясі” (“may fever shake it”), which serves as an exclamation of anger or frustration but with less intensity than the aforementioned expressions.

In the English adaptation, the phrase is rendered as “the haunted heck,” a non-standard expression created specifically for the context of the scene. The word “haunted” can denote something “inhabited by ghosts,” or “terrifying,” while “heck” is a euphemism for “hell,” often used to express annoyance or surprise. Together, the combination suggests a description of an unpleasant, confusing situation, aligning with the tone of the original Ukrainian phrase while adapting it creatively for an English-speaking audience. However, a traditional and rural flavor, which would align with the context of Mavka, is lost.

Lukash also employs idiomatic expressions and colloquial words, which undergo interpretative recreation in the English version: Table 21

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
29 (00:06:57)	Село просто стоїть на вухах! Про нас дуже скоро й цілий світ заговорить.	And the fans go wild! We are so ready to conquer the world.

The translation, “And the fans go wild! We are so ready to conquer the world,” is dynamic and engaging, but it deviates from the original meaning of the Ukrainian sentence. The original phrase (literally, “The village is on its ears. The whole world is going to talk about us soon”) reflects a sense of excitement, surprise, and commotion, without any direct reference to “fans” or the notion of “conquering the world.”^[1] A more accurate and faithful rendering would be: “The village is buzzing! Soon, the whole world will be talking about us.” This version could have preserved the original tone and imagery while maintaining clarity for an English-speaking audience.

Answering to Mavka's introduction "I am Mavka, the soul of the forest" (00:25:52), Lukas, in the English version, might be perceived as an insecure person, which he is not: Table 22

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
30 (00:25:57)	Ну а я Лукаш. І я душа...компанії.	Well, I'm Lucas. The soul of... myself?

In Ukrainian, "душа компанії" (literally, "the soul of the company") is an idiomatic expression meaning someone who is lively, engaging, and central to a group's social dynamic. The phrase conveys Lukas's self-confidence and charm within social contexts. The translation "the soul of... myself?", especially with the question mark, introduces an introspective and self-referential twist that changes the meaning as well as the character's personality entirely. It shifts from referring to Lukas's well-established role in social settings to suggesting individualistic uncertainty, which is not present in the original expression. A smoother, more fitting version could be: "Well, I'm Lucas. The soul of... the party."

It is worth noting that creative word formation (such as neologisms, wordplay, and inventive expressions) is actively present in Lukas's speech, which may also serve as a lexical marker of his character as a creative individual. Therefore, it requires adaptation, though it is not always preserved, even if the linguistic means are available to do so. For instance, the boy's speech demonstrates word formation through the blending of the words "борщ" ("borscht") and "пояс" ("belt"), resulting in "борщопояс" ("borscht-belt"). This refers to a belt that could be obtained in various martial arts practices, where "борщ" symbolizes its red color. In the English version, the translator employed a calque translation, preserving the symbolism embedded in the original. However, the resulting phrase in English strips the expression of its Ukrainian authenticity, which is crucial for capturing the spirit of the film: Table 23

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
31 (00:24:27)	Я попереджаю: я маю борщопояс з бойового гопака.	I... I'm a... borscht belt in combat polka.

While the original Ukrainian line combines a playful warning with a culturally specific reference (the term "борщопояс" is unique to the Ukrainian context, blending food and martial arts culture to suggest a distinct identity and skill level), the translation appears more nonsensical than humorous, failing to preserve the deeper connection to Ukrainian identity and martial arts traditions. The translation introduces "combat polka." "Гопак" [hopak] is a famous traditional Ukrainian dance, but in the context of "бойовий гопак" ("combat hopak"), it refers to a specific Cossack martial art

based on the movements of the dance. The term “combat polka” seems to conflate dance styles by replacing the culturally specific hopak with polka, a distinct Eastern European dance unrelated to martial arts. This substitution significantly alters the intended meaning. While “polka” may be more widely recognized, it does not guarantee that children are familiar with this folk dance. However, this translation ensures that they do not learn anything new—which contradicts the educational function of children’s literature—as numerous videos of combat hopak are available online, and information about hopak can be found in reputable sources such as the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Phrases in examples 28-31 clearly reflect the use of domestication. The folkloric curse (28) is rendered as a euphemistic phrase, while the example 29 replaces an emotionally charged idiom with a sports-related metaphor, aligning the register with contemporary global speech but detaching it from the rural Ukrainian context. The idiomatic expression “душа компанії” (example 30) becomes hesitant and self-deprecating. The last example here, 31, demonstrates domestication through the substitution of culturally embedded terms with generic or mismatched references, thereby diluting the national and folkloric coloring of the original.

3.5. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Mavka’s Speech

Mavka’s speech, in contrast, is less conversational and expressive. As a child of nature and the forest who has never interacted with the human world, her speech does not employ the familiar “human” phrases or words typical for daily use, as seen with Lukas (which also creates a striking contrast between their characters). Instead, her language is rooted in associations from her own world (for instance, she refers to Lukas as “the guardian of music”). Mavka speaks in a melodic and poetic manner. In the English version, we observe a partial transformation of her sentences into semantically appropriate equivalents of the Ukrainian version: Table 24

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
32 (00:26:10)	Не підходь! Я про людську підступність чула не раз. Ти порушив лісовий закон і я тебе виганяю!	No. I have been warned that humans are skilful liars. You have broken the law of the forest and I expel you!

Mavka’s speech is more faithful to the original in comparison to other characters, the simplified, less emotionally intensive equivalents are not as numerous as in the case of other heroes: Table 25

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
33 (00:33:05)	Як музика. Це щось магічне. Ти, певно, Хранитель музики свого світу.	Like music. It’s so lovely. You must be the guardian of music in your world.

34 (00:44:34)	Часу обмаль. Рушай. І не вертайся, інакше ти страшною смертю загинеш. Рушай!	There's no time. Go... and never return. Death is the only thing for a human to seek here. Go!
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In example 33, for instance, “магічна музика” (“magical music”) is rendered as “lovely music,” though the word “magical” would better convey the sense of wonder and enchantment implied by the original “щось магічне,” lending it a slightly more mystical quality. Similarly, the epithet “страшною смертю” (“dreadful, horrible death”) is reduced simply to “death” in example 34, which significantly diminishes the ominous and impactful tone of the original. Nevertheless, *Mavka*’s speech generally flows well in translation and retains much of its expressivity.

3.6. Translation and Adaptation Strategies: Secondary Characters’ Speech

The secondary characters in the film, despite having relatively few lines, exhibit distinct individual traits. For instance, *Kylina*’s enforcers, Eric and Derick, frequently use slang, which highlights specific aspects of their personalities. The use of coarse or street slang by characters often conveys an impression of aggression and danger: Table 26

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
35 (00:18:39)	Я не заради стейка. Заради веселухи.	This isn't hunting. This is fun.

The translation diverges slightly from the original phrasing, which emphasizes the purpose behind the action. The original phrase directly translates to “I’m not here for the steak. I’m here for the fun,” conveying a sense of personal motive by contrasting practical goals (“steak”) with leisure (“fun”). The translation, however, shifts the focus from the speaker’s reason to a broader statement about the nature of the activity (“This isn’t hunting”). Additionally, the Ukrainian version employs a casual, cheeky tone, whereas the translation adopts a slightly more formal and declarative style. This shift could have been avoided with a phrasing such as “I’m not here for the steak. I’m here for the thrill,” which would retain the original motive and imagery (“steak”) while being more dynamic and idiomatic (“for the thrill”).

Unfortunately, the unique aspect of the characters’ slang-heavy speech is lost in the English version. Of all the (albeit limited but linguistically diverse) slang elements present in the original script, only the idiomatic expression “black and blue” remains, used in reference to bruises: Table 27

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
36 (00:19:20)	Будеш тепер Лукаш В-Кашу-Рило-Розхряпченко. Мій брат каже тобі: «Шуруй в той ліс сам один».	We'll make you Clumsy Black-and-Blue-cus. My brother thinks you should go on by yourself.

This line serves as a threatening response to Lucas, who interfered with the killing of a bison and attempted to excuse himself by claiming it was accidental, saying, “My childhood nickname was Clumsy Lucas” (“Мене знаєте як звали в дитсадку? Лукаш Незграбченко”). Words such as “шуруй” (“scram”), “рило” (“mug”), and “розхряпати” (a wordplay element in a character’s surname) were rephrased into more neutral constructions. While these translations retained the semantic meaning of the dialogue, they altered the original’s stylistic tone. Consequently, the intentions and mood of the characters must be inferred through the voice actors’ intonation.

However, the richness of English slang could have allowed for preserving the original’s derogatory and mocking tone. For example, the translation could have been phrased as: “We’ll make you Shmukas Pulpy-Chopped-Up! My brother tells you: Get your butt out there to that forest on your own.” In this version, “Pulpy-Chopped-Up” serves as a surname for Shmukas, reflecting themes of violence and disfigurement. Similarly, the phrase “Get your butt out there to that forest on your own” conveys a sense of forcefulness and better aligns with the exaggerated tone of the original scene, compared to the more neutral “you should go on by yourself” (example 36).

Although, a strong translation choice is evident in the case of the colloquial term “ружбайка,” which is rendered as “boomstick.”

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
37 (00:27:47)	Деріку, потримай мою ружбайку.	Derek, hold my boomstick.

Uncle Leo (the protagonist Lukas’ uncle) also possesses a distinctive way of speaking, characterized by the ample use of colloquial words and idiomatic expressions:

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
38 (00:47:22)	Лукашу, слухай, якщо ти швендяв по вечорницях всьєну ніч і тобі кортить вернутися – так і скажи мені.	Lucas, look, if you’ve been at the village fair all night long and plan on going back, you can just tell me.

This translation serves as another example of maintaining the overall meaning of the original sentence while losing some of its nuances and tone. Much of the highly expressive vocabulary is neutralized. First, “швендяв” implies aimless wandering, with a connotation of idleness and non-productivity. The translation, “you’ve been at the village fair,” shifts this meaning to suggest that Lucas was merely at the fair, without capturing the sense of leisurely enjoyment or aimless lazing.

Similarly, “кортить” suggests an overwhelming desire to do something, often conveyed with an impatient tone. The phrase, “plan on going back,” does not carry the same sense of yearning or impatience. Additionally, the translation, “you can just tell me,” loses a degree of the informal directness and impatience present in the original. An alternative translation could be: “If you’ve been living it up all night at the village fair and hankering to head back, just say so.” This version seems to better preserve the informal and playful tone of the original while maintaining expressiveness in English.

Similarly, the stylistic simplification of Uncle Leo’s speech can be observed in table 30:Table 30

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
39 (00:48:26)	Ха! Тіло не болить! Я наче огірочок, хоч зараз на гульки! Це якась магія.	Hah! And no pain. I haven’t stood this straight in 20 years. It’s a miracle.

The beginning is fairly well translated, with the exclamation preserved. However, the simile “Я наче огірочок” (literally, “I am like a cucumber,” meaning fit and energetic) is unjustifiably lost, along with the expressive colloquial word “гульки” (which refers to having fun with a romantic partner, often all night long). This significant divergence shifts the focus from physical vitality and youthful energy to posture and age. The original phrase conveys a playful, light-hearted tone, whereas the translation implies something more serious. Furthermore, the translation of “магія” as “miracle” slightly alters the tone. The original phrase suggests a sense of wonder or surprise, as though something magical has occurred, whereas “miracle” is a more dramatic term, sounding more grandiose and serious, which shifts the tone toward something less playful. An alternative translation might read: “Hah! No pain at all. I’m as good as new, ready to party! It’s like magic!”

There are also cases with notable cultural shifts, replacing and mixing culturally significant concepts: Table 31

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
40 (00:48:44)	Сили б’ють через край! Я підкую хоч чорта. Гей! Гайда гнути підкови.	I’ve got so much energy. Now I’ll be Hercu-Leo. Hey, let’s take up curling.

Ukrainian culture often integrates humor, even in expressions of strength or struggle. The phrase “Я підкую хоч чорта” literally translates as ‘I could shoe the devil himself,’ reflecting a common trope in Ukrainian folklore. This trope celebrates physical strength, determination, and a touch of humor. The devil symbolizes a challenge of supernatural proportions, highlighting the speaker’s unyielding resolve. Translating this phrase using concepts such as “Hercu-Leo” and “curling”

attempts a Westernized reinterpretation. However, replacing the culturally rooted imagery of blacksmithing and ‘shoeing the devil’ with such substitutes diminishes the original context and cultural depth. This approach not only hinders the target audience, particularly children, from learning about and appreciating the traditions and folklore embedded in the Ukrainian original but also reduces the text’s educational value in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Moreover, introducing references like “Hercu-Leo” and “curling” does not necessarily enhance clarity in the target text. Instead, it risks confusing young readers, particularly those unfamiliar with these concepts. Such a substitution fails to capture the dynamic and culturally significant elements of the original phrase, ultimately weakening the intended message. An alternative version could be “I’m bursting with energy! Could shoe the devil himself. Hey, let’s forge some shoes!”

Another interesting and challenging example in terms of translation is the phrase that confirms Mavka was translated from Ukrainian into English, despite its prior release in English with English lip-syncing. Table 32

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
41 (00:11:31)	Це магічний перди-кака-чи-як-там.	It’s a miracle of perdi-caca-something-um.

The original phrase, “перди-кака-чи-як-там,” is a playful, nonsensical expression that mimics the sound of an unknown spell. The humor in the original derives from the exaggerated absurdity, which is intended to be amusing for children. Children often find humor in topics that are considered taboo, such as farting and pooping, which are common sources of humor in children’s literature. These topics are universally relatable and are frequently associated with silliness and surprise. The translation attempts to preserve this humor by transliterating the spell, but it falls short by introducing the overly complicated and artificial term “perdi-caca,” which loses the simplicity and spontaneity of the original expression. To maintain the original humor, an analogous spell could have been coined, such as “Fartus-poopus-or-whatever!”

This very phrase can also serve as linguistic evidence that the translation direction was from Ukrainian into English (official sources of Mavka: The Forest Song do not provide this information), as the random combination of letters into “perdi-caca” in English, whose roots would align with the Ukrainian ones перд- and как-, fitting this particular comedic context, is nearly impossible.^[2]

The idiolect of other characters, whose speech is more measured, literary, and fairy-tale-like, is generally better preserved in translation. For instance, Lesh's speech: Table 33

Example	Ukrainian version	English version
42 (00:16:46)	Сили мої тануть і я слабшаю, Мавко. Тягар обов'язків Хранителя уже заважкий для моїх пліч.	I have so little strength left. The guardian's burden has grown too heavy for me.

These phrases illustrate how different translation strategies were employed: 35 and 38-40 exemplify domestication, as idiomatic expressions, folklore-based metaphors, and colloquial nuances were replaced with more neutral target-language equivalents; 36 represents partial domestication, retaining the general mocking tone but softening the original's vivid aggression. By contrast, examples 37, 41, and 42 demonstrate foreignization, preserving the source text's creative wording, absurd humor, or poetic solemnity to maintain cultural and stylistic authenticity in the translation.

The examples provided above represent only a portion of the speech patterns showcased in the animated film, which contribute to shaping a distinct perception of Ukrainian culture. The dialogue not only aids in revealing the characters' personalities and highlighting their individuality but also often serves as a key guide to the narrative's plotlines and a carrier of cultural elements that must be faithfully rendered in translation.

4. Conclusion

Translation of culturally rich texts requires balancing linguistic creativity, character integrity, and cultural specificity. The analysis of *Mavka: The Forest Song* reveals that achieving this balance is often challenging. Out of 42 examples analyzed, 30 employ the strategy of domestication, 8 use foreignization, and 4 reflect partial domestication. The predominance of domestication suggests that the translation favors fluency and accessibility for a broad English-speaking audience, particularly children, over the preservation of Ukrainian cultural and linguistic uniqueness—something that could have been achieved with a more creative approach, given that the corresponding linguistic units were available. Domestication in the analyzed translation is primarily reflected in the simplification or omission of idioms, neologisms, and culturally marked expressions, often resulting in a loss of character specificity and cultural depth. Elements rooted in

folklore or myth are frequently replaced with neutral or unrelated Western equivalents. At the same time, selected instances of foreignization—such as idiomatic wordplay, metaphorical threats, and solemn expressions—demonstrate that preserving Ukrainian imagery in English is both feasible and effective when applied deliberately. These findings suggest that while domestication may serve short-term goals of clarity and relatability, especially for younger viewers, greater integration of foreignization—particularly in linguistically and culturally charged scenes—could enhance the educational and intercultural value of the film. Future translations of culturally rich animated works should consider a more balanced approach to preserving identity while maintaining accessibility.

Text segments that rely less on creative linguistic features are translated more effectively, with fewer expressive losses, revealing the challenge of capturing linguistic creativity. The less expressive adaptation of *Mavka* stemmed from deliberate choices, not linguistic constraints. Greater fidelity to cultural and narrative elements, leveraging English's capacity for creativity, could have yielded a more dynamic and authentic adaptation, fostering a deeper appreciation of Ukrainian culture in English-speaking audiences.

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[1] The phrase “conquer the world”, while metaphorically appropriate in context, may carry problematic connotations in the current historical moment, particularly as Russia’s systematically deceptive propaganda persistently seeks to distort Ukraine’s image as a peaceful nation. This concern is further heightened by the fact that the film, which represents the quintessence of Ukrainian culture and nature, was released during Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine.

[2] ChatGPT calculated this probability based on probability theory and determined that the likelihood is 0.066%.



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