

SOURCE, VARIANT, EDITING, AND TRANSLATION ISSUES IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KARAKALPAK, TURKMEN, AND ENGLISH FOLK TALES

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ABSTRACT

One of the main problems in comparative folkloristics is determining the scholarly status of the texts involved in the analysis. A fairy tale in one collection may have been recorded directly from a performer; another text may have been copied from an earlier publication; a third may have been translated; and a fourth may have been abridged for children. If these differences are not taken into account, comparative analysis may be based on sources that are not methodologically equivalent.

The fact that a fairy tale has been published does not necessarily mean that it was directly recorded from oral tradition. A book version may be the combined result of the work of a performer, collector, translator, editor, and publisher. Therefore, before conducting comparative analysis, it is necessary to reconstruct the source history of each text.

The purpose of this article is to establish criteria for evaluating textual sources using Karakalpak, Turkmen, and English fairy tales as examples and to identify the differences between variants, reprints, editing, and translation.

A published fairy-tale text can be classified according to its source into the following types: (a) a text recorded directly from a performer; (b) a text prepared for publication from a manuscript collection; (c) a text reprinted from an earlier book; (d) a translated text; (e) a literary adaptation; and (f) a composite text reconstructed on the basis of several sources.

Each of these types does not have the same scholarly value for comparative analysis. A text recorded directly from a performer and accompanied by complete source information is considered a primary source for studying oral tradition. A literary adaptation, on the other hand, is valuable for studying the relationship between book culture and folk narratives but should not be used as a direct example of living oral performance.

Complete source information should include the title of the fairy tale; the first and last name of the performer; the performer's age and place of residence; the date on which the text was recorded; the name of the collector; the manuscript or audio identification number; the first publication; subsequent reprints; and information about editing or translation.

Without such information, it is difficult to reliably evaluate a text as a regional, performance-based, or historical variant.

In oral tradition, it is natural for the same plot to be narrated differently by different performers. An episode may be shortened in one fairy tale, the name of a character may change, a new supporting character may appear, or the ending may be constructed differently. Such differences demonstrate the ways in which the fairy-tale tradition survives and develops.

However, identical texts copied from one book to another should not increase the number of variants. For example, if a text published in the 1977 collection *Karakalpak Folk Tales* was included in the 2014 multi-volume edition while preserving its main events, episodes, and wording, it should be identified as a reprint rather than as a new variant [1], [2].

To identify an independent variant, at least one of the following differences should be present: the text was recorded from a different performer; the geographical area or date of recording is different;

the composition of plot episodes differs; the character system has changed; the resolution of the conflict is different; the opening or closing formulas have local characteristics; or the characters' speech and descriptive manner demonstrate independent features.

An oral fairy tale undergoes a certain degree of editing when it is prepared for publication. Punctuation, paragraph division, and correction of obvious errors are necessary editorial procedures. However, completely standardizing dialectal features, shortening repetitions, replacing images, or adding new episodes can affect the poetic structure of the text.

Repetitions in a fairy tale may sometimes appear unnecessary to an editor. In reality, however, trials, journeys, questions, or battles repeated three times ensure the gradual intensification of events. Reducing repetitions not only shortens the fairy tale but also changes its compositional balance.

Similarly, replacing local words with common literary-language equivalents weakens the national environment. Terms related to the steppe, rivers, villages, and livestock farming in Karakalpak fairy tales; vocabulary associated with deserts, wells, caravans, and crafts in Turkmen texts; and words related to local housing, food, and rural life in English fairy tales constitute integral elements of national poetics.

The scholar J. Jacobs notes in the preface to *More English Fairy Tales* that he softened certain dialectal forms in some texts [3, pp. vii–ix].

Comparative analysis shows that editorial intervention produces two opposing effects: it makes a text accessible to a wider readership while simultaneously reducing some linguistic and stylistic features of oral performance. Both aspects should therefore be considered in comparative research.

The purpose of a fairy-tale collection prepared for children differs from that of an academic edition. In children's books, comprehensibility of the plot, entertainment value, and educational content are given priority. In a scholarly edition, the source of the text, performer, language, variants, and explanatory notes are of primary importance.

The collections *Türkmen Ertekileri* by the Turkmen scholar A. Aliyev were intended for children and were illustrated [4, pp. 270–273]. For this reason, they are important sources for the history of Turkmen children's reading culture. However, because information about the performers is not provided, it is difficult to associate the texts in these books with a particular fairy-tale tradition or school.

The collections of J. Jacobs were also intended for children's reading, but notes concerning the sources of the texts and plot parallels were provided at the end of the book [5, pp. 233–253]. Therefore, his publications represent an intermediate form combining characteristics of children's literature and scholarly collections.

In an academic edition, priority should be given not to “beautifying” the text but to preserving its source characteristics. If dialectal words are difficult for readers to understand, they should not be replaced; instead, they should be explained.

The use of translated sources is widespread in comparative folkloristics. Translation enables researchers who do not know another language to become familiar with the plot and general content. However, a translation cannot preserve all the poetic features of the original text.

The following features may change in the translation of a fairy tale: traditional opening and closing formulas; rhymed prose; onomatopoeic words; local terminology; forms of address used by characters; wordplay and humour; the rhythm of repetitions; and national moral evaluations.

O. Erberg's 1953 collection *Turkmen Folk Tales* was prepared through translation and adaptation [6]. In these texts, the translator not only changed the language but also intervened in the presentation of events to make them appropriate for the age of the intended readership. Such a publication is important for the dissemination of Turkmen narratives in Russian.

The collection *The Sold Dream*, prepared by I. V. Stebleva, contains scholarly notes and an introductory article [7, pp. 5–20]. Therefore, its source value is relatively high.

In comparative research, translations can be used for the following purposes: determining the plot content; identifying the character system; comparing the sequence of episodes; and establishing the international tale type.

However, when analyzing national artistic language, style, and traditional expressions, the original text should be used as the primary basis.

One of the main problems in the textual study of English fairy tales is the interaction between oral performance and popular book traditions. Plots such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* circulated for a long time both as oral narratives and in inexpensive books.

In his collection *English Fairy Tales*, J. Jacobs used oral records, periodicals, local collections, and earlier books [5, pp. 233–253]. While some texts were taken from a single source, others combined features of different variants.

Therefore, in comparative analysis, Jacobs's texts should not be regarded as “the single original version of an English folk tale.” Rather, they should be evaluated as national texts shaped for scholarly and literary purposes at the end of the nineteenth century.

International fairy-tale classification is an important tool for identifying similar plots. H.-J. Uther's *The Types of International Folktales* assigns special numbers to fairy tales according to their plot types [8].

This system makes it possible to identify the following similarities in Karakalpak, Turkmen, and English folklore: three brothers or three trials; the victory of the youngest child; rescuing a lost girl; a supernatural helper; a magical object; a struggle with a giant or monstrous creature; the violation of a prohibition; and the hero's return and recognition.

However, the same plot number does not mean that the texts are artistically identical. International classification demonstrates the general basis of events, while national poetics is manifested through the hero's name, setting, language, customs, types of labour, religious beliefs, and moral evaluations. In general, the principal requirement in the comparative study of Karakalpak, Turkmen, and English fairy tales is not to increase the number of texts but to correctly determine their source status. A text recorded directly from a performer, a reprint, a translation, and a literary adaptation do not perform the same scholarly function.

In Karakalpak fairy tales, it is necessary to establish the relationship between the first publication and the academic multi-volume edition; in Turkmen materials, the relationship between the original text and its Russian adaptation; and in English fairy tales, the interaction between oral sources and book traditions.

An independent variant should be identified on the basis of differences in the performance source or in the plot-poetic structure.

International fairy-tale classification makes it possible to identify common plots. However, to determine national poetics, the original language, performance environment, local images, setting, traditional expressions, and publication history of the text should be studied together.

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