

## IN MEMORIAM: SUSANA GREISS 1920-2006

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susana Greiss was born in Soviet Georgia of Russian parents. When she was 4, her family immigrated to Brazil, the first country that would take them, where her father was to work as a civil engineer. When she was 7, she developed tuberculosis and was sent to France with her mother for treatment. She did not return to Brazil until age 11. At 15, she moved to Uruguay, where she learned Spanish and, at the same time, English, by enrolling in the British School. After the war, she worked as a bi- and tri-lingual secretary, doing some translation as well. Following the birth of two children from a short-lived marriage, she reluctantly immigrated to New York to better her (and their) prospects. She soon found a job as a "Translator Correspondent," working in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English. During the next few decades, she gradually gained expertise in various fields and acquired increasingly prestigious translation jobs while raising her children and earning a BA and MA. In her spare time, she was active in the New York Circle of Translators and ATA, and with Susana, active means ACTIVE. She was instrumental in organizing what later became ATA's Portuguese and Spanish Divisions. In the late 80's, she became concerned about the welfare of the growing number of Russian speakers leaving the Soviet Union for the U.S. with aspirations of becoming translators. She was most particularly interested in the complaints she was hearing about their work and client relations. Susana-like, she decided to do something to help them, and cajoled and bullied a somewhat suspicious and reluctant group into meeting in a room at NYU. From this group, originally a Special Interest Group of the New York Circle of Translators, grew our ATA Slavic Languages Division. In 2002, Susana was the recipient of the Alexander Gode medal, ATA's most prestigious award.

### SUSANA GREISS, BIG SISTER

*George Fletcher*

Obituary: "a usu. short account of the significant aspects and accomplishments of a person's life published upon the person's death"

*Некролог: "статья, посвященная умершему, с характеристикой его жизни и деятельности"*

*Nécrologie: "article sur une personnalité décédée"*

*Obituário: "diz-se de ou nota de falecimento ger. publicada em jornal, acompanhada de perfil biográfico do morto"*

*Necrología: "noticia comentada acerca de una persona notable, fallecida hace poco tiempo"*

*Necrologia: "Cenno biografico di persona morta recentemente"*

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Joseph Bayerl  
SLD Administrator

Events of the past quarter in the life of the SLD were clearly overshadowed by the passing of the Division's founder and friend Susana Greiss. As a person of vision and energy, Susana has left the ATA with organizations and individuals prepared to perform substantive service to support the professions of translator and interpreter. Over these past months, I was struck by the number of inquiries that come to the SLD from individuals seeking information and advice on how to become translators and am grateful to have individuals and resources within the Division to which I may direct questions with pride and confidence. I have also been encouraged by the committed efforts on the part of SLD members to add to the number of Slavic languages certified by the ATA. These are just two practical examples of the Division at work. It is this network of committed colleagues within the SLD that daily transforms Susana's vision into a tangible resource that provides real service and growth opportunities to current and potential members, wherever they may be in their professional careers.

On behalf of the Division, I would like to thank all those who have agreed to organize and lead sessions for the SLD at the annual conference in New Orleans. In particular, I wish to recognize Nora Favorov for her efforts and initiative in inviting Michele Berdy to be our Division's Susana Greiss lecturer. Many of us know her through her regular column on Russian language and culture for the *Moscow Times*. She is an American who has lived more than 25 years in Russia, where she has worked as translator, interpreter, author, educator, TV producer, lexicographer, and communications consultant, mainly in the areas of health and human rights. In addition to being our 2006 Greiss lecturer, she is conducting a pre-conference session, a translation workshop for R-E and E-R translators. I simply cannot commend Michele strongly enough to the Division and to other attendees at the Annual Conference. Aside from being a prolific and gifted translator, interpreter, and writer, she also possesses an abundance of wit and insight concerning the challenges and rewards of performing cross-cultural mediation in dynamic times—one more fine reason to come early to New Orleans.

As always, I welcome any and all questions and suggestions regarding the Division's roles and activities, and offer my thanks to all who make the answers and solutions possible.

Joseph can be reached at [b@yerl.net](mailto:b@yerl.net).

**OFFERS OF WORK FROM EMPLOYERS  
AND CLIENTS ARE PUBLISHED FREE**

# IN MEMORIAM: SUSANA GREISS

Continued from page 1

Dear Susana,

We miss you already. It took more than seven professional translators, the UN, and eleven dictionaries to find the concepts, skirt the false cognates, and translate just one word into your languages. There is no single replacement for your wisdom and knowledge. And if, as is our wont, we translators you left behind get into a great tizzy and eternal arguments over the above translations, or should they bring us all together, either way we'll miss you even more. Below is some information you forbade me to disclose while we shared this good Earth.

From the original introduction for the *Beginning Translator's Survival Kit* (all proceeds dedicated to the New York Circle of Translators):

(Note from editor: Susana deleted the following paragraph every time a draft of the book was sent to her.)

"When Susana first asked if I'd be interested in joining her in writing a booklet about the translation profession, I hesitated. My first thought was, 'What in the world could I add to anything Susana Greiss has to say about the translation profession?' In her generous, patient way, she suggested I think about the idea, and we'd talk in a day or two, which we did. My response to her in turn, based on the fact that I couldn't believe she'd actually asked me to consider doing this project with her, was to ask permission to take a look at what she was writing to see if there was indeed anything I could offer. In terms of her experience and the wisdom she imparts, of course, what's to add?" (For those of you who own the book, you may now add this to the Introduction.)

In a heart-to-heart conversation long ago, you told me about your life. What has always stuck in my memory is what happened to you after your family had left Russia and you had contracted tuberculosis in Brazil. You were taken to France for treatment and interred in a medical facility on the coast. Every day they would wheel you out to the beach and leave you for the day. An indelible picture formed in my mind of a little bundled-up girl, all by herself, sitting and watching the ocean day after day. Every time I've thought of you, been with you, or talked to you, I've seen that little girl, who had entered my heart and stayed there.

You were the best translator I've ever known or worked with. You were never once late with a job, and since, as anyone in our profession is aware, "no news is good news" after we deliver a job, my admiration and gratitude were boundless when your translations elicited calls from the clients praising the quality. Once, during a reorganization of our company, you completed a large translation. When it was time to pay, you called and said, "Please do not pay me now. I know you have extra expenses, so pay me when it's convenient for you." Thank you for investing in the profession, in our company, and in me; as long as we were in business, you were too. After 9/11, you called and offered your ser-

vices for free for the rest of the year. You also volunteered as an interpreter for the families of the victims of that tragedy. At the time, you told me that service to humanity was what was important. Then, last year you called and said you wanted to give something back to the profession that had sustained and nurtured you and allowed you to raise a family. You wrote a book for beginning translators and donated the proceeds to the New York Circle of Translators, a gift that will continue indefinitely, and perhaps increase as the profession grows.

You planted and nurtured the seeds of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian SIGs in the ATA, you mentored us, you taught us how to study for and pass the certification exams, and thereafter you even graded those exams that launched our careers. We were all so proud when the ATA recognized your lifelong dedication and efforts on its behalf. You won the Gode Medal for all of us; you won it from the trenches; you won it as a translator.

The last memory that will fit in this allotted space was the time I tracked you down in the reception area of the ATA Annual Convention in St Louis. We found a chair for you and I sat on the step below. As we began to talk, a person saw you from across the room and rushed over to say hello and thank you for something you had done for her. Then another came, and another, until there was a stream of people greeting and thanking you for one thing and another; I felt as if I were in a queen's court. Have no doubt about it, our profession did not lack for royalty. On that occasion, you showed me my own egocentric world. Up until then, I had only been aware of your generosity and kindness toward me. But of course! I wasn't alone, there were countless others! So I can only impart a tiny piece of what your life has meant to so many. Perhaps others will write their stories and share them with the rest of us as well.

Goodbye for now, Oh, Susana! We are comforted to know we have a guardian angel over our shoulders whenever we need her, encouraging us to get it right and offering us a hand up. *До свидания; nous nous reverrons un jour; até que nos veremos de novo; hasta que nos volvamos a ver; arrivédéerci*; until we meet again, from all of us to you, dearest Susana.

Your honorary Little Brother,  
George

Susana's concise autobiography is available at  
[www accurapid.com/journal/12prof.htm](http://www accurapid.com/journal/12prof.htm).

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## My Years with Susana

Ann G. Macfarlane

It was my good fortune to join the ATA just as the Russian Special Interest Group was about to become a full division. At my first conference, we adopted bylaws and attained division status. That entire conference experience was so intoxicating for an aspiring Russian/English translator that after returning home, I volunteered to serve as Assistant Administrator.

Susana was wary at first. She accepted my offer, but apparently enough eager volunteers had failed to deliver in the past that she wanted to make sure I was truly interested, willing, and able to deliver the services I offered. We had several months of polite but strained conversations. Then one day, when I picked up the phone, the Administrator was relaxed, gregarious, friendly – evidently I had passed the test and my bona fides were established.

That was the beginning of four great years with the division. As our newsletter, the *SlavFile*, became better and better and our conference sessions more lively, it was a joy to work with Susana and develop our program of activities at both ends of the country. In New York and Seattle we had local get-togethers that were interesting, informative, and fun. At the conferences, the dinners were always lively. The best moments probably came when Susana stood on a chair to toast and be toasted. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should admit that I wasn't averse to a little chair action myself.)

Susana combined the qualities of determination, loyalty, and warmth. When she put her head down in pursuit of a particular goal, it was wisest not to get in the way. That determination enabled her to get the special interest group, and later the division, established when lesser mortals might not have persevered. Loyalty was also primary for her. When I announced my candidacy for ATA president-elect, she had some concerns that I might not be faithful to the divisions in the new role. That didn't stop her from presenting me with a beautiful cut crystal vase in San Francisco, a token of our friendship that I still cherish. I did my best to demonstrate fidelity both to the divisions, my "first love" in the ATA, and to the association as a whole. As the years went by, we laughed together over old disagreements, and she took delight in seeing the rise of other members of the division to ATA positions. Her warmth and her human concern for the well-being of others were always paramount. It was a privilege to serve her during her tenure as Administrator, and to remain her friend when our roles diverged. We will all miss her.

Susana's own description of the SLD's founding can be read at <http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/PDF/SlavFile-Winter-03.pdf>.

## Susanecdotes

Lydia Stone

In the last few years I have attended too many funerals and memorials for people I love and admire; I have written, listened to, and read too many eulogies. One thing that this sad experience has taught me is that no one, no matter how eloquent and how close to the person who has died, can come close to presenting a comprehensive and coherent picture of another individual's essence and life. People are simply too complex for that, and besides, no one person has ever experienced every side of another person: it takes a village to do a eulogy full justice. The best picture gets built up in these affairs as a composite of all sorts of anecdotes about the person that others feel moved to share. What I wanted to do here was collect anecdotes about Susana from a variety of her fellow translators and friends, but that did not work out, so I will simply share my own motley collection of "Susanecdotes" and draw some personal generalizations.

Although I did not live in the same city as Susana (like George) or collaborate with her on translation projects or running a division (as George and Ann did), I have known Susana since almost the very beginning of my active association with ATA and even before the birth of SLD, and I always looked forward to seeing her at each Conference and having her tell me about her latest gentleman friend and beam at me when I told her she never seemed to grow any older (it was true).

My feeling is that Susana was born to be the benevolent matriarch of a large family. The exigencies of life and immigration meant that she did not have a large family, though I know she was extremely close to her daughter's family and doted on her granddaughters. However, this was not a sad ending; she simply transferred all her benevolent motherly and grandmotherly tendencies to her "children" in the translator community. Although she considered the SLD members her particular children, there were also the Portuguese, and particularly the Brazilians. We know how proud she was of having a place of honor in both of these ATA worlds, not to mention those of the Spanish and French translators.

One interaction with Susana that I remember very well took place at one of our conferences in California. I arrived at the Saturday SLD meeting with a terrible headache and faced the prospect of having to go home that night on the red-eye. I was a mess, but I needed to present the *SlavFile* report at the meeting, and besides, I had already checked out of my room and could not go lie down. I was hoping to see Ann Macfarlane at the SLD meeting since she, as Board president-elect, had a suite until Sunday and had offered to let me use it to lie down until I had to leave for the airport.

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I slipped in to the meeting and sat down next to Susana, asking her if Ann was there yet. When she said she wasn't coming, I guess she read the distress on my face and asked me what was wrong. I told her about my sad, but of course trivial, plight. Susana immediately figured out what ATA meeting Ann must be attending, looked up the room number in her program, stuck her head out into the hallway and commandeered a PLD member to run up to that room, find Ann, and bring me back her room key. This small incident exemplifies a number of the characteristics that were so strong and so uniquely combined in Susana: her concern for others, her savvy in figuring out what to do to help and how to do it, and the number and variety of people who were devoted to her and willing to rush off at a moment's notice to do her bidding, confident that if she asked it was for a good cause.

The single quality I have come to value most in people is benevolence, but benevolence alone is not enough. It has to be combined with activism and an ability to get things done in the real world. Susana combined her maternal benevolence not only with a remarkably energetic nature, but with a real hard-headed understanding of people and of how to get things done in this world. Like any mother, she was determined to help her children whether they acknowledged that her help was needed or not. And she was perfectly prepared to manipulate them into doing what she thought good for them no matter what they thought to the contrary. Here is another anecdote narrated by Susana herself in a piece she wrote for *SlavFile* on the history of our Division.

I approached [the ATA president] and asked if he would be willing to get me a room, assign us a date and time, and announce at the opening session that there would be an impromptu meeting of Russian translators. He did so, and we met that same day at 5:00 PM. I wondered if anyone would show up. Well, we had twelve people (plus me). I explained my concerns and said that I felt I was the best qualified person to run a Russian translators group: ....Most of all, I understood the problems Russians were facing because my parents and their generation went through the same thing. I also told them that I knew exactly what they were thinking, and I could prove it. At this point, everybody was slouching in their seats, wondering how soon they could leave the room. "You are thinking: this lady is going to take money from us, she will publicize the new group and when clients call her, she will take the work for herself and give us nothing. Well," I continued, "I am going to prove to you that this is not going to happen, because I DO NOT TRANSLATE FROM OR INTO RUSSIAN. I do not have or intend to take accreditation in these two combinations, because I already have accredi-

tation in five language combinations, in languages I know much better than Russian." All of a sudden, I could see my audience perk up. Aha! I had hit the nail on the head!

In another part of the same article, Susana tells how she ensured her target population would attend the Russian translators meetings she started holding in NY. She would buy food at a deli, prepare a sumptuous spread herself, and then charge attendees \$2.50 a head, with unlimited seconds. What thrifty Russian immigrant was going to resist that?

While she wanted nothing concrete for herself in return for what she did for people, Susana did need to feel that she was appreciated, and at times it was clear that she felt hurt when she believed she was undervalued or her input was being ignored. Knowing this, I was quite surprised when, at a midyear conference being held in the Washington area, I saw her standing calmly and allowing herself to be berated loudly and publicly by a gentleman twice her size. Among the mildest of the names he called her was *Баба Яга*. I found out later what she had done to set him off. She had had the temerity to produce a directory of the Slavic SIG's members and send a copy to every translation company in the country, in his eyes undermining the credentials and income of those who were not members. I never quite understood why she took this abuse so calmly, yet would get her feelings hurt at slights of much smaller magnitude. Perhaps this was because she did not consider the abusive gentleman one of her "children."

One of the things about Susana that made her my own role model was her complete lack of what might be called institutional snobbism. She seemed to have no idea that the long-standing and illustrious members of organizations, while being pleasant and welcoming to all (at least in theory), tend to spend their time at events talking to each other, and have little time left over for more than perfunctory contact with newcomers, unless said newcomers possess stupendous credentials. Well before the ATA mentoring program started, Susana, whose company was sought after by virtually everybody who was anybody in the ATA, seemed to be drawn particularly to those most in need of her assistance, i.e., those starting out in the profession. She never gave (or I am sure felt) the slightest sign that she would rather be talking to someone "more important." For an example, see the first paragraph of Olga Collins' contribution to this issue. Mary David, ATA's Chapter and Division Relations Manager, writes that "I spent an hour or so with her one evening during my first ATA Conference—undoubtedly the most fun I had during that entire meeting."

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I follow in Susana's footsteps, in that the ATA has become an enormously important part of my life and the SLD is like another family to me. And she was instrumental in this coming about. We were all newcomers once! I joined the ATA in 1983 because I wanted accreditation and attended one or two meetings before the Russian SIG was formed. I found little that really excited my interest, and furthermore felt awkward and frequently in need of someone to talk to. After I attended my first Susana-run SIG meeting, everything changed, and I have never missed another conference. Indeed, the next year in San Diego I was even emboldened to talk back publicly to Susana. The day before, Christina Sever, my first and still one of my dearest SLD friends, and I had invited her to go on a city tour with us; she had declined. At the SIG meeting, Susana started her address by chiding those who were neglecting the sessions for the beaches and sights. Incensed, I called out, "Well, that is the last time we invite you to go sightseeing with us." It wasn't!

Several years after that, in Nashville, Christina, who had been editing our newsletter, became ill and had to step down. At our meeting Susana called for a replacement. Distressed by the illness of our friend and undoubtedly concerned for the future of the Division, Susana seemed on the verge of tears when no one volunteered. After a minute or two, I was unable to stand the look on her face, so I raised my hand. That was in 1995; I have been responsible for putting out the *SlavFile* ever since. Those who have worked with me on it know how important it is to me. Thank you, Susana.

Susana loved her Spanish and Portuguese friends and liked to brag how she had partied half the night with the Brazilians, but we of the SLD always knew that we were her special, favored

children. Perhaps she loved us best the way some mothers have a special soft spot for the child that gave them the most trouble in the beginning. Perhaps it had something to do with her earliest memories of hearing Russian spoken. Susana was accredited between English and Portuguese, French, Spanish, and Italian and always said her Russian was not very strong, but, to my knowledge, Russian was the only language that made her cry. One evening she called me and reminded me of a time at a Russian sing-along that she had dissolved in tears on hearing a song her mother used to sing to her. She said she had just heard it again on the radio – *Kalinka*; she asked me to promise to make sure it was sung in her memory at the next ATA conference after she died. It has only occurred to me in retrospect to be flattered at being chosen for this request. Those of you who attend our next conference can expect to hear *Kalinka*, I promise.

If anyone has additional Susaneccdots to share please send them to Lydia and [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net) and we will publish them in a subsequent issue.

## A Song Written For Susana on the Occasion of her Retirement as SLD Administrator

(tune self-explanatory)

Oh, Susana, we owe a debt to thee!  
The founding top banana of the famous SLD.

For seven years she nurtured us and lectured us as well.  
At time she was the only thing that saved us from ourselves.

Oh, Susana, the soul of SLD!  
We would have gone bananas if it had not been for thee!

Though stepping down, she'll be around with wisdom and advice.  
For never could we do without, our own Susana Greiss.

Oh, Susana, this song's in praise of thee!  
From all the Slavs and others of the mighty SLD!

## Two Very Good Reasons for R<>E Translators and Interpreters to Come to New Orleans

1. "Torture the Translator," a hands-on pre-conference workshop (October 31) being offered by Michele Berdy and designed for translators working in both directions between Russian and English.
2. "Translating Styles, Genres, and Realities," the 2006 Annual Susana Greiss lecture, to be delivered by Michele Berdy.

Many SLD members are familiar with Michele "Mickey" Berdy's witty and insightful column on Russian language and culture in the *Moscow Times*. A US native who has lived in Moscow for most of the past 30 years, Berdy has worn many hats during that time. Cultural and linguistic translation has been at the center of nearly everything she has done. She has taught courses and workshops for R<>E translators and interpreters in Moscow. Now she's coming to us. Don't miss it!

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hello everyone,

I am a Russian to English translator and a new member of the ATA. I have just received my first copy of the *SlavFile*. Thanks for an entertaining and informative newsletter.

I would first like to make a brief comment on the review of Dr. Levintova's presentation entitled, "Words and Values: Factors Affecting Translation of Patient-Centered Medical Documents." Regarding socially, linguistically, and culturally "sensitive" translations; simply because the doctors in Russia prefer not to tell, and the patients not to hear, the bad news, it doesn't mean that it should be "lost in translation." In my opinion, it is the job of the doctor to use sensitive terminology, not of the translator to "soften it up." For example, *zapushchenniy rak* = neglected, not diagnosed in time cancer; vs. advanced cancer = *daleko zashedshii*; there is no such thing as "*prodvinutaya forma*;" the latter is but a helpless attempt to translate "advanced" verbatim. But the natural Russian way of expressing the idea of an "advanced disease" is *daleko zashedshii*.

My second comment refers to the translation of CPR in the word compilation entitled, "End of Life Issues." CPR = Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation means literally in Russian: *serdechno-legochnaya reanimatsiya*, which includes not only artificial respiration (*iskusstvennoye dykhanie*) but also chest compressions (*zakrytiy massazh serdtsa*), which is an absolutely essential component of CPR.

Please excuse the transliteration.

Best wishes,  
Sherry Neiman

\*\*\*\*\*

Dr. Levintova (now Dr. Levintova Allison) replies:

1. In general, I of course would never advocate the practice of distorting the meaning by the translators. In fact, as I mentioned in my presentation, as an editor of translations, I had a chance to correct those translations where Russian translators actually did omit references to death as a potential side effect. My mission in this presentation was to alert translators, as well as translation managers, that this happens and that there are cultural explanations for it.

Unfortunately, liberal education in America makes people who hear "it has cultural explanations" jump to the conclusion, "therefore it should be allowed." This is not the conclusion that I want people to draw. My intention is to say: Look, this is what sometimes happens – please be alerted, because this may be a persistent error since it has cultural roots. I think this is especially pertinent now, when many translation companies, in an attempt to lower their costs, are subcontracting to Russian resident translators who have had little or no exposure to Western standards. This would be my message to the Russian translators in Russia, if I ever get to present there.

2. Now about some translation choices that Sherry discusses.

I agree with her that "*daleko zashedshii rak*" would be a good translation for "advanced cancer." Thank you, Sherry, for this suggestion!

I cannot dismiss the adjective "*prodvnutyi*" as "but a helpless attempt to translate 'advanced' verbatim." I used to feel that way only 15 years ago, being a purist, but now we must face the fact that this translation loan is one of the frequent words that Russians are using today.

I agree with Sherry again that Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation means literally in Russian "*serdechno-legochnaya reanimatsiya*." That's how one would translate it in documents meant for health professionals. However, in view of NIH guidelines on the language of patient-centered medical documents ("Keep within a range of about a 4th to 6th grade reading level"), in certain contexts it would be better to translate it by a popular common phrase, even though it is less precise.

It was great to have a chance to think about these matters again. Made me consider going to a Medical Ethics conference in Moscow in the summer!

Elena Levintova Allison  
(831) 643-0181

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Dear Editor:

This is a heretical proposal. After attending several Slavic dinners, driving on a bus, with the driver inevitably getting lost, and then eating the same old *zakuski*, *shashlik*, etc., I am proposing that we embrace the ethnicity of the host city instead. We are going to be in the heart of Cajun cuisine in New Orleans in November. Why should we hunt down the one obscure and distant Slavic restaurant, when we could walk to a nearby Cajun or other ethnic restaurant? Next year, in San Francisco, our hotel is just blocks away from Chinatown, with the second largest Chinese population in the United States. Why should we take a bus to eat Russian food? Think about it, and I would like to hear feedback from the rest of the Slavic division. Otherwise, I will eat my cucumbers and potatoes in silence.

Best regards,  
Heretic to remain anonymous



## This Is a Fact: Mistakes of Russians in English

Presentation by Lynn Visson, Reviewed by Jennifer Guernsey

For me, the most important benefit of attending an ATA conference is the opportunity to interact with people who speak my language. By that, I mean not Russian, English, German, or any other particular native tongue, but rather the language of translation and interpretation. Where else can one bring up topics like the perils of literal translation or the finer points of grammar and be greeted with lively discussion rather than blank stares? In the case of Dr. Lynn Visson's presentation at last November's ATA conference in Seattle, the topic was one which all translators and interpreters can appreciate, as it affects their work at every turn: the impact of culture on language, here colorfully illustrated through examples of the ways in which Russians can be misunderstood in English. (The presentation nicely complemented the recent series of *SlavFile* articles by Elena Bogdanovich-Werner entitled, "Common Mistakes of Non-Native Speakers of Russian"; see the Winter, Spring, and Fall 2005 issues.)

While cross-cultural communication is a topic impossible to cover adequately in 45 years, let alone 45 minutes, Dr. Visson managed to touch on a broad range of issues at the intersection of language and culture that contribute to Russians being misconstrued when speaking English to Americans. In doing so, she drew on her extensive interpreting experience (more than 25 years at the United Nations) as well as her own personal observations as the spouse of a native Russian speaker.

Dr. Visson found that her husband and his friends often came across to Americans as abrasive and abrupt, and this prompted her to delve into the culture-related errors that led to this mistaken impression. Of course, no discussion of the cultural differences between Russian and English would be complete without mention of what Dr. Visson termed "the baggage of Marxist jargon," but this topic was quickly set aside in favor of other, less obvious cultural differences.

Some of the misunderstandings Dr. Visson described derived primarily from a lack of full equivalence between certain Russian and English words. For example, "отдых" and "отдыхать," which are often translated as "rest," more often mean "vacation," and "Мы хорошо отдохнули" can usually best be translated simply as "We had a good time." Similarly, "праздник" does not always equate to "holiday," nor does "конечно" always mean "of course." There are significant differences in the depth of meaning of "друг"—a true, close friend—versus the more generic, not necessarily close "friend," that derive from differences in the role of friends in Russian and American society. And if you tell your acquaintances to "Get undressed!" when they enter your home, you will certainly not have communicated the meaning of "Раздевайся!" These differences in meaning can also extend to gestures; for example, the American fin-

ger-across-the-throat gesture meaning "I'm fed up!" means "I'll slit your throat!" to a Russian.

But Dr. Visson also pointed out a number of broader cultural differences that can contribute to a speaker's being misconstrued. A key difference is that American thinking is generally positive, emphasizing individualism and idealism, while Russian thinking is generally negative and far more fatalistic. Whereas an American mother would say to her departing child, "Have a good time!" the Russian mother would say, "Be careful, don't fall!" This fatalism likewise dictates that while "to pity" (жалеть) has a negative connotation in American English, it is positive in Russian. The Russian language correspondingly uses a lot of negative constructions, so that many expressions that sound neutral in Russian come across as negative in English. In a related vein, English emphasizes active constructions, while Russian uses more passive constructions. Russian fatalism and negativity may also be closely related to the fact that while Americans toot their own horns, Russians feel compelled to be modest, even in job interviews.

Dr. Visson also pointed out that Russian tends to use more categorical and dogmatic constructions: "это правильный подход," "это не правда." In English, such constructions sound abrupt and arrogant, and the equivalent English phrases are more relativistic: "I agree with you," "I don't agree." Along these same lines, consider the very roundabout way in which an American supervisor would order his subordinate to do something: "Would you please look at this when you have a moment?" The perceived abruptness of native Russian speakers is exacerbated by the substantial differences between Russian and American intonation. These differences affect people on both sides of the language barrier. When a native English speaker applies English intonation to Russian words, wholesale misunderstandings can result—for instance, saying on a bus, "Вы выходите теперь?" versus "Вы выходите теперь." In contrast, when native Russian speakers apply their normal declarative intonation to English, the essential meaning is usually not lost, but the tone and mood sound dogmatic and abrupt to the American ear.

Dr. Visson also extensively covered differing norms of etiquette as a source of misunderstandings. Telephone etiquette certainly differs between the two cultures. For instance, at the end of a phone call, Americans will summarize the conversation before concluding; Russians will simply say, "Okay, goodbye." Again, this can result in native Russian speakers being perceived as abrupt. (And in my own experience, Russian business telephone etiquette is also quite different; never in the US have I seen a business person pick up a telephone to stop its ringing, lay the phone

*Continued on page 9*

## MISTAKES OF RUSSIANS IN ENGLISH

*Continued from page 8*

on the desk without saying a word to the caller, conclude his current business transaction, and then commence the conversation with the caller.) There are also differences in the structure and content of ordinary conversations. In giving directions, Americans usually provide far more detail than Russians. And the style of dinner conversation differs: Russians are fond of long stories and what might be termed “sequential monologues”; American dinner conversation is more of a back-and-forth, like a ping-pong game.

Uses of what might be called “politeness words”—please, thank you, sorry—also differ between the cultures. The actual word “please” is not used as often in Russian as in English; instead, it is replaced with the suffix *-ка* (e.g., *скажи-ка*) or another turn of phrase, such as “*будьте любезны.*” And the appropriate Russian version of “thank you” to a cashier may be a simple grunt. (Indeed, I myself often got strange looks from store clerks when I thanked them after our transactions...my own cultural error in Russian.) Dr. Visson also noted that in Russian, there are many more ways to say you’re sorry.

Another etiquette difference mentioned was the appropriate response to a compliment. Americans are expected to simply thank the compliment-giver, but Russians are obliged to downplay or refute the compliment. Such refutation, while appropriately modest in Russian, could be perceived as an insult to the taste of an American compliment-giver. Again, the cultural differences extend from spoken language to body language; Dr. Visson mentioned the “dead fish handshake”—the offering of a limp and lifeless (and optimally also cold and clammy) hand—as a breach of etiquette for Americans, but not for Russians.

While Dr. Visson’s presentation certainly cannot instantaneously transform a native Russian speaker into a near-native English speaker, her description of the many areas in which cultural differences play a role served to heighten her audience’s awareness of this component of language acquisition. However, what stood out most at Dr. Visson’s presentation was the vigorous nodding of listeners’ heads in agreement and their smiles of recognition, reflecting that finding of common ground that is such a rewarding aspect of the ATA conference.

Jen Guernsey, a *SlavFile* copyeditor and author of our intermittent “Nuts and Bolts” column, can be reached at [jenguernsey@att.net](mailto:jenguernsey@att.net).

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## Between Norms and Style: Translating Punctuation (Russian-English)

*Presented by Brian James Baer and Tatyana Bystrova-McIntyre*

*Reviewed by Vadim Khazin*

Punctuation seems to be one of the easiest of problems that challenge Russian->English translators. However, anyone who applies the rules of one language to the other may encounter real problems, because there are too many, sometimes irritating, discrepancies between them. I, for one, confess that when translating into English, I quite often ignore rules I consider illogical (like not leaving spaces before and after an em-dash, placing a phrase-ending comma or period before, not after, the closing quotation mark). Indeed, you may notice examples of such rebellion on my part in this review. Thus, it was with great interest and anticipation that I attended this presentation where the authors attempted to compare the two systems of punctuation.

As for comparing punctuation rules (norms), the presenters have limited themselves to just one punctuation mark so far – the colon – showing and illustrating the common features and differences in its usage in the two languages. As we all have probably noticed, the colon in Russian – both in the norms and in practice – has a much wider range of usage than in English. The advice the presenters gave to novice translators was, rather than copying Russian-language usage of the colon, to use other punctuation marks or rephrase the sentence. And for each specific type of colon usage, Brian and Tatyana provided respective “translation strategies”. These are presented in the tables on the next page.

The main part of the presentation, however, was dedicated to an empirical statistical study of the frequency of usage of various punctuation marks in English and in Russian. The marks surveyed were (non-numerical) commas, semicolons, colons, em-dashes, en-dashes, and end punctuation marks. Concerning the choice of these punctuation marks, I have one reservation, about en-dashes. In English, as stated, e.g., in Wikipedia, all dashes (five types of them, plus hyphens) are indeed considered punctuation marks, while in Russian *тире* (corresponding, more or less, to the em-dash), is considered a punctuation mark, but *дефис* (corresponding, more or less, to the en-dash or hyphen) does not. It is considered an orthographical mark, and, as opposed to “normal” punctuation marks, obeys the rules of spelling and cannot be a matter of stylistic preference. I think that in English the situation is similar, and the en-dash (for example, in Tatyana’s double last name) should not be considered a punctuation mark, either.

For their statistical analysis, Brian and Tatyana first selected 20 samples, 1000 words in each (20,000 words total), in both languages. One set of samples was taken

from editorials in two newspapers, *The New York Times* and *Известия*. The second set of samples was taken from literary texts written by John Updike and Tatyana Tolstaya – both respected as stylists but not “avant-garde,” so their style is not too much beyond the norms in their respective languages.

The comparative results were presented as average frequencies per 1000 words in each type of text. One of the findings was that, contrary to expectations, the number of sentences (per 1000 words) in the Russian editorials was 1.6 times higher than in the English ones. Also, most of the punctuation marks tested (especially commas, colons, and em-dashes, as well as end marks) occur significantly more frequently in Russian than in English, both in newspapers and in literature; the one exception is the semicolon, which occurs more frequently in English periodicals and almost equally in Russian and English literary texts. When comparing the two types of texts within the same language (i.e., Updike versus *NYT* and Tolstaya versus *Известия*), it appeared that all the punctuation marks are used in literature much more frequently than in the newspapers.

Brian and Tatyana proceeded to demonstrate what most of us know: punctuation may quite often present a challenge for Russian-English translators. They provided some examples of improper punctuation used by a renowned translator who mostly reproduced the original Russian punctuation, thereby creating situations that offend the eye of a native English speaker (e.g., comma plus em-dash [,–], which is quite common in Russian). Undoubtedly, a similar problem exists in English-Russian translations, although the authors did not research this.

In conclusion, I must say that this presentation was indeed very interesting, although the results, as the authors stated, are as yet preliminary. Hopefully, they will continue this research, covering more types of texts and more punctuation marks, as they have promised. Or perhaps they will focus on the discrepancies between the punctuation norms in the two languages and suggest some changes (in the English norms at least)? I wish them every success in this research.

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# ATA Conference in Seattle

## TRANSLATING PUNCTUATION *Continued from page 10*

Use	Russian Examples	English Examples	R>E Translation Strategies
Use 1. To introduce a list	<i>В Амуре, его притоках, озерах и других реках района обитает разная рыба: карась, сазан, щука, сом, [...]</i>	<i>Long Islanders can [...] choose to devote half or all of a monthly electric bill to buying power from marketers that sell energy from renewable sources: wind farms, hydroelectric plants and biomass operations, [...]</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preserve the colon</li> <li>2. Use “such as” or similar constructions (omitting the colon). <i>The Amur and its tributaries, as well as the lakes and other rivers of the region, provide a home for different kinds of fish, such as crucian carp, wild carp, pike, catfish, [...]</i></li> </ol>
Use 1a: Colon separating verb and object	<i>В случае эвакуации необходимо взять с собой: воду в размере 1,5–2 л. на человека в день, [...] алюминиевую фольгу, [...]</i>	In English, a colon should NOT separate a verb from its object or a preposition from its object.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Eliminate the colon</u> <i>In case of evacuation, be sure to take 1.5–2 liters of water per person per day, [...] aluminum foil, [...]</i></li> <li>2. <u>Introduce a generalizing word</u> <i>In case of evacuation, be sure to take the following items: 1.5–2 liters of water per person per day, [...] aluminum foil, [...]</i></li> </ol>
Use 2. After an independent clause, when the following clause interprets or amplifies the preceding clause	<i>Тут все как на футбольном поле: понятно, что надо делать, главное – исполнить.</i>	<i>Electricity use, in fact, is climbing rapidly on Long Island: it is up more than 20 percent since 1997 [...]</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preserve the colon</li> <li>2. Introduce a conjunction or a relative pronoun <i>Here everything is like on a soccer field where you know what to do [...]</i></li> </ol>
Use 3. When the following clause explains the reason for a state or an action	<i>Вакула и Оксана были счастливы: они были вместе.</i>  <i>Вышло только у Дзержинского: была у него сила.</i>	Not typical in English.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Introduce the following clause with <i>because/since/etc</i></u> <i>Vakula and Oksana were happy because they were together.</i></li> <li>2. <u>Introduce a different punctuation mark (e.g., a semicolon)</u> <i>Only Dzerzhinsky succeeded; he was strong enough.</i></li> </ol>
Use 4. When the first clause has such perception verbs as <i>видеть, смотреть, слышать</i> , etc. (no conjunction)	<i>Снова бегу и вижу: линия порвана.</i>	Not typical in English	Introduce the following clause with <i>that</i> <i>I ran up again and saw that the line had been damaged.</i>
Use 5: To introduce direct speech	<i>«[...] вы читали мой текст?» А они говорили: «Нет, не читали, потому что знаем – это греховный рассказ, это театр абсурда».</i>	Not as common in English: a colon may be used when the quotation SUPPORTS or CONTRIBUTES to the preceding clause. <i>The squalor of the streets reminded him of a line from Oscar Wilde: “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Preserve the colon</u> (esp. when the quotation SUPPORTS or CONTRIBUTES to the preceding clause)</li> <li>2. <u>Replace with a comma</u> <i>“[...] have you read my work?” They answered, “No, we haven’t, because we know it’s a sinful story [...].”</i></li> </ol>

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# ATA Conference in Seattle

## “Of Camels, Virgins and Perrier Cognacs” by Konstantin Lakshin

Reviewed by Robert Taylor

This somewhat cryptic title captured the attention and imagination of the many Slavic language translators who filled the room to listen to Konstantin Lakshin’s engaging talk. We have all been caught with our proverbial “pants down” after improperly translating or interpreting a concept. These embarrassing, yet unforgettable, experiences are the backbone of learning, and while painful, often have a greater impact than standard translation instruction techniques. Konstantin focused on several of these amusing situations, which should serve as a reminder to all of us that we are indeed human and capable of error, and should pay very special attention to our thorough understanding of source text.

Konstantin introduced one example of a potential misunderstanding using Matthew’s biblical expression, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Was “camel” indeed the proper translation of the original Aramaic “gamla,” or would one of the other translations for this term (e.g., thick rope, beam) have been more appropriate? If so, should this expression, which has been used for centuries, be translated as “It is easier for a thick rope to pass through...”? You get the idea.

He cites a more modern example in the Russian translation of the *Bourne Identity*. The translator read “Perrier” in this thriller as a type of champagne (i.e., Perrier Jouet) instead of the other famous “Perrier,” which is bottled water, and the actual intent of the author. Was this merely the result of a small Russian publishing house using an inexperienced translator or a product, as Lakshin suggested, of

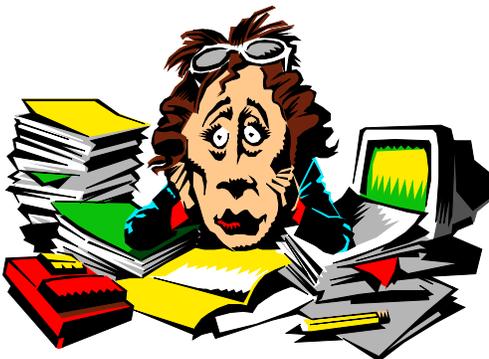
“пост-советское пространство?” Or was the translator up against a tight deadline and unable to take the time to delve into this usage before sending off his job?

Konstantin then drew on a practical example to emphasize this point further. He used the example of “valves” and the distinction made between “клапан” and “кран” in a technical translation. After determining the technical distinction between these two terms and their most appropriate English equivalents, the translator was faced with a situation in which the glossary distributed by the client to the translator had incorrectly transposed the English translations for these Russian terms. This mix-up occurred in the shuffle of a large, complex project and was never actually noticed. We often see an error like this and assume that someone else will take care of it. The result might be that the improper valve could be used, resulting in a waste of time and money. Konstantin suggests that the only practical way to avoid this is to talk to the customer, or ultimately, the author of the work, and ask him/her what was truly intended.

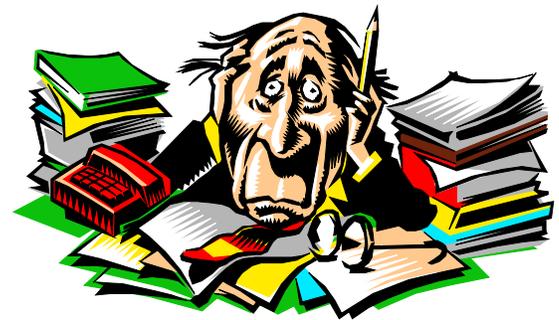
As translators we err if, in our haste to complete a job, we quickly translate an ambiguous term or passage without doing the “hard work” to determine the true meaning of the troublesome text involved, which can often be ascertained by a simple phone call or e-mail to the customer or author concerned. Konstantin’s humorous and insightful examples were a clear indication of the value of doing this.

Robert Taylor is a translator of Russian and Italian into English who specializes in business and financial translations and lives in San Diego. He may be reached at [rftbob@yahoo.com](mailto:rftbob@yahoo.com).

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# LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Olga Collin, *SlavFile's* New Editor for Ukrainian

Some time ago, I had the honor of reviewing a book by Susana Greiss and George Fletcher entitled, "Beginning Translator's Survival Kit." Shortly after my review was printed, I received a warm welcoming email from the founder of the Slavic Languages Division and the coauthor of the above book, Susana Greiss. We had never met, but her encouraging words made me feel as if I had known her for a very long time already and that we were the best of friends and good colleagues. She introduced herself, made some remarks on the review, and commented on the fact that "it is getting harder and harder [to break into this business of ours], and this may discourage a lot of very talented people." Susana offered her help and advice, regretting that we wouldn't be able to meet at the ATA Conference in fall 2005, and suggested we get together in New Orleans. We will never meet...

There is another sentence from the email that remained in my memory. Susana wrote, "I am interested in all members of the Slavic Language Division." So am I, but currently I am particularly interested in my colleagues working with Ukrainian. And my first undertaking as the Ukrainian editor will be to learn from you about the state of the Ukrainian translation/interpretation market today, the tendencies of this market as it advances toward tomorrow, and last, but not least, to find out who all of you – professionals working with Ukrainian – are. Where do you live and work? Are you a freelancer, a full-time employee, or a translation business owner? What is your educational and ethnic background? How do you find your clients? Are you working with other languages in addition to Ukrainian? How successful are you? What are your areas of specialization? These and other questions will be included in a survey I am currently working on. Soon all SLD members will be receiving notice of this survey by email. If you work or want to work with Ukrainian, go to the website and follow directions; I promise it will not take you more than a few minutes. Those of you who are not working with Ukrainian, but know somebody who is, please forward our survey to them. This approach will help us reach those professionals

who are not members of SLD or even ATA. The results of the survey will be published as soon as we have received a sufficient number of replies.

Before I start learning about who all of you are, let me introduce myself. I am the *SlavFile's* new Ukrainian editor and a professional translator, medical interpreter, and cross-cultural consultant. Born in the Soviet Union, raised in the Ukrainian Republic, educated in the independent Ukraine and in Germany, and currently living in the United States, I am an example of a typical immigrant with a split identity and culture and two native languages: Ukrainian and Russian.

I graduated from the Johannes-Gutenberg University in Gernersheim, Germany and hold an MA in translation. My career as an interpreter and translator started in Germany, but about two years ago I moved to Chicago and had to start from the beginning, gaining new customers and learning a new market. That's where the "Survival Kit" proved to be of exceptional value. Membership in ATA, MATI, CHICATA, and other professional organizations also helped by providing ideal networking and learning opportunities. I earn my daily bread (sometimes even with butter) balancing my workload among the Ukrainian, Russian, German, and English languages and trying to bridge not only the gap between the languages but also the one between the cultures.

I would like to finish my short introduction with some great news that was forwarded to me just moments before this article was to be printed. **We are pleased to announce that, thanks to efforts spearheaded by Vadim Khazin, all the steps for ATA recognition of English-Ukrainian certification were completed, and the program was accepted by the ATA Board.**

Please feel free to contact me with any comments, thoughts, or topic suggestions, not to mention articles or article ideas relating to Ukrainian. I welcome all ideas or questions. You can reach me at [olgacollin@msn.com](mailto:olgacollin@msn.com) or 847-729-3964.

I am looking forward to meeting you all!

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## TRANSLATING PUNCTUATION *Continued from page 11*

Use 6. After a salutation in a formal letter	Not typical in original Russian. <i>Уважаемый господин Президент!</i>	<i>Dear Mr. Montague:</i>	---
Use 7: To separate hour from minute in a notation of time	Less frequent in Russian than English <i>10:45 «События. Время московское».</i> <i>10.45 «События. Время московское».</i>	<i>The train departs at 10:48 PM.</i>	---

# SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone

I am grateful to SLD member Tanya Gesse and her mother Vera Gesse for sending me so many amusing clippings and original contributions over the years. This time they have sent a selection of the real estate ads from a publication called *7 Дней*, evidently a local newspaper for Russian speakers living in the Chicago area. Now, I have always thought of real estate ads as a source of anxiety for those in the market for a place to live, and of yawns for those who aren't. In other words, such ads are not to be read for pleasure, much less laughs. Not so these: Here are a few samples:

- Прекрасный 3-бедрумный таунхаус. Pergo пол. Импортная кухня.
- Кирпичный ранчо дом на отличном участке земли.
- В популярном комплексе угловой таунхаус; 3 спальни; законченный бейсмент. В комплексе бассейн и теннисные корты.

Would the discerning buyer prefer *кафедральные потолки* or *9 футов потолки с выходом на дэк*? Either comes with a *низкий ассесмент*, and one even features *крытый паркинг*. In the words of the advertisement, *Все остальное вы уже видели. Теперь время для самого лучшего!*

Do you suppose that anyone ever has done or will do a comparative study of the health of translators who primarily use electronic dictionaries and those who are still using antique paper ones? On the one hand, it is probably good for your spine to get up every few minutes to take a book or two off your shelf; on the other, stooping to low shelves or reaching to high ones entails orthopedic risks, and some of those volumes are awfully heavy besides. It is also likely beneficial to shift your focus every once in a while from screen to shelf to book. However, at least on-screen writing is readable (and can be made more so by a minor adjustment), while some of those tomes one has collected over the years have print that is smudged or minuscule or both. Having switched in the last year or so from primary use of actual books to virtual ones, I wonder about this. My own experience seems to be that electronic dictionaries are easier on both the back and the eyes. Still, I would hate to get rid of all my dictionaries, especially since my office has the worst heating system in the house and I would not want to give up the insulating properties of all that porous Soviet paper that lines the walls.

Nora Favorov adds to our collection of U.S. media references to Russian literature with the following.

An ad for Bréguet (the world's oldest watchmaker) in the *New Yorker* (Oct. 10 2005) quotes an unidentifiable translation of *Evgeniy Onegin*. There is a picture of Palace Square and the words:

A dandy on the boulevards (...)  
strolling at leisure  
until his Bréguet, ever vigilant,  
reminds him it is midday.

Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 1829

Nora continues: Why didn't they pick any of the brilliant existing translations of this passage? The first one I happened to find on my shelf (Charles Johnston) is far better and would certainly have greater appeal to prospective Bréguet clients.

Eugene attends the boulevard,  
and there at large he goes patrolling  
until Bréguet's unsleeping chime  
advises him of dinner-time.

Nora also notes that Episode #56 of *The Sopranos* is titled "All Happy Families..."

The above-cited references are at least not disrespectful of Russian classics, but I fear that the following mention is more typical (even if clearly meant tongue in cheek). It appeared as an entry in a *Washington Post* "Style Invitational" contest seeking humorous recycling ideas.

Gather leather-bound editions of classic Russian novels: "War and Peace," "Crime and Punishment," "The Brothers Karamazov." Stack them and drill a thick hole straight through them to turn the stack into a lamp stand. Then your eyes won't be so strained when you're watching the reruns on TV Land. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

However, all is not lost. My erudite and accomplished friend, Elizabeth, a fellow member of the fabled Swarthmore Class of '64, has decided to devote some of her retirement to reading or rereading the classics. She started with *Anna Karenina*, and reports after finishing it, "I don't know why anyone would want to read anything else."

Perhaps a paragraph actually about translation would not be out of place here. I have come to the conclusion that the phrase *ведомственные интересы* is often best translated as *vested interests*, while the conflicts such interests give rise to can be described as *turf wars*. I came across the phrase *Равные условия конкуренции* recently and realized that what was being talked about was called in English nowadays *a level playing field*.

I have always tried to keep the *SlavFile* in general and this column in particular relatively free of what are euphemistically known as "adult" themes and language. However, some things are too good not to be shared. Let us pretend that the following item is included because of its purely

*Continued on page 15*

terminological interest. Did you know, for example, that politically correct terminology has spread to such an extent that even in Kazakhstan, a country not famous for the modernity of its ways, prostitutes are now being referred to as *секс работницы* or even *работницы сексбизнеса*. At least, this is the case in an article I was asked to translate recently. It seems that the UN-sponsored Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria gave Kazakhstan \$22 million, which the local powers decided to spend on an enormous shipment of Indian condoms (even at inflated prices it is hard to imagine how many such items one can purchase for \$22 million) for free distribution. Unfortunately, these products turned out to be defective in any number of ways, the most common of which was rupture. Some local organizations, with wisdom evidently born of frequent experiences with the dental hygiene of gift horses, decided to test these products before distribution. What could have been more natural or more up-to-date than to convene a user focus group? What ensued is history: *В К\_е попросили сексработниц оценить презервативы по пятибалльной системе. Двойки выставила фокус-группа!* Or to put this last sentence another way: the prostitutes gave the defective condoms a rating of two balls.

A piece I read in the *Washington Post* this morning reminds me of the only time I ever saw Oksana, the young Russian doctor who lived with us during the mid-nineties, lose her temper. After a great deal of struggle, Oksana “matched” for a residency in a Pittsburgh Hospital. All she had to do was have some forms filled out to satisfy the bureaucratic requirements of the Pennsylvania Medical Boards. This was not easy! Aside from trying to figure out whether time spent harvesting potatoes should be counted as part of the duration of the medical school semester this task was embedded in, the Board demanded, for example, that Oksana’s Russian medical school fill out and sign their forms and then Federal Express them to Pennsylvania in an official school envelope. Well, the school didn’t have any official envelopes and Oksana’s mother ultimately spent 4 hours on a train to Moscow to ensure that the signed transcript was sent from a reliable FedEx office. You get the idea. Believing that most people and even bureaucracies would be inclined to be reasonable, my husband and I urged Oksana to call the Board. She did and they weren’t, insisting on adhering to all the details of their requirements. Oksana spent the next half hour raging around the house and saying things like, “Americans expect everyone everywhere to live in a house with a dishwasher and computer, but some people don’t, some people live in yurts!” *Some people live in yurts* became one of our family phrases. Now, we hear that the government of Kyrgyzstan has rented a booth at the “Homeland and Global Security Summit” here in DC to advocate that the U.S. government purchase sheep’s wool yurts at \$10,000 apiece and use them as a temporary housing solution for the Gulf Coast. Maybe

Oksana will be proved wrong and Americans will learn that people live in yurts, albeit with built-in dishwashers.

I wrote the following as an email to Vadim Khazin after reading his review of Brian Baer’s and Tatyana Bystrova-McIntyre’s excellent conference presentation on punctuation, and he suggested I include it in this column.

Dear Vadim, I admire the courage it took to publicly confess to trying to subvert the English punctuation system. I am with you all the way. I hate punctuation, especially commas, which I consider simply a typographic equivalent of fly specks. Approximately 50 years ago on a day the public schools were closed, I went to private school with a friend of mine. Her English teacher was teaching the subject of periods inside quotes and parentheses and someone asked why the period was inside and the question mark outside? He answered that the period is considered too small to be out without its mother. For some reason I have remembered that all these years. Best grammar explanation I have ever heard! When my mother worked as a psychologist for the NY schools, she had to take whatever secretary they assigned her. Once a new and hostile secretary typed a letter for her. My mother took it back to her and said politely that she was afraid it would have to be done over. The secretary belligerently asked her why and my mother replied, “Sentences have to start with a capital letter.” The secretary answered, “That’s your opinion!” So much for the logic behind punctuation rules.

Once again I feel the urge to coin a new phrase. We have all heard about *gender politics*, but I have recently encountered what could be described as *gender poetics*. In the recent talk I gave with Vladimir Kovner on the Russian->English translation of poetry for children, I listed gender as one of the potential features of Russian that could complicate such translation. At that time, I had only experienced one instance of this when, because of casting considerations, I was compelled to switch the genders of fox and crow in a translation of a Krylov fable commissioned by a children’s theater. Now I have a more serious example. Charmed by a poem I discovered, full of word and sound play, *Колдунье не колдуется* by Марина Бородинская, I was unable to translate it to my satisfaction without changing the gender of its only human character, a wizard. Witch, the normal English feminine of wizard, did not work—too many overtones of warty chins and an appetite for small children. Sorceress, my other choice, simply had too many syllables for me to handle in alternating eight- and six-syllable iambic lines. And once I had come up with the third line of a wizard version, there was no going back. Here are the original and the translation.

Happy Spring, Everyone!

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# “WHO IS THE NEW LEADER OF CHINA?”

## Rendering Names in News Translation (English>Russian)

Olga Zamaraeva

Condi: *Hu is leading China.*

George: *Now whaddya' asking me for?*

Condi: *I'm telling you Hu is leading China.*

George: *Well, I'm asking you. Who is leading China?*

Condi: *That's the man's name.*

George: *That's who's name?*

Condi: *Yes.*

—From part of a much longer sequence by playwright James Sherman.

This reworking of Abbott and Costello's famous “Who's on First” routine has become popular on the Internet (the name of the new leader of China is Hu Jintao), but it serves to remind those of us who translate current events of an issue we confront

frequently. If you do not already know how to spell the name of the new leader of China in your target language, how do you find out? This may not be easy, but it is necessary.

A translator's failure to render foreign names and titles (of officials or organizations, for example) consistently and correctly can deprive news reports of credibility. Matters are further complicated when the source text is in English and includes names or titles that are not originally English, but have already been rendered into English from a language with a different alphabet. Such misrenderings (e.g., Юничиро Коизуми for Дзюньитиро Коидзуми, the prime minister of Japan – in English, Junichiro Koizumi) immediately convey to the reader that the article is a translation – and an

imperfect one. The same problem exists in translating official titles: you, as a translator, should know the standard Russian designation for the Defense Secretary of the UK and should not confuse this person with the Secretary of the Security Council. Many translators actually seem to have a problem with this and refer to such American and British officials as «секретари», while they should in most cases be called «министры»: Donald Rumsfeld is министр обороны and not секретарь Совета безопасности; however, the Secretary of State is indeed the государственный секретарь. Likewise, you should know that in Russian the President of China is not a President at all – he is Председатель Китая, even if you personally think this sounds a little weird. Ideally, you should know all this before you start working as a news translator. In reality, even if you have a PhD in journalism, you will find yourself coming across names or titles that you are not sure how to translate.

Those of us who translate from English into Russian know that there is no one approved transliteration system that can be applied at all times. This is the biggest problem for name transliteration. The general practical rule is that names are rendered based on how they are pronounced in the source language, i.e., *u* will be rendered as [a] in *Lush* or as [u] in *Bush*. That is why we render *Junichiro Koizumi* as we do: we are trying to imitate the Japanese pronunciation to the extent possible. Actually, for Japanese names there exists the *kiridzi* system. The corresponding system for Chinese is the *paladitsa* system. (Russian Wikipedia has articles on both these systems: search for Киридзи and Транскрипционная система Палладия.) But this does not help if you do not read the Asian languages and are trying to render a name given in English.

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### SLAVFILE LITE *Continued from page 15*

#### Колдунье не колдуется

*Марина Бородицкая*

Сидит колдунья, дуется  
На целый белый свет:  
Колдунье не колдуется,  
И вдохновенья нет.

Наколдовала к завтраку  
Из Африки банан,  
А появился - здрасьте вам!  
Из Арктики буран.

Наколдовала к ужину  
В стаканчике пломбир,  
Но убедилась с ужасом:  
В стаканчике - кефир!

Ну что за невезение,  
Ну что за наказание -  
И даже вместо пения  
Выходит рисование,

И даже вместо курицы  
Выходит пистолет...  
Сидит колдунья, дуется  
На целый белый свет.

А может быть, кто дуется -  
Тому и не колдуется?

#### The Whizzed Out Wizard

*Translated by Lydia Stone*

This wizard at the world is sore.  
He sits and pouts all day.  
The wiz he was he is no more;  
His wizardry has whizzed away.

Why just today he longed to eat  
Bananas—a whole bunch.  
He waved his wand and conjured up  
Bandanas for his lunch.

At dinner time he cast a spell  
To make a chocolate shake  
But in his glass was buttermilk.  
A horrible mistake!

This wizard mopes about his luck,  
The cursed misfortune that has struck!  
Each time he tries an incantation  
He conjures up humiliation.

He cast a spell to make rain pour  
Instead we had a drought.  
This wizard at the world is sore  
And all he does is pout.

A pouting wizard – what a pill!  
He says he's grieving for his skill  
But all this pouting, some might say,  
Is what whisked wizardry away.

Since English is not spelled phonetically, especially when it comes to names, no letter-to-letter transliteration system can be universally used. For example, should the name Watson begin with a [в] or [у]? Ватсон or Уотсон? Here is where tradition also plays a role. Supposedly, the rendition should reflect foreign pronunciation to a certain extent – and once a given rendition has been created and accepted, it should be used consistently. But this is theory; in reality, both Ватсон and Уотсон are found in translations of Conan Doyle. This is just one example.

It is wonderful if the name you have come across is a very famous one. But what if you are unfamiliar with the name? What if the name has already been transliterated into English or otherwise altered by an intermediate rendering? Should you guess what the name originally was and how it should be pronounced? There are too many languages for us to be experts in them all. A feeling that something looks “right” or “wrong” is not enough. So, first of all, we should have good operational guidelines for correct rendering. I suggest that in transliterating names and translating titles in the news, “correct” should mean **linguistically and logically justified and/or widely used by reliable mass media**.

As for the first part, a “linguistically and logically justified” rendition should take into account the traditional transliteration of a given name (similar names should probably be rendered in a similar way unless they are pronounced differently in the source language). A translator should be competent enough to, at the least, find resources that help in determining how justified a rendition is. Unfortunately, the current situation in Russian reference literature is not good, and the most reliable resources (which many consider to be Розенталь Д. Э. *Справочник по орфографии и пунктуации*, 1998 г. [<http://www.spelling.spb.ru/rosenthal/alpha/>], see § 74], and Гиляревский, Старостин. *Иностранные имена и названия в русском тексте*, 1978, with 1985 and 1989 editions) are outdated, while newly published literature often cannot be called reliable. (I also highly recommend Ермолович Д.И. *Имена собственные на стыке языков и культур*, 2001 г.)

This lack of reliable reference materials is what necessitates the second part of my definition: “widely used by reliable mass media.” It can be said that nowadays in Russia, mass media themselves create some language standards, including standards in the rendering of foreign names. Whether this is good or bad, it is a fact of life, as language is evolving anyway. So the important thing here is to look to usage in “reliable media,” and not just to overall frequency of usage. Indeed, “widely used” does not necessarily mean “right.” We always have to make a judgment about whether or not the source of a usage is reliable.

What sources can be called reliable? First of all, there are official resources, for example, the United Nations. There is plenty of information about the UN and its projects in Russian on UN official websites. There is no need to try to translate all those long and complicated abbreviations;

everything you need is sure to be out there on [www.un.org](http://www.un.org). UN experts have translated everything, and their version is really the only one we have a right to use. For anything that has to do with the UN, never start by translating it yourself; rather, search for approved translations! This is true not only for names, titles, and organizations but also for quotations from international documents (covenants, pacts, etc.). Such material has official translations, and not only does this make our lives easier, but we are obliged to use them. Any international organization, for example WHO or the Red Cross, may also have parallel material in Russian and English, so always try this first. Of course, keep in mind that typos can sneak into any text, even an official one, so do not suspend your own judgment entirely.

What if there is no official resource or you cannot find it? What might be called “reliable” then? I would say stylistic consistency is a good sign. But keep in mind that a website or a newspaper may have its own preferences, often dictated by its particular focus. For example, the city of Ashgabat is rendered in Russian as Ашхабад, but those who work mostly for a Central Asian audience might prefer the Turkmen version Ашгабат. Such preferences may be controversial, but if there is a guiding principle behind such decisions and if the terminology is consistent, then the source is reliable – you just need to make sure your stylistic approaches match.

I have found, to my surprise, that the Russian BBC is not very reliable, as it seems to make weird mistakes with names and is not consistent. The same is true of [lenta.ru](http://lenta.ru). Sources that I do recommend include the television station websites [www.ntv.ru](http://www.ntv.ru) or [www.itv.ru](http://www.itv.ru), or electronic media like [www.gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru), [www.rian.ru](http://www.rian.ru), or [www.rbc.ru](http://www.rbc.ru). At any rate, in journalism, stylistic consistency is extremely important; and you (or, ideally, your client) should build your own style guide and then use it consistently.

While trying to make a decision about which version to choose, a translator may encounter dilemmas. Let’s call the most common one the “Standard versus Customized” dilemma, for example, the dilemma we face dealing with the Russian rendition of Ashgabat. Either transliteration might cause emotional reactions in some readers. In this case, I would say do what the client wants. If the client is not aware of the delicacy of certain transliteration decisions, some client education may be in order. If the client gives no useful guidance, try to figure out who the audience is and what the goals of the translation are.

A similar situation may arise if a person (or organization) mentioned in the news prefers his/her (its) name to be rendered in a certain way regardless of any rules, traditions, etc. In this case I think a translator should honor this desire. This is also true for “Americanized” Slavic names (Gorky, for example): should we inflect them? Should we put an [и] or [й] ending? I think if a person has a Slavic name only thanks to distant ancestors, we should not necessarily spell it as it was originally spelled in Cyrillic. This is

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a general rule for me; the client may have a different opinion. Generally speaking, in every difficult case, first decide the objective of the text, and then the decision will come naturally. Do you want your newspaper to look like *Gazeta.ru*? Go ahead and use their style! Do you want to reach the Russian community in the US with an advertisement? Leave some “Russlish” («реалтор», «хиropрактор») – even if you hate such words, this is what many people are accustomed to. Do you want everyone to be able to read your news? Never leave anything in the English alphabet, even if transliteration looks weird! Again, logic should be your guide.

In short, the golden rule is search! Never guess! What I mean is that, when there is the slightest doubt, try to verify everything, even if the person is Russian or even if the spelling seems really easy to transfer into Russian. We are human beings and we do not know everything. So search! And the most important point here is, while you can find everything on the Internet, 90% of it may be wrong! (Remember the slogan «Яндекс – найдется все!» – this is true indeed. Type in the weirdest letter combination and you’ll probably find some hits.) So try never to start searching by simply typing your best guess for a name or title rendition in a search engine; regardless of correctness, you are sure to find it! Remember, although you do not need to get a million hits, you do need some from reliable sources.

Now, what do I do to ensure that my search will lead me to satisfactory results? The general rule here is that the search should be based on the **meaning** of the source text, not on its wording. This is just a variation of the rule you use when you translate: you want to render the meaning, not the words. Analogously, the meaning is what you look for when you search for a term.

Here are a few specific helpful techniques I use.

- Try to find the same news story on any reliable website. At first, you should attempt to do this without even typing the name in the search engine (because you don’t know how to spell it and you do not want to involve your guesses in the search process). Instead, use some details from the news story, the position of the person or at least one part of the name, not both. For example if I wanted to search for *Koizumi*, I would type only *премьер-министр Японии*, without the name. If I did not get satisfactory results, I would try searching for some aspect of the news item itself: let’s say *Россия и Япония подписали торговое соглашение...* Only then would I type in *Коизуми* or *Юничиро* – but in this case that would be of no help if I were not aware of how Japanese names are normally rendered in Russian and just treated this as if it were an American name. Hopefully, I would recall that in Japanese *дз* is more common than just *з* and try *Кои<sup>дз</sup>уми*. This is analogous to something I recently did with the name of a Russian prosecutor. The English text read *Kalnin*. When I saw this

I immediately assumed this to be a typo since *Kalinin* is a common last name, while *Kalnin* certainly is not. It took me only a few seconds to find the same news on another website, and this time the name was *Kalinin*.

- Type in your best guess. If finding the appropriate news item without using the name is not possible, you are forced to guess. When you do that, you must be very wary about accepting “hits” as confirmation. In any case, if there are too few of them, there is a strong possibility that the guess was wrong. It is not always possible to be 100% sure of what is correct, but my point is be careful, and don’t be satisfied with just any result. Check what the source is and check the quality of its language, punctuation, style, etc.; note whether the website is designed in a professional way and whether the source seems to specialize in politics.
- Use parallel search. Search for similar things and names if you are unable to find the exact ones. Once I had a problem with an unfamiliar Chinese name rendered into English. I picked the last part of the name and typed it in Google in English. I found out that there is a CEO in a big corporation who happens to have this name. It was easy to find how this CEO’s name is rendered in Russian (by searching for «Президент корпорации такой-то» in Yandex). Even though it was another person, my version was based on reliable grounds: in English, both names are spelled the same way, so probably in Russian we should spell them the same way, too. This and the previously described techniques are good for both names and official positions; you should use both when you search (type in the search engine *премьер-министр Японии* if you are not sure about the name and then verify what you find by doing another search with it – how many hits did you get? Too few? Then perhaps you chose the wrong rendition of the name or maybe you are even wrong about the title in Russian).
- Widen your search. For example, if you cannot find anything on *премьер-министр Японии*, try looking for *структура правительства Японии* or something similar, or even just *Япония*. This is much better than just trying any far-fetched spelling of the name that comes to mind. If you have time, read general articles on the topic. Wikipedia is great, do not neglect it – you can learn a lot of very interesting stuff while you are searching, and it has parallel material in Russian and in English! (But be aware that there can be mistakes there, too, so always use your own judgment.)

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# THREE LITTLE (RUSSIAN BIOMEDICAL) WORDS

*(We continue to publish materials from the 2004 ATA Conference medical terminology presentation, which we neglected to review last year. The current materials were generated by Lydia Stone.)*

## 1. ОРГАНИЗМ – отдельное живое существо, рассматриваемое как биологическая система.

### ORGANISM: an individual life form.

In practice, the English word organism is not used very much in scientific or popular medical writing except when it implies microorganism. Translation of the cognate, while not distorting meaning, is frequently “off.” Some sample translation solutions based on examples found on the Internet follow.

Силиконовая грудь отравляет <b>организм</b>	Silicon breast implants prove poisonous
Воздействие радиации на живой <b>организм</b>	Physiological effects of radiation on <b>living things</b>
Влияние кофе на <b>организм</b> человека	<b>Physiological</b> effects of coffee (in humans) Note: in English, “in humans” would probably be left out. Who else drinks coffee? If this were a lab study on animals, species would be noted.
Влияние алкоголя на <b>организм</b> и психологию подростка	<b>Physiological</b> and psychological effects of alcohol in adolescents
Здесь в условиях покоя и умеренной деятельности в <b>организме</b> здорового человека не наступает сколько-нибудь существенных изменений, поскольку <b>организм</b> легко компенсирует недостаток кислорода.	Here no significant changes occur <b>in healthy humans</b> (adults) at rest or engaging in moderate physical activity, since the <b>body</b> readily compensates for an insufficiency of oxygen.
обезвоживает <b>организм</b> животного	<b>the animal</b> becomes dehydrated
Главный враг больного – собственный <b>организм</b>	The sick person’s (patient’s) main enemy is (may be) <b>his own body</b> .
Влияние компьютера на <b>организм</b> во время беременности	<b>Physiological</b> effects of computer use in pregnant women (or during pregnancy).
Что уж говорить о более мелких <b>организмах</b> , например, одноклеточных	As for smaller <b>organisms</b> , for example, unicellular <b>organisms</b> . (Substitute creature for one organism?)
Что же означает состояние невесомости для живых <b>организмов</b> и к чему может привести пребывание <b>организма</b> в этом состоянии?	What does weightlessness mean for <b>living things</b> and what are the <b>physiological</b> effects of long-term weightlessness? (NASA uses microgravity.)
Слушайте свой <b>организм!</b>	Listen to your <b>body!</b>

**2. ПРЕПАРАТ** – anything that has undergone intentional processing before use; specifically in a medical context: either specimen for microscopic or macroscopic study, or drug, medicine, etc.; лекарственный, фармацевтический; лечебный; медикаментозный – drug, medicine, etc., even without the adjectives.

Although “something compounded or prepared for a specific purpose” is the last of five definitions of “preparation” in Webster’s (e.g., Preparation H), this use is not common in scientific articles.

The best translation procedure is to figure out exactly what the thing being discussed is (drug, vaccine, antigen, insect repellent, chemical compound, etc.) and use that word.

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Препарат против клещей действительно оказался подделкой	The tick <b>repellant</b> truly proved to be fake (counterfeit??)
Микроэлементный препарат, необходимый СОБАКЕ ЛЮБОГО ВОЗРАСТА!	Mineral <b>supplement</b> essential for dogs of any age!
дезинфицирующий препарат	<b>disinfectant</b>
Токсичный препарат "Эйджент оранж"	The toxic <b>defoliant</b> "Agent Orange"
Сканлюкс ® – новый неионный рентгеноконтрастный препарат	Scanlux ® – a new non-ionic X-ray contrast <b>medium</b>
Коптильный препарат как аналог "Жидкого дыма"	<b>Artificial smoke flavoring</b> as an analogue of "Liquid Smoke"
лиофильно высушенный препарат фракции I	freeze dried <b>fraction I</b>
Одной из важных проблем, которая возникает при изучении эффективности вакцинного препарата	One of the important problems involved in the study of <b>vaccine</b> efficacy

**3. НАПРАВЛЕН** – common English translations when not used in the sense of physical direction: directed at, aiming at, has the purpose/objective/goal of, targeted at.

This word is used frequently in Russian to indicate the ultimate result (or "direction" of physiological changes); the typical translations seem anthropomorphic or inappropriately "intentional" in English.

Suggested translations:

Терморегуляция -- совокупность физиологических процессов в организме человека и теплокровных животных, <b>направленных</b> на поддержание постоянной температуры тела.	Thermal regulation is the set of physiological processes that <b>serve to</b> maintain constant body temperature in humans and warm-blooded animals.
Мы полагаем, что рост гематокрита <b>направлен</b> на повышение кислородной емкости крови для удовлетворения энергетических потребностей повышенной мышечной массы у спортсменов.	We believe that the increased hematocrit <b>has the function of</b> increasing the oxygen capacity of blood to meet the energy needs of the increased muscle mass of athletes.
Острая (первичная) или эпикритическая боль имеет физиологическое значение, она <b>направлена</b> на восстановление нарушенного гомеостаза.	Acute (primary) or epicritical pain has physiological significance since it <b>serves to</b> facilitate restoration of disrupted homeostasis.

**RENDERING NAMES** *Continued from page 18*

- Try to determine the person's gender. Even if you can avoid pronouns, in Russian gender is important for the verb. The techniques are the same: finding a reliable source is sometimes more important than the number of hits. If there is nothing in Russian, or even if there is something, you can still look for images on the American web. Pictures of the person usually make it obvious.
- Be aware of Central Asian names. A common problem with such names is that in English there is no *ы*, which is usually transliterated as *i* or *y*, so we should always suspect an *ы* on every such occasion. (Tinichbek Akmatbayev – Тынычбек Акматбаев).

Do not forget that in Uzbek, *o* is often transliterated into Russian as *a*, *j* as *dzh*, etc.

Remember, while a translator's primary goal here is to honor rules and tradition, in some cases you can justify your own version – as long as it makes sense and is consistent with your own stylistic guidelines.

Good luck, and let us make good news together!

Olga Zamaraeva graduated from the School of Journalism of Moscow State University and now lives in Bellevue, WA, where she works as a freelance translator. Last year, she worked as a translator and editor for an American governmental news project. She can be reached at [olga@rustranslate.net](mailto:olga@rustranslate.net) and would welcome questions regarding this article or questions or suggestions about news translation.

# “The Translator: A Prominent Figure in the Twenty-First Century”<sup>1</sup>

Genowefa Legowski

I have volunteered to be the *SlavFile* editor for Polish. I have lived in the U.S.A. since 1984 and hold a degree in Polish from the University of Gdańsk. During my first years in the U.S., I worked on my English by taking classes at a community college and the University of Wyoming. Before deciding to become a professional translator, I worked various odd jobs, including in a university library, a tourist information center, a university athletic department, and a university art museum. All this experience often comes in handy in translating. I prefer to work with subjects that generally fall in the humanities. I also teach Polish and have published articles in Polish and English.

I decided to volunteer to be *SlavFile*'s Polish language editor for purely self-serving reasons. No, not the usual ones: more exposure (although I could use it), more work offers (that would not be bad either). I simply wanted to make myself write more. I'm a very conscientious person and I like to keep my promises. If I were to promise to produce something on Polish for a *SlavFile* issue, I would feel very bad if I did not come through. Thus, I would have to write...well, you get the picture.

Living in Wyoming, I work pretty much in isolation; my work comes mostly through the Internet. I may not be aware of the problems facing other translators working in different environments. That's why I need help and cooperation from my colleagues living all over the U.S. I welcome ideas and suggestions, as well as contributions suitable for publication (of course).

When I was in Poland last year, two articles caught my attention. Both had something to do with the process of translating. One was the published address of renowned Polish writer and journalist Ryszard Kapuściński to the First World Convention of Translators of Polish Literature, which took place in Kraków in May of 2005. The other was about a series of workshops for translators of the great book *Tin Drum* by German writer Gunter Grass. These articles would seem to have little in common except the subject of literary translation. But in different ways they both speak of the importance of the translating profession.

Ryszard Kapuściński is very well known all over the world. He has traveled extensively, written about many complicated political situations in the world, and seen revolutions and revolutionaries in different settings. Many of his non-fiction books have been translated and published in the English-speaking world. Here are a few titles: *The Emperor. Downfall of an Autocrat* (“Cesarz”), *Shah of Shahs* (“Szachinszach”), *The Soccer War* (“Wojna futbolowa”), *Imperium* (“Imperium”), and *The Shadow of the Sun* (“He-

ban”). Ryszard Kapuściński regularly deals with translators, and he seems to have a very favorable view of people in this profession. Being a man of the world, he recognizes the importance of the role translators and interpreters play in the process of communication between the peoples of our complicated modern world.

Gunter Grass came from the complicated and difficult environment of the city of Gdańsk before World War II. *Tin Drum* is about that time. Gdańsk was built at the mouth of the Vistula (Wisła) river. For centuries, the city was a thriving mix of Polish and German cultures and was home to free-spirited and independent people who dared to stand up to kings if they felt their rights would be trampled. After World War I, Gdańsk became a “Free City” with equal rights guaranteed to both German and Polish inhabitants. But with the rise of Nazi power in Germany, the situation in Gdańsk changed dramatically for the worse.

In June of 2005, Grass's translators from all over the world came to this city to walk the paths he walked and to catch the spirit of the places where *Tin Drum* heroes and heroines lived. Gunter Grass came, too. During organized workshops, he met with the translators, answered their questions, and explained cultural references in the book. The translators loved that. For them this was “a workshop, a meeting with the author in a small circle, and a language lesson” all in one.

Ryszard Kapuściński expressed his appreciation and understanding of translators' work in his speech in Kraków. Here are a few excerpts in my translation:

“By translating a text, we are opening a new world for other people. We explain it, and through the process of translation we help them better understand this world. We allow other people to enter this world and to be a part of our personal experience. Because of the hard labor of a translator, our horizons broaden, our understanding and knowledge deepens, and our sensibility is reactivated.”

“After the end of [the cold war], the world became more open, more democratic. Now there is a greater chance to get closer and know each other. There is a chance for dialogue, conversation, and an exchange of opinions and points of view. [...]his chance is not going to be fulfilled without the participation and facilitation of someone who will translate words and thoughts from one language into a totally different one – that is, without a translator. The presence of a translator – somebody who will interpret/translate a conversation or a text – is becoming essential for harmonious coexistence within the community of human beings, within the family of man.”

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1 A translation of the title of Kapuściński's talk

# BEGINNER'S LUCK

*Liv Bliss (perennially novice translator)*

*Lakeside, Arizona*

It has been a long time, hasn't it?  
Jimi Hendrix, *Live at the Isle of Wight*

Having taken an AWL (absence *with* leave) from the last issue of *SlavFile*, here I am at last, with the final installment of my payment practices series. We've already discussed how to check the reputation and/or status of clients in advance of accepting a job, and the initial steps to take after encountering a payment problem. Now, with that under our belts, it is time to look at the more time- and money-consuming actions that might help shake that hard-earned fee loose. (For our many new readers, at the end of this article I will insert a list of topics covered in previous columns, which may be worth looking at for starters, as some of that information might just help you avoid getting into a position where you have to bring in the big guns just to get paid.)

Before we begin, though, there are two things I need to tell you. The first is that I am neither a financial whiz nor an attorney and that nothing in this column constitutes financial or legal advice, from me, *SlavFile*, or the ATA. Nor is it an encouragement to move as a group against any client or to do anything else that would constitute a violation of U.S. antitrust legislation. And the second is that nothing mentioned here is based on my own personal experience but has, rather, been gleaned from the advice of colleagues, information freely posted on one online forum or another, and some judicious Internet research—in short, nothing that you couldn't do for yourself as well or better, if you had the time or the inclination.

Remember that when you deliver work to a client, per the terms of the job and in accordance with your own impeccably high standards of quality, you are extending *credit* to that client. Or, put another way, that client is taking an *interest-free loan* from you. It is a risk at least equal to that which clients incur when they accept work they may not be able to evaluate from an unfamiliar translator. I have been on that side of the desk too, and I remember only too well the sinking feeling that came when I realized that, for all my diligence, the translator I had chosen was simply not equal to the assignment. (That happened rarely, I am happy to say, and always in languages of such extraordinarily limited diffusion that, in those pre-Internet days, I didn't seem to have much choice.)

Job No. 1, then, is to make sure that you live up to your side of the bargain, that your clients never have reason to fear they have misplaced their trust in you. Once that is squared away, you can be confident that the agreed fee is rightfully yours and you are fully entitled to pursue every legal means you wish to get it.

Let's assume, though, that you have already tried some, most, or all of the suggestions in the Fall 2005 column and it has gotten you precisely nowhere. At this point, common sense dictates that you add a few other considerations into the mix:

\* Is the client still in business? And still at the same physical address?

If you are planning to sue or to hand the debt off to a collection agency, you need to do this part of your homework early in the game.

\* Has the client declared bankruptcy?

A quick Googling will net any number of companies prepared to sell you lists of bankrupt individuals and entities (talk about throwing good money after bad!), but you could start with [www.privateeye.com/?from=p17741&vw=Public+Filings&piid=42](http://www.privateeye.com/?from=p17741&vw=Public+Filings&piid=42), which will give you a straight yes or no on personal and business bankruptcies in the US, without charge. Another simple trick is to input the company or individual name along with a keyword like "bankruptcy" into a reliable search engine. If the answer is a yes, there is no time to waste: you must have your name entered on the list of creditors pronto. The Web page [www.moranlaw.net/creditorfaq.htm](http://www.moranlaw.net/creditorfaq.htm) has some good basic information on this; also go to the link "Creditor Rights" in the left margin. That's you, my friend, and isn't it nice to know that you do have rights? Except that the debt owed to you could well be categorized as a nonsecured claim, and as such, will be way down the list of debts to be paid off in a bankruptcy.

\* Is the sum sufficient to justify the time that you have already expended plus the time (which you could devote to more surefire income-generating work) and money you will have to expend if you choose to pursue the claim, not to mention the stress that legal proceedings may cause you?

Some people have more stamina and resolve or are more dogged in their pursuit of justice than others. This is an individual decision, and there is no shame attached to whatever you decide to do. Even though there will probably be no lack of people telling you to fight to the bitter end, it's not their fight.

Speaking of not wasting time, do be aware that many debts in many locations fall under a statute of limitations. In other words, after a debtor has gone for a certain period of time without either paying a debt (or any part of it) or stating any intention of paying, the debt more or less goes away. It's as if it had never existed. The statute, if there is one, varies enormously from country to country and even from state to state: take a look at [www.cardreport.com/laws/statute-of-limitations.html](http://www.cardreport.com/laws/statute-of-limitations.html) for an idea of the range.

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But assuming there has been no bankruptcy, your debtor has not fallen off the face of the earth, and the statute of limitations has not yet kicked in, you have two basic choices: a collection agency and court. There may be others that have escaped my notice, and if there are, I would love to be set straight—so contact me, please (at the coordinates below), and do just that.

If you subscribe to any of the online business/payment practices boards that I have listed here so often I can do it in my sleep, you will already know that opinions of collection agencies and of their likelihood of success vary enormously. The starting point, though, is to know who you're dealing with. Once in a while, I receive what may politely be called an "unsolicited email" offering to collect bad debts for me. Usually, other colleagues have received the same thing, and the boards will be buzzing with reactions and reports on the prospective debt collector. On at least one occasion, the wannabe had apparently been a notorious nonpayer himself: perhaps there's nothing like personal experience as a predictor of success, but I would not want to put a fox like that in charge of my henhouse. As a minimum, run a whois search ([www.whois.net](http://www.whois.net)) on the domain name, to see if you can find out if this person is remotely close to who s/he claims to be.

In the US, you could consider going with an established and reputable agency such as D & B Small Business Solutions (go to [www.dnb.com/us/dbproducts/small\\_business/index.html](http://www.dnb.com/us/dbproducts/small_business/index.html) and click on "Collect Debt" on the right-hand side). Dun and Bradstreet are upfront about fees and services, and you may be surprised at how relatively low those fees are. There is also the ATA partner, Receivable Management Services (contact information at [www.atanet.org/membership/generalinfo.php](http://www.atanet.org/membership/generalinfo.php)). Of course, no collection efforts are ever guaranteed. And if anyone ever does offer you a 100% performance promise, run away and don't look back.

Miklos Tasnadi has written a quite thorough article on the use of collection agencies, which you will find at [www.proz.com/translation-articles/articles/82/1/How-to-collect-late-payments](http://www.proz.com/translation-articles/articles/82/1/How-to-collect-late-payments) (click on "Print Article" on the right-hand side for a screen layout that's easier on the eye). He lists a few agencies that he calls "reputable," including one each in Canada and the UK, but even so, take nothing on trust. After all, it was being too trustful that got us here in the first place, wasn't it?

Another possibility is Small Claims Court. Sometimes, apparently, the mere warning that you are intending to file with an SCC elicits a gratifying response from the debtor. In other cases, you may as well have been singing *Frère Jacques*. So if you're going to threaten this, you really should mean it, and you should know in advance what is involved.

The maximum amount that can be recovered through small claims varies from state to state. I could not find a consolidated list or a single source of information, so you

are going to have to check for your own individual situation: search on the state name plus the words "Small Claims Court." Nolo ([www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com)) has a Small Claims Court FAQ page with lots of handy links, which you might prefer to access via Google (nolo + "small claims court FAQ"), as maneuvering around the Nolo site itself is now more difficult than it used to be: it seems you have to search on a *product* first, in the search box at the top left of the home page, then continue by unchecking "Products" and checking "Entire site" and/or "Glossary." Nolo also offers some publications that might be helpful (input "Small Claims" into the search box), including *Everybody's Guide to Small Claims Court* and *Settle Your Small Claims Dispute Without Going to Court*. (This is, by the way, one instance in which I would not recommend buying an older, "gently used" copy of any such publication at a discount from [www.fetchbook.info](http://www.fetchbook.info) or anywhere else: for this, you need the most up-to-date information there is.)

You will normally have to file in the Small Claims court where the debtor resides or in which your contract with the debtor, if any, was executed. I am told, too, that the small claims system in France and the UK, for instance, will only deal with claims lodged by residents of the countries concerned. This is where a subscription to a business/payment practices board (especially [www.tcrlist.com](http://www.tcrlist.com)) can really come in handy: yes, people have actually been known to offer their addresses to help out colleagues in need. In Germany, on the other hand, the Amtsgericht Berlin Schönberg is said to handle claims made against German residents by individuals residing outside the European Union. Or—again—so I am told.

Now, finally, if the amount you are owed is in excess of the small claims maximum and you still want to take this thing to court...I hate to say it, but I really do think you are past the stage of self-help and you need a qualified attorney. And that is so far beyond my range of competence that I better hadn't say another word.

(Changes the subject rapidly...) I do hope this is not a sign of the times, but there seems to have been an increase in the number of articles (in *SlavFile*, *The ATA Chronicle*, and elsewhere, in print and online) on the subject of getting paid. For instance, Wendy Griswold's "And Furthermore... Still More Things Freelance Translators Can Do to Ensure Payment," in the *Chronicle* for November/December 2005, is a veritable goldmine of good stuff. (Does anyone else think that the *Chronicle* seems to have adopted a more practical, less academic bent of late?) After a while, you will start to notice that the information and advice overlap, but that's hardly surprising. And as long as the boards are home to sad stories from individuals, often new to the business, who were not quite careful enough, the counsel cannot be repeated too often.

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You may also have noticed, in the November/December *Chronicle* issue, the announcement of an ATA Business Practices Education Committee. Much like the Ethics Committee, it will not step in to resolve business disputes, but it does intend to inform independent contractors on a variety of business issues in a variety of ways. Most interestingly to me, it has set up a question and answer column entitled "Business Smarts" in the *Chronicle* that has already (in the January and February 2006 issues) answered some worthwhile queries. Good for them: long may they prosper. Send them your queries, if you'd rather not send them to me and even if you already know an answer that works for you: your colleagues, especially those with less experience, can only benefit thereby. Or sign up for the new committee's Yahoo! group at [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/ata\\_business\\_practices](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/ata_business_practices).

Last of all, here is the promised list of past Beginner's Luck columns. Go to [www.americantranslators.org/divisions/SLD/slavfile.htm](http://www.americantranslators.org/divisions/SLD/slavfile.htm), where you can check out the contents of each issue, and then go to the left side of the page to download the one(s) you want to read.

- Summer 2002: Introduction to the column, with thumbnail bio of yours truly
- Fall 2002: Real-life ethical dilemmas (client management)
- Winter 2002/3: This translator's 20+ favorite web sites
- Spring 2003: Reader feedback on ethical dilemmas
- Summer/Fall 2003: Translator freebies plus some things worth paying for
- Winter 2003/4: A fake advice column about real problems
- Spring/Summer 2004: Avoiding translator burnout, part 1
- Fall 2004: Avoiding translator burnout, part 2
- Winter 2005: How to mess up your life in language
- Spring 2005: How to identify problem clients
- Summer 2005: What is translation?
- Fall 2005: How to get paid, part 1
- [Winter 2005/6: no BL column but lots of other juicy stuff]

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I am rapidly running out of things to talk about that might be of interest to beginners, or to anyone else, for that matter. Don't look so surprised: when I began this column I told you that might well happen. So help me regain my creative momentum: tell me what's on your mind, at [bliss@wmonline.com](mailto:bliss@wmonline.com).

## CAROLYN COOPER

My interest in Slavic languages began in 1994 when I was in St. Petersburg, Russia on a Fulbright Teaching Scholarship. At that time, I was a Professor of Special Education at Eastern Illinois University and was teaching (in English) Russian students how to mainstream young children with disabilities into a regular kindergarten. I didn't know a word of Russian, but thought since I was in Russia, I should study the language. I had a wonderful Russian teacher and became absolutely enraptured with the language.

After my Fulbright, I kept returning to St. Petersburg whenever I could and tried to keep studying Russian. In 2000, I decided that my heart just wasn't in special education any longer and entered a program at St. Petersburg State University to prepare me to work as a translator/interpreter. After three years, I completed the program and began working, mainly as a translator from Russian into English. At present, I am an Associate Professor of written translation in the Department of English Philology at St. Petersburg State University. I also work part-time as a translator for a Russian investment bank, where I translate stock analysts' reports into English.

Carolyn may be reached at [carolyncpr@yahoo.com](mailto:carolyncpr@yahoo.com).

**American Translators Association's  
47th Annual Conference  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
November 1-4, 2006**

### THE TRANSLATOR: A PROMINENT FIGURE

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"[...]All the languages that translators have to work with are in constant flux, always changing and evolving, with words developing new connotations and meanings. When reading a text, a great deal of experience, alertness, and good taste are necessary to catch and interpret the signs of these changes coming to us from its hidden layers, from within." For the full Polish text of this address, see [www.gazeta.pl/kapuciński](http://www.gazeta.pl/kapuciński).

The editors are pleased that Genowefa has agreed to serve as SlavFile editor for Polish. Please heed her call for contributions and suggestions. She can be reached at [bartlego@yahoo.com](mailto:bartlego@yahoo.com) (with an alternate email of [glegowski@uwoyo.edu](mailto:glegowski@uwoyo.edu)).

# INTERPRETING CUSTOMER SERVICE PHRASES FROM ENGLISH INTO RUSSIAN

Svetlana Ball

You might have noticed that my title fails to include “and vice versa.” Unfortunately, the reason for this is quite obvious. The concept of customer service is basically non-existent in Russian society. Perhaps you disagree. I myself recall the wave of anxiety that would sweep over me every time I had to make a phone call while living in Russia many years ago. I would repeat the question several times before dialing the number, utter the question very fast when I had a representative on the line, get some obscure response, and before I was able to ask anything else the line would be disconnected. This would happen again and again regardless of whom or when I was calling. I would always blame myself afterwards for not asking my next question fast enough or loud enough. (That’s why I talk so fast these days. I experienced such psychological trauma over and over as an adolescent. Perhaps this article is a form of therapy to help me recover completely!!!)

I do not believe things have changed all that much. My last trip to the Ukrainian capital comes to mind. We had just finished our tour of St. Vladimir’s Cathedral, and on the way out I politely inquired at a ticket booth if there was a place nearby we could grab a bite. The response would fit in the category of an R-rated movie due to “language content.” At that moment, I promised myself that while dealing with my former countrymen as an interpreter, I would do my best to go above and beyond to make sure they are treated the way I was not, but should have been.

What is customer service? These are just a few definitions I found:

Customer service is all about the way customers are treated and how they feel they are being treated. Customers like to know that they are appreciated, listened to and valued by the business.

Customer service is the way in which procedures are put in place to enable a business’s clientele to get difficulties with products and services dealt with effectively, questions answered politely, concerns allayed quickly and access to any resources and services made available.

([http://www.clearlybusiness.com/marketing\\_sales/cs\\_what\\_is\\_customer\\_service.jsp](http://www.clearlybusiness.com/marketing_sales/cs_what_is_customer_service.jsp))

After a lengthy search, I discovered that there are organizations dedicated to the advancement of customer service issues and concepts. Some of the organizations are:

[International Customer Service Association](http://www.icsa.org) (ICSA) is a trade association that works to serve the needs of its members, who all share responsibility for helping to manage the customer contact function at their organization. ([www.icsa.org](http://www.icsa.org))

[American Society for Training and Development](http://www.astd.org) (ASTD) is a worldwide organization dedicated to the advancement of training and HR issues. ([www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org))

[Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals](http://www.socap.org) (SOCAP) is an association open to all professionals who are in some way responsible for creating and maintaining customer loyalty. SOCAP provides the tools needed for corporations to reach their goal of maximum customer loyalty, excellent customer service, and value-added innovations. ([www.socap.org](http://www.socap.org))

Whether as interpreters or just plain customers, we all have come across various levels of customer service. It starts in a Customer Care/Service Department (what used to be called the Sales Department). By the way, I think the most appropriate way to translate this term would be *Отдел обслуживания* (not *Отдел заботы о клиентах*, although I have heard this used). Customer Care Representative [*представитель отдела обслуживания*] is the person who gets on the line when we dial the number of the above-mentioned department.

I may be over-interpreting (after all, I am an interpreter), but it has been my experience that there are certain stages customer care representatives go through when dealing with a customer. As a rule, these stages are outlined in a script some companies have developed to simplify their work with customers. I have named and outlined them below. If you disagree, please feel free to let me know.

## Phase 1. Greeting.

During the initial stage of the conversation, the following expressions are often used. I will take the liberty of providing my humble suggestions for Russian equivalents:

“Who do I have the pleasure of speaking with today?”

*С кем я сегодня (сейчас) имею удовольствие разговаривать?*

“How can I provide you with excellent customer service today?”

I remember how taken aback I was the very first time I heard this phrase. How can I translate it, I thought, in a way that sounds natural to a Russian ear? *Как сделать, чтобы услуги, оказанные Вам сегодня, были на высоком уровне?* This certainly does not sound normal, perhaps because such a phrase has never been uttered under any circumstances by a native Russian. How do you reflect the willingness (or at least create the appearance of willingness) of a customer service representative to go above and beyond what is normally expected to satisfy the customer?

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## CUSTOMER SERVICE *Continued from page 25*

*Чем мы вам можем помочь сегодня?* does not say anything about the “excellent service” referred to in the original phrase.

### Phase 2. The Main Part.

At this point, we are past the initial niceties, the call is under way, and an exchange of information is taking place. Occasionally, there arises the need for a customer service representative to verify something or check with the supervisor or whatever. Then we hear something like:

“Would you mind if I put you on hold for a minute or two?”

*Не могли бы вы подождать одну или две минуты?*

или

*Вы не против подождать минутку-другую?*

or “Would you mind holding?”

*Не могли бы вы подождать?*

or

*Вы не против подождать?*

Then the customer service representative returns and we hear something like:

“Thank you for your patience.”

*Благодарю вас за терпение.*

“I apologize for such a long delay!”

*Я извиняюсь за задержку.*

or

*Извиняюсь, что вам пришлось так долго ждать.*

Some phrases are quite standard and therefore do not need to be reexamined; however, some of them are quite unusual, and definitely foreign to our countrymen.

During a recent virtual discussion, one of my fellow telephonic interpreters stated that Russian speakers are not accustomed to such niceties, and therefore such phrases should be avoided. I believe that, on the contrary, such expressions should find their way into the life of Russian-speaking LEPs (Limited English Proficiency persons) living in or visiting this country.

### Phase 3. Closing the Call.

At the end of the call, certain expressions are used that even now make me cringe. Try to find an equivalent to something like:

“Customer service is our highest priority!”

*Для нас обслуживание клиентов стоит на первом месте!*

or

*Обслуживание клиентов является для нас приоритетом!* Sure, you can say this, but does the Russian speaker take you seriously? I am not sure.

“You are number one with us!”

*Вы для нас важнее всего!*

“Our service is tops!”

*Мы гордимся нашим обслуживанием!*

or

*Мы обслуживаем на самом высоком уровне!*

“Thank you for being a valued customer!”

*Спасибо, что остаетесь верным клиентом нашей компании!*

or

*Благодарю вас за то, что пользуетесь нашими услугами.*

The phrase *valued customer* (*ценный клиент*) implies that the company providing services thinks highly of the customer and is grateful to him/her for being there. However, when rendering the word combination into Russian, one has to avoid sounding sarcastic.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?”

*Могу ли я вам еще чем-нибудь помочь?*

or

*Как еще я могу вам помочь?*

“Have I provided you with excellent customer service today?”

*Довольны ли вы тем, как вас сегодня обслужили?*

or

*Считаете ли вы, что сегодня вам были предоставлены услуги высокого уровня?*

I know I have not covered all those wonderful customer service expressions that are out there, and I know there are many more that the resourceful representatives from the Customer Care/Marketing Departments will come up with. As interpreters and translators, let us try to keep up with them, finding that perfect equivalent for each of them, and ensuring that our countrymen are receiving the same, high-level customer service through us, their messengers.

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