

## Translating and Interpreting in a Pragmatic Age

### The 2009 Susana Greiss Lecture

Presented by Pavel Palazhchenko

Reviewed by Jen Guernsey

***“Languages have beauty and music and strength. It is not for everyone to appreciate them in our pragmatic age – it is a gift.”***

**Pavel Palazhchenko**

Pavel Palazhchenko is about the closest thing we Russian->English translators and interpreters have to a rock star. In our field, not many people attain name recognition. We usually function quietly behind the scenes (noticed mainly when we get it wrong). But Palazhchenko, by virtue of his work interpreting for such prominent figures as Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze, has been an unusually visible member of our profession. Add to that his two-volume *Мой несистематический словарь (My Unsystematic Dictionary)*, an extremely helpful reference on how to deal with those oft-encountered hard-to-translate concepts such as “rogue” and “empower,” and you get, well, a rock star.

In his lecture Palazhchenko sought to answer two fundamental questions: one, where is the translation and interpreting field heading; and two, why do people choose this profession? Palazhchenko commenced his lecture with a synopsis of a 1924 tale by Zoshchenko in which a triangle player thinks he is going to be put out of a job by an electric triangle. Clearly, fears of being replaced by technology—in our case machine translation and interpretation—are nothing new. Indeed, Palazhchenko pointed out that machine translation itself is really nothing new, given that it has been under development since 1966.

Mr. Palazhchenko’s assessment is that translation and interpretation will undoubtedly survive, not only in the “traditional” forms, but also in other forms, including some not yet envisioned. Certainly, experience thus far has borne out this theory. Who among us, for instance, would have predicted 20 years ago the extent to which computer-assisted translation, Internet access, and electronic dictionaries would revolutionize, but in no way diminish, the translation profession?

Palazhchenko went on to ask why anyone would choose this profession of ours. From a purely pragmatic standpoint, it seems quite unappealing. The training required is very labor- and time-intensive, and not particularly cost-effective in terms of eventual monetary return. A lot of rote

memorization is required, particularly when it comes to correctly translating terms that are similar, but with very different meanings; the examples he cited were *medication* vs. *narcotic* and *young adult* vs. *adult services*. Because language is constantly evolving, we in the field must continually update and upgrade our knowledge. Imagine trying to interpret an ordinary conversation today, for instance, if you had not updated your knowledge of everyday computer-related terminology in the past decade or two. Lastly, Mr. Palazhchenko cited the relatively low prestige of the translation and interpreting profession. In most cases, the pay grade is ordinary middle class; the work is viewed as uncreative since what we produce is merely derivative (though we in the field surely know just how creative we are forced to be every day!); and finally, there is not much opportunity for fame or prestige, Palazhchenko’s “rock star” status being the exception that proves the rule.

Palazhchenko went on to answer his own question, noting that we might be attracted to this work because it gives us a special understanding of other people and cultures, or perhaps because we gain the ability to read works of literature in the original and before they have been translated. He noted the lure of foreign travel as impetus for some,

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## SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION

### OFFICERS

Administrator: Becky Blackley  
Tel: 304-637-7505  
[beckyblackley@gmail.com](mailto:beckyblackley@gmail.com)

Assistant Administrator: P. Elana Pick  
Tel: 917-400-6918  
[pick.ep@gmail.com](mailto:pick.ep@gmail.com)

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Write to ATA, 225 Reinekers Lane  
Alexandria, VA 22314

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Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or of the Division.

Editor: Lydia Razran Stone  
Tel.: 703-768-5441  
[lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net)

Associate Editor: Nora Favorov  
Tel.: 919-960-6871  
[norafavorov@gmail.com](mailto:norafavorov@gmail.com)

Associate Editor: Galina Raff (Russian, Layout)  
Tel.: 704-849-8200  
[galina.raff@gmail.com](mailto:galina.raff@gmail.com)

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Liv Bliss  
[bliss@wmonline.com](mailto:bliss@wmonline.com)

Roy Cochrun (Dictionaries)  
[roy@royfc.com](mailto:roy@royfc.com)

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(Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian)  
[smd@ku.edu](mailto:smd@ku.edu); [jpdickey@ku.edu](mailto:jpdickey@ku.edu)

Jennifer L. Guernsey  
[jenguernsey@gmail.com](mailto:jenguernsey@gmail.com)

Vladimir Kovner  
[vkovner250696MI@comcast.com](mailto:vkovner250696MI@comcast.com)

Christina Sever  
[csever@proaxis.com](mailto:csever@proaxis.com)

Lynn Visson  
[lvisson@aol.com](mailto:lvisson@aol.com)

Roman B. Worobec (Ukrainian)  
[rbw@inbox.com](mailto:rbw@inbox.com)

## Translating and Interpreting in a Pragmatic Age

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and specifically cited the desire to buy foreign clothes—though I would wager that the latter was a significant draw only in the old, shortage-plagued travel-restricted Soviet Union, not in the U.S. or in modern Russia. But really, as Palazhchenko implied when describing himself and his colleagues as “fanatics of phonetics,” we come to this profession through our love of and fascination with language.

Palazhchenko expressed the firm belief that to be a translator or interpreter, it is not sufficient simply to know two languages; the special skills required by translation and interpretation must be taught. He spent considerable time during his lecture lovingly recognizing the dedicated teachers of translation and interpretation who had made a difference in his life. His teachers succeeded despite the paucity of suitable teaching materials, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, and he expressed approval for their emphasis on the theoretical basis of translation and for the respect they had for the work of even foreign specialists in translation studies.

When our translation or interpreting work is criticized, Palazhchenko noted that we might succumb to self-doubt, be tempted to leave the profession, or at a minimum try to work in a “safer” language pair, such as Japanese<>Portuguese, in which qualified critics would be few. However, he feels that criticism is a healthy thing, and that errors are a natural occurrence, particularly in interpreting with its rapid-fire pace.

Regarding his own philosophy of translation and interpretation, Palazhchenko feels that it is important for the translator/interpreter to have the latitude to be a cultural mediator, particularly when working in what he termed “high-context” cultures. These are languages and cultures—as examples he cited Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic—where much of the context is assumed and not explained. He feels that Russian is also a relatively high-context language, requiring considerable explanation as well as straight translation, though he acknowledged that this is a new, debatable way of thinking about this topic.

As his lecture drew to a close, Palazhchenko discussed recent changes in the translation profession in Russia, particularly as regards literary translation. He noted that there is an enormous body of foreign literature translated into Russian. At one time, this work was prestigious and very literature-centric, and these factors (coupled with the need to work around the censors) meant that there were a large number of authors working as translators. However, Palazhchenko predicted that fiction translation in Russia will soon become an unsustainable profession.

Unfortunately, during his lecture, Palazhchenko stuck strictly to his prepared remarks. Earlier in the conference, at his pre-conference seminar, he more frequently spoke off the cuff and thus the seminar was more engaging. But even with this drawback, it was a delight to hear the views of someone who is not only our profession’s “rock star,” but is clearly a devoted and contemplative member of our profession.

Jen can be reached at [jenguernsey@gmail.com](mailto:jenguernsey@gmail.com).



## ADMINISTRIVIA

Becky Blackley, SLD Administrator

Greetings and Happy Spring!

For those of us here in the Allegheny Mountains (and many other parts of the country), it was a long and harsh winter. But all the snow and ice is now only a distant

memory as I watch the daffodils burst into bloom on my hillside. They appear to be smiling as they turn their bright faces upward to bask in the warm sunlight. It makes me smile, too. So, wherever you may be, I hope you are smiling at the springtime delights near your home.

Spring is a time of new beginnings, and we are already planning ahead for the ATA annual conference in Denver this October. We have just previewed the proposals submitted to ATA for SLD presentations at the conference. We have an excellent candidate for our Susana Greiss lecture but will not announce the candidate's name or presentation topic until our choice has been approved by ATA. By the

next issue of the *SlavFile*, we should know which presentations have been accepted by the conference organizer (the ATA president-elect), and we'll be able to give you more details on the conference schedule.

We even have a head start on our division banquet, having found (thanks to Alex Lane) a restaurant that specializes in Russian and European cuisine and is within walking distance of the hotel. Those of you who enjoyed our fabulous banquet at the Russian Samovar in New York will be pleased that we have found another gem. (And those of you who weren't able to attend the New York division banquet because it sold out will be sure to reserve your place earlier this year, won't you?) We should have more details on the banquet in the next issue, and ATA headquarters will send out an e-mail announcement to all division members in late September.

Meanwhile, enjoy all the spring delights in this issue of the *SlavFile*. There is plenty here to make you smile!

Becky

## Find It on the [Additional Resources Page](#) of the SLD Website

### Glossaries

- [Multi-Slavic Glossary of Pharmaceutical Terms](#)
- [A Crash Course in Experimental Design & Statistics for Biomedical Translators](#), English-Russian, by Lydia Stone
- [Legal and Social Sciences Glossary](#), English-Russian, by Emma Garkavi and Vadim Kazhin
- [Characteristics of Legal English](#), English-Russian, by Tom West
- [General and Business Terminology](#) (Russian Neologisms), by Konstantin Lakshin
- [End of Life Issues](#), English-Russian, by Elana Pick
- [Colloquial English Words Ending in --Y](#), by Lydia Stone
- [Translating Court Forms: Lessons Learned](#) by Emma Garkavi (ATA Conference, November 1, 2007)

### Recipes

- [Recipes from "The Russian Heritage Cookbook"](#) by Lynn Visson (Kurnik, Vatrushki with Sour Cream Dough, Aratun - Currant Squares, Marinated Cucumbers)

### Translator Tools

Handouts and other materials related to the software tools for Slavists presentations in Orlando at the 49th Annual ATA Conference:

- [ABBYY FineReader \(OCR and PDF Conversion\)](#) - presentation by Jen Guernsey
- [ABBYY Example](#) by Jen Guernsey
- [ABBYY Lingvo 12 and MultiTran Electronic Dictionaries](#) - presentation by John Riedl
- [Context Electronic Dictionary](#) - presentation by Becky Blackley

- [Context Smart Collocation Explanation \(in comparison with ABBY Lingvo and MultiTran\)](#) by Becky Blackley
- [MultiTran Electronic Dictionary \(Additional Information\)](#) - presentation by Becky Blackley

### Miscellaneous Articles on Interpreting from the SlavFile Archives

- [Articles on Interpreting](#) by Laura Wolfson
- [The Slovist](#) (1998-2004) by Raphy Alden from the SlavFile Interpreter column
- [Assorted Pre-1998 Articles](#)
- [Miscellaneous Articles of Interest to Interpreters II](#) (Spring 2007)

### Other Articles of Interest

- [Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian: A Textbook with Exercises and Basic Grammar](#) by Ronelle Alexander and Ellen Elias-Bursac (Madison, WI, 2006). Reviewed by Stephen M. Dickey
- [For the Imperfectly Articulate](#) Stone-Kovner Presentation on the Use of Articles in English (November 2007)

### Resources on Corporate Governance in Russia

- [Translation and Corporate Governance in Russia](#), by Megan Lehmann
- [Corporate Governance in Russia](#), collection of resources

### Samples

- [Sample Page from the Ukrainian Dorlands](#)

## 12, directed by Nikita Mikhalkov (2007)

Golden Lion award, Venice Film Festival, 2007;  
nominated for Academy Award, Best Foreign Language  
Film, 2008

Reviewed by Susan Welsh



*Editors note: Recently SLD member Susan Welsh wrote to us and suggested a column reviewing, recommending and discussing Slavic films and further agreed to moderate it and start the ball rolling with a review of Mikhalkov's 12. We thought this an excellent idea and suggested that she introduce herself with a short profile. Following this column*

*is an article by Nora Favorov about russiandvd.com, the Russian equivalent of Netflix. Nora's list of her ten favorite DVDs will appear in the next issue of SlavFile.*

Readers of Slavfilms are invited to comment on published reviews, to submit new ones and/or suggest films to review. Contact [welsh\\_business@verizon.net](mailto:welsh_business@verizon.net).

As SlavFile's newest columnist, I have been invited to write a brief profile introducing myself to readers. I have been fascinated by Russia's culture and language since I was a teenager growing up in beautiful, pre-war Beirut, Lebanon (I was born there to American teachers who taught at the American University of Beirut). I would lie on the beach, reading Dostoevsky and broiling my Anglo-Saxon skin (we didn't know better then). With the passion of youth, I decided to major in Russian when I got to college, the better to understand the human mind—and why my family was so crazy. And so I did, studying Russian at Swarthmore College, adding a psychology major later. I took a summer “immersion” Russian program at the University of Indiana in 1968, the summer of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, of the assassination of Robert Kennedy, of the escalation of the Vietnam War. I was politicized for life.

I ended up using my Russian as a professional translator and journalist, reading the Soviet press every day. My technique was to scan an article until I came to the word *однако*, and then see if the author had anything to say. Usually, they didn't. I studied Soviet history, psychology (E. Ilyenkov), and history of science (V.I. Vernadsky.) By 1981, I had had as much as I could stomach of *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, switched to the study of German, and eventually became an editor. Among my other pursuits during that period was delving into Leonardo da Vinci's scientific investigations and the work of Johannes Kepler, hoping that by the time my young son was old enough to ask me “why?” questions, I would be able to answer them.

My son, now a student at the University of Virginia, was born a week after the Berlin Wall was breached, and I confess that the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991 somewhat passed me by, as I was struggling with a two-year-old, a job, and sleep deprivation, among other entertainments. I always kept up with translating, either on the job or on the side, and in 2007 decided to hang up my shingle as a freelance translator. I continue seeking to comprehend what has happened in Russia all this time; this column is an effort in that direction. My website is <http://www.ssw-translation.com>.



Nikita Mikhalkov's 12 is reputed to be a remake—and even a plagiarism—of the American play 12 Angry Men, written by Reginald Rose and directed for Hollywood by Sidney Lumet in 1957. It is certainly not a plagiarism, and not a straightforward remake either. Although the story is obviously based on the earlier work, it is very different in many important aspects. Mikhalkov's 12 is more of a Canterbury Tales in which a number of disparate characters tell revealing stories about themselves, with a darker, uniquely Russian tone, set in the context of a courtroom drama where (as in Lumet's film), a young man's life hangs in the balance, but this time in a nation seeking to establish its identity after a century of trauma.

As in the best Russian literary tradition, there is a sustained tension between moments of high drama and comedy—that devastating irony that is so characteristic of Russian, Jewish, and other East European humor. The ironic humor that has sustained peoples through historical waves of oppression and enabled some, at least, of the survivors of the gulags to emerge with their humanity uncrushed.

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## SLAVFILMS

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The 12 jurors hold in their hands the fate of young Umar (played by Aпти Magamayev), a Chechen whose parents were brutally murdered during the war. A Russian soldier, “Uncle Volodya,” a friend of Umar’s parents, finds the orphaned boy after their death and takes him to Moscow to raise as his own son. When Umar’s adoptive father is found stabbed, Umar is charged with the crime. Some elements of this story line parallel that of the Lumet film, in which a Puerto Rican youth in New York City is charged with murdering his father. But how much richer and deeper is Mikhalkov’s tale!

With Lumet, we know little about the jurors. We know their occupations; we know that they represent a certain cross section of the white, male population of the United States in the 1950s; and we learn something about their characters. But we do not know, for example, why the “dissident” juror (played by Henry Fonda) steps forward to say “not guilty,” challenging the consensus of men who have already made up their minds to agree with the prosecutor, unencumbered by any thought process of their own, and who (mostly) want to get the business over with.

But with Mikhalkov’s *Canterbury Tales*, almost every juror has a story to tell, a story that reflects in some way upon the experience of the Soviet and post-Soviet people. There is a multidimensional mingling of personal, social, and economic issues that is only hinted at in the Lumet film. Of course, at the beginning, most of the jurors are convinced the boy is guilty, like their American counterparts. But slowly they open their hearts and lives to each other, as they arm-wrestle one another toward the realization that there is indeed at least “a shadow of a doubt” about Umar’s guilt—and maybe more than a shadow; that the boy is a human being, worthy of compassion, not “Chechen scum” (as the

taxi driver, played masterfully by Sergei Gamash, puts it). There is then a solid core of psychological truth when, over the film’s two and a half hours (Lumet’s is one hour shorter), they change their votes, one by one, to “not guilty.”

Who will have the courage to discover and stand up for the truth, even if no one else does? What theme could be more gripping for a Russian audience that still feels the impact of Stalin’s police state, an audience in which each person’s family lost loved ones in the carnage that swept Russia and the USSR from World War I to the Civil War to Stalin’s purges to World War II to Afghanistan to Chechnya?

The film is also a story about love and redemption, with a very subtly presented Christian theme, which is only made overt at the end. One of the most endearing characters, the first to join the dissident juror (played by Sergei Makovetsky) in voting not guilty, is a Jew (played by Valentin Gaft). Another juror, whose self-revelation has a particularly dramatic impact on the other jurors—as well as the audience—is himself, like Umar, from the Caucasus (this juror is played by Sergei Gazarov).

The acting is excellent, and the direction is brilliant overall. The charge made by reviewer Zoya Svetova ([Review, “12’ как апология Путина”](#) on the website «Ежедневный журнал» [Daily Journal])—that the film is not about the jurors, not about Chechnya, nothing but a puff-piece for Vladimir Putin—seems to me so silly as not to be worthy of comment. I found the beginning hard to follow (who is related to whom, and how?)—but I’m often that way with movies. It made the second viewing that much more enjoyable.

Send comments on this review or the film 12 to [welsh\\_business@verizon.net](mailto:welsh_business@verizon.net).

## American Translators Association

### 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference



**Denver, Colorado**  
**Hyatt Regency Denver**  
**October 27-30, 2010**

## TO OUR FAR-FLUNG READERS

Every once in a while we hear from a heretofore anonymous reader outside the U.S. and/or Slavic speaking countries—Israel, for example, or Scotland. We are always delighted to do so. After all, even though we are the official organ of ATA’s Slavic Languages Division, we post SlavFile on the ATA’s open website so that anyone who is interested can read it. We welcome and publish appropriate contributions from all readers and even non-readers.

Now we would like to find out more about our far-flung readers, both members and non-members of SLD. Send us a paragraph about yourselves and/or your reactions to SlavFile. With your permission, we will publish it and, as an extra incentive, will add you to a list of people receiving emails when the next issue is available on line. We are looking forward to hearing from and about you.

The Editors: Lydia ([lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net)) and Nora ([norafavorov@gmail.com](mailto:norafavorov@gmail.com)).

# RussianDVD.com

## Staying in Touch with “Small-c” Culture One DVD at a Time

Nora Seligman Favorov



As every translator and interpreter knows, if you're not up on what Genevra Gerhart, author of *The Russian Context* and *The Russian's World*, calls the “small-c” culture associated with the language out of which you are working, you will, at best, wind up being the only one missing the jokes at a gathering of native speakers and, at worst, be in danger of making an embarrassing translation error (or perhaps it's the other way around—maybe missing the jokes is worse). I am pleased to report that I, for one, have been actively and enjoyably improving my own small-c cultural literacy in the comfort of an easy chair on a regular basis since July 2007, according to the история проката (rental history) page of my account with russiandvd.com.

I can't remember how long I have been a customer of an operation out of Brighton Beach that currently goes by the name of “russiandvd.com” and that used to be known as RBC Video, but it's been a long time. When we bought our first movies from them, the DVD had not yet been invented and we had to call and order a catalogue, since this was before the days when every business had a website and most homes had internet access. I don't want to make myself sound ancient, but many *SlavFile* readers simply cannot appreciate what it was like trying to stay bi-cultural before the internet and globalization. You had to go to the library to read the Russian-language Soviet press (if you were fortunate enough to live near one that carried foreign periodicals), and generally if you did not have the right paper reference on your bookshelf or a native speaker by your side, you just had to accept not understanding much of what you were reading.

Of course, I'm sure we all now have the opportunity to watch all the foreign films and even television we want (and probably a good portion of *SlavFile* readers get to watch foreign television via cable or satellite dish). For me the solution has been the “Russian Netflix,” russiandvd.com. For \$19.99/month we can have two DVDs at a time. Keeping our queue populated has put just the right pressure on my husband and me to stay abreast of what's been happening in the world of Russian film and TV serials, and being able to browse the russiandvd.com website, which more or less follows the Netflix model of providing film descriptions and customer ratings, is extremely helpful. (Unlike Netflix

they do not offer links to outside media reviews, but they do offer a host of other products, including VHS tapes, audio books and music for purchase.) Although delivery is a bit slow compared to Netflix, the service is reliable and accommodations are made for the occasional damaged or lost disc. Typically, eight or nine days pass between the time we mail off a disc (from North Carolina) to the arrival of the next one in our queue (with Netflix, which has several North Carolina facilities, the analogous wait is only two days).

Perhaps for me personally, more than “small-c” culture, it is the ability to better visualize Russian history and literature that is the most valuable thing about watching a lot of Russian film and television. In this connection, two series come to mind.

The first is the excellent 10-part production of *Master and Margarita* that aired on Russian television in 2005. Finally I could offer my brain a better informed image of Griboyedov House, apartment No. 50, the Variety Theater, Patriarch Ponds, not to mention the palace of Herod the Great. Since both of our non-Russian-speaking children loved this novel, I was very eager to share this production with them. Alas, despite the fact that there are half a dozen excellent translations of the novel, some enterprising Russians decided to create their own subtitles, apparently without consulting any English versions of the novel. The results make the series unwatchable for people who do not know Russian. Now I see that this production will soon be available on Netflix, so perhaps we can hope that the subtitles are being revised.

The second made-for-TV series that greatly improved my ability to visualize a beloved work of literature was the excellent “В кругу первом” (*First Circle*) that aired in 2006, also consisting of 10 parts. This does not appear to be available with English subtitles.

*Nota bene:* Some of these discs are only available in DVD PAL format. Several years ago we bought a PAL-compatible DVD player from russiandvd.com and it has given us broader access to Russian film and television.

### BE A BOOK REVIEWER FOR SLAVFILE

We hope you find the book reviews in this issue interesting. You too can review books for us, gaining information, fame and continuing education points. Any book not previously reviewed in our pages pertaining to translation, Slavic languages, literature or culture is appropriate. Please contact Lydia or Nora (see masthead for addresses) for further information. See page 7 for a list of reviewable books available at Russia Online, Inc. at a substantial discount for SlavFile readers.

## A FEW WORDS FROM RUSSIANDVD.COM

- If customers write to us ([info@russiandvd.com](mailto:info@russiandvd.com)) before placing their order and mention that they read about us in the *SlavFile*, we will e-mail them a \$3.00 Gift Certificate code which they will be able to use while placing their first order online.
- We have been in online business since 1998 and ship orders worldwide. We accept Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover cards. All online transactions involving personal information are secured using 128-bit encryption, as required by law.
- Some DVDs we sell are in PAL (European) video format (their format is noted next to DVDs' titles), and some of them are Region 5 only, so customers may need a multisystem and multiregion DVD player to play them. Information about purchasing such players from us can be found here:  
<http://www.russiandvd.com/store/helpwms.asp>

- Please note: players of the same model may be found elsewhere. They may play those PAL format DVDs that are region-free, but not some region-encoded PAL DVDs (like "Region 5 only"--some DVDs from Russia today are "Region-free," but some are "Region 5-encoded"--or, for example Region 2 from Europe--those purchased from amazon.co.uk are very often "Region 2-encoded"). These DVDs may not play on PAL players purchased elsewhere.
- We obtain players from our suppliers only on the condition that they will play region-encoded PAL discs.
- In addition to the usual free ground shipping in the U.S., we offer 5 free DVD titles with the purchase of a DVD player. The free titles must be selected from this list: [http://www.russiandvd.com/store/dvd\\_promo.asp](http://www.russiandvd.com/store/dvd_promo.asp) (link to the list is located under the picture of DVD player) and must be placed in the same basket with your the DVD player when you purchase it.



The American Translators Association (ATA) will host its **51st Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado (October 27-30)**.

This conference showcases diverse panel discussions, expert presentations, training workshops, and scholarly papers. Both general and language-specific sessions will be offered.

The conference also offers language professionals one of the best opportunities to network with colleagues. Additional conference activities include a Job Marketplace, a vendor exhibit hall, and ATA certification testing.

For conference information see

<http://www.atanet.org/conf/2010/>

For questions, contact Maggie Rowe, Membership Services Manager.

Phone: +1-703- 683-6100, extension 3001

Email: [Maggie@atanet.org](mailto:Maggie@atanet.org)

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Books include:

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О. Дорман, *Подстрочник. Жизнь Лилианны Лунгиной*. \$24.95.

С. Кузьмин, *Русско-Английский фразеологический словарь переводчика*. \$39.95

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To place an order please call (301)933-0607 or email: [books@russia-on-line.com](mailto:books@russia-on-line.com)

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## The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus

Reviewed by R.B. Worobec

Author: Serhii Plokhy

Publisher: Cambridge University Press

Year of Publication: 2006

Number of pages: 379

ISBN 978-0-521-86403-9

This monograph by Serhii Plokhy, presently a professor of history at Harvard, deals with the factors that determined the national identities of the Eastern Slavs. It covers the beginning of Rus' (Rus' Land, Kyivan Rus') in the ninth century and ends with Peter the Great's perestroika in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The introduction briefly surveys some of the modern views on national identity and nationalism. For example, Plokhy endorses the views of Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities*, 1983) in rejecting the notion of primordial national identities. However, he does feel that ethnic and national factors in premodern communities do play a role in the origins of modern national identities.

Many *SlavFile* readers will be generally familiar with the three major competing approaches to the origins of the East Slavic nations: a) Kyivan Rus' was one nation that split into three; b) Kyivan Rus' evolved into one of the East Slavic nations and the other two are its offshoots; or, c) Kyivan Rus' consisted of three proto-nations that evolved separately. Plokhy handles this hot potato in yet a fourth way.

He concentrates on intellectual history, i.e., on the detailed interpretation of historical, religious, political and literary texts created by the intellectual elites in the lands that once constituted Kyivan Rus'. He interprets these documents as demonstrating that Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia are relatively modern constructions that were periodically fine-tuned to fit new realities.

And these were complex realities indeed! They included the collapse of Kyivan Rus' in 1240, the ascendancy of Muscovy in the northeast, the rise of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its takeover of the rest of Rus' (now frequently called Ruthenia), the mutation of the Duchy into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the transformation of Muscovy into Russia.

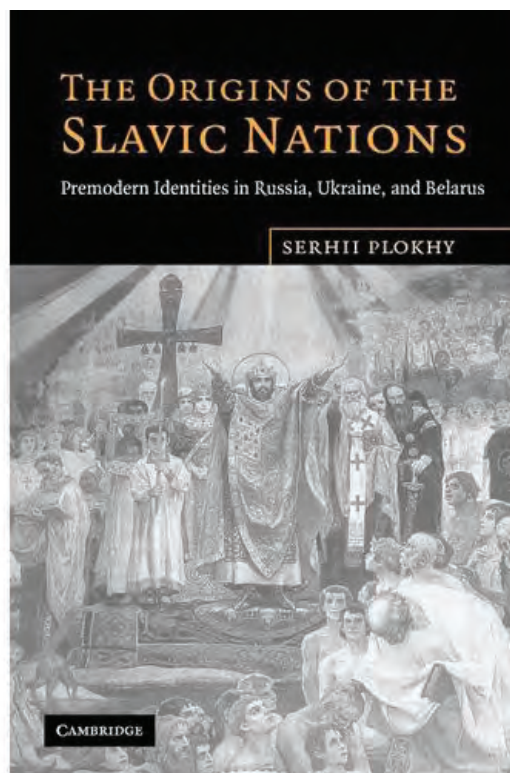
Plokhy notes the historiographic difficulties posed by the fact that Russian historical literature had not developed a separate designation for the "premodern population of Ukraine and Belarus." Up to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Muscovite texts referred to Ukrainians as Cherkassians, Lithuanians, Cossacks, etc.

He also reminds us that "Rus' meant very different things to different people at different times." Novgorod, for example, although a major metropolis of Rus', was not actually considered to be Rus' until a century after Kyivan Rus' fell. Prior to that time travelers are described as going from Rus' to Novgorod and vice versa.

In analyzing the contrast between the identities of Ruthenia and Muscovy, Plokhy concludes that what "shaped the Ruthenian identity was not loyalty to the ruler (as in Muscovy) but the rights of individual institutions, estates, and nations." In contrast, foreigners traveling in Muscovy had remarked on instances where people identified themselves simply as "the tsar's people."

Plokhy's book is a fascinating read even for a nonhistorian (although readers may wonder why "East" was not included in the first part of the title, since the South and West Slavs are not discussed in the book). It certainly adds a new historical perspective on what may have appeared to be more-or-less settled issues.

R.B. Worobec, our Contributing Editor for Ukrainian, received his doctorate in immunology from Tulane University Medical School in New Orleans. After a stint as a medical researcher and educator, he switched to biomedical information management at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC and freelances as a medical editor, translator, and lexicographer. He can be reached at: [rbw@inbox.com](mailto:rbw@inbox.com)







*Veteran translator looks back on nearly 40 years of translating.*

## The Unexamined Livelihood Is...

*Kim Braithwaite*

Freelance translators' stories that you see in the *ATA Chronicle*, *SlavFile*, or the *Translation Journal* are always upbeat. The authors recall their first stirrings of keen interest in languages, their first inklings of a future career, milestones along the way, perhaps one or more sidetracks (language related or not) before deciding the translating life is for them. They list the satisfactions of the work and its rewards, the challenges, the things they learn. The fulfillment.

My own story is like that, and has had "one or more sidetracks" along the way, too. Mine was what they call "a checkered career"—night dispatcher, military, business, traveling salesman, merchandiser, slacker, police clerk, Voice of America.... At the age of 41 in the summer of 1973, soon after I was booted out of my latest career (university teaching), I started doing translation for the government's Joint Publications Research Service and other outfits and getting paid for it, quite a lot eventually. It was liberating. No more wage slave I!

It was a whole different world, staying at home while my wife drove off to her own teaching job at the university. I rejoiced in the prospect of peaceful toil. All I had to do was meet my own set quota of 5,000 words a day and be on hand for the kids, who at 11 and 9 took care of themselves and were pretty well behaved.

For my first assignments I rough-typed the translation and had a professional typist do the final draft. As I've explained [elsewhere](#), rough-typing eight to ten hours a day those first couple of months took a heavy toll, physical and mental. It scared me, and I might have given up. But before long I learned to dictate on tapes for the typist to transcribe. This made my work vastly easier physically, quicker and more productive.

Now I was on a roll. Dictate five or six hours a day, deliver the tapes to the typist, have corrections made on the previous day's work, and mail it to the client. Plenty of time left over for relaxation, music, family fun, sports, friends. I received work in the mail two or three times a week, and there was more where that came from. Each month's income was bigger than the last.

I eagerly shared each new discovery with everyone, in particular two old friends of mine who both knew Chinese from the Army. In letters I described my routine and the fantastic rewards, and urged them to get in on it too. I was a flaming missionary! My proselytizing must have gotten real tedious real fast.

I do remember one little inkling of doubt, which I

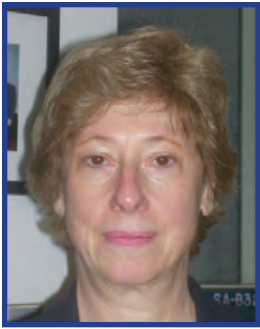
expressed in a letter to one of my friends. Peering into a distant and dimly conceivable future, I mused philosophically, "What if I find myself, years hence, wishing I had taken a different path instead, maybe going back to the Voice of America or finding another academic position? What if I grow to resent the daily chores that are so challenging and fulfilling here in my middle years?" In that dim future, would the querulous old geezer I might become one day mutter grumpily that his cocky self of decades before had *no right* to saddle his future self (the QOG) with the drab prospect of daily quotas?

Years before, in 1965, I had attended an ATA Conference in Washington DC as a reporter for the Georgian Service of the Voice of America. Several participants harshly condemned the practices and rates of JPRS, for which I was starting to do small jobs on the side (at the time, JPRS was only paying \$9 per thousand Russian words). What are they whining about, I thought. To me, a low paid civil servant and family man struggling to make ends meet, being able to earn extra bucks in my spare time was a godsend. But an older full-time freelancer who helped me with some tricky vocabulary and phrasing (he wouldn't let me pay him) unloaded a litany of gripes on me and wished to hell he'd never decided to go into translation. I also told my friend about a science fiction story I'd read in the 1950s. In it, a young man and his wife are ecstatic when he passes a battery of intelligence tests and is hired to work in a huge computer complex, with unbelievable pay. It is a thrilling prospect. But this is a dark 1950s fantasy of future technology, and it works like this: Our hero is one of thousands of employees whose *brains* are hooked into the operation's electronic circuits for 8-hour shifts. It is their brains that provide the working intelligence of the machinery. They are like *cogs* in the most dreadful meaning of that word. The work is relentless, grueling and spiritually draining, and each day's shift is worse than the one before. I don't remember how the story ends.

Does my own experience jibe with these scenarios? In fact it does not, although it is true that my fervor has cooled a bit in the span of nearly 40 years. Translation provides me with a good living, and I have always vowed I will never quit "until or unless the brain turns to mush." The leisure time I enjoy more than makes up for a few hours of serious mental toil. It's not heavy lifting in the hot sun, after all.

And the profession affords other real satisfactions. One of the things I treasure is being in contact with fellow translators all over the country, sharing ideas, helping each other with tricky terms, alerting each other to useful resources, cluck-clucking over client atrocities (!), passing on jobs,

*Continued on page 11*



## INTERVIEW WITH LYNN VISSON ABOUT HER NEW BOOK “СЛОВА-ХАМЕЛИОНЫ И МЕТАМОРФОЗЫ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ” (Chameleon Words and Transformations in Current English)

*Many of us hypervertbal translators and interpreters dream of writing our own books and having them published—and quite a few of us do realize this ambition. Chameleon Words, published this year by RValent, is Lynn Visson’s tenth published book. SlavFile interviewed her about it.*

### **How is this book different from the others available? To put this another way, what need did you perceive that this book responds to?**

Very simply, there is no other book on this subject, of “chameleon words,” which is in fact a translation into Russian of “weasel words.” I started thinking about the ways in which over the last few years meanings of so many English words have started to drift—such as, “surge,” “embrace,” “closure”—and then began contemplating how extremely difficult it would be to render all of these into Russian.

### **What were your criteria (formal or informal) for selecting words and phrases to discuss?**

I tried to select words (I had dozens more that I discarded) that are appearing in American speech and media with increasing frequency, that diverge from the original meaning of the word or phrase, and for which the translation into Russian is not obvious.

### **Although I never go into Russian, I read this book (in a single day) with great interest. However, clearly the main target audience consists of native speakers of Russian. Who precisely did you conceive to be the primary audience for this book? What possible secondary audiences do you envisage?**

Yes, I agree, the primary audience here is native speakers of Russian and translators (whatever their native language may be!) working from English into Russian. I also thought the book might prove useful to Russian students and teachers of English (particularly those on an advanced level), Russian translators and interpreters, or anyone interested in English-Russian translation problems.

### **How would you suggest this book be read by various audiences—as a text, as a reference, or as a work of analysis? An unusual feature of this book is the exercises that follow each chapter. As a teacher of translators, would you recommend that all readers whose native language is Russian complete these exercises for maximum benefit?**

The publisher was quite insistent that the book include exercises, and I had no objection, since so many of my books are being used in Russian classrooms. I think, though, that the book could also be useful to individuals studying English on their own, and could also serve as a textbook and as a work of analysis. I’m not sure I would lay claim to having written a “reference” book, since the meanings of these words change so rapidly, but perhaps for at least some time to come it may be of some use in that capacity.

### **I was impressed by the amount of research that clearly went into this book, both of the scholarly linguistic and other literature on the chameleon word phenomenon and of the media to find examples of usage. Would you describe the research process for us? So many of the examples are so recent (from the Obama era) that you must have been well into writing when you found them. Did you continually have to update the text to add new examples you found?**

It did involve a great deal of research. For nearly four years I read around widely on polysemy [multiplicity of meaning] and on linguistic drift, and began clipping articles from the media, Xeroxing book passages and noting down interesting uses of these words in conversation and speeches. The choice of words and phrases was extremely time-consuming, and it took considerable time and work to decide on the categories and arrangement of the words and phrases. Gradually, the categories began falling into place and ultimately included the language of the media, political and social terminology, the language of pop psychology and business, and changes in meaning resulting from changes in intonation. Once I had my lists ready, though, and had thought through the organization of the material, I opted for the most recent examples, as these are the most relevant ones. I was adding new examples up to the last minute before the manuscript went to the printer. I have dozens of older examples that are still in my files.

The writing and production process also went very slowly since this was the first book that I wrote entirely in Russian—all my other books were translated from English into Russian by professional translators in Russia. For this one, however, I thought that it would be a poor idea to give the manuscript to a translator when the whole point of the book is the translation of these words, and I focused a great deal of time on figuring out what the best translations would be. Of course, during that process I consulted heavily with native speakers of



*Continued on page 11*

Russian—I could never have done this without my husband.

**While many of the example usages are followed by source citations, some are not. Where did these others come from? Did you compose them yourself, overhear them, or what?**

The examples without citations are either ones I heard people using in conversation or got from the radio, TV or films for which I could not be completely sure that I'd managed to write down the whole example. I don't believe that I composed any of them myself.

**You make no secret of the fact that you believe many of the usages you discuss to be indicative of what you consider to be deplorable trends in American culture. Did you debate whether to include these opinions, which are not usually present in works of this type, or was the decision a “no-brainer” for you?**

A very good question! I think it was a no-brainer. I am more and more concerned by the decline of spoken English, and this kind of deterioration is not peculiar to English, as Krongauz has noted in his “Русский язык на грани нервного срыва” (The Russian Language on the Brink of a Nervous Breakdown). And I've always been concerned about speakers of other languages—and in particular Russian speakers—trying to imitate substandard colloquial English—“like,” “you know what I mean,” etc.—because they think that this shows that they're “with it.”

**After reading this book, I found myself wanting to send you a long message, containing my reactions, points of disagreement, additions, etc. Are you collecting this kind of thing? Where should reactions be sent?**

I'm sure readers will have additions or comments to make, and that's the way it should be!

This is “fuzzy country,” when we deal with the ways the meanings of words drift away from their original sense. And, as I tried to emphasize in the book, no one can know how long these meanings will stay or whether they will eventually drop out of the language. The ones I chose for the book, though, have mostly been around long enough to acquire their “credentials” as valid English words or phrases.

I'm therefore very interested in readers' reactions, additions, disagreements, etc. On the last page of the book there's a request to send such comments to RValent. But that's mostly aimed at Russian readers; I'd love to have reactions from American readers at the e-mail address: [lynnavissson@gmail.com](mailto:lynnavissson@gmail.com)

**Where and how can SlavFile readers obtain a copy of this book?**

It should be available by late spring or so in the U.S. from [www.russia-on-line.com](http://www.russia-on-line.com), or can be ordered from the publisher, [www.rvalent.ru](http://www.rvalent.ru).

having a bit of fun with multilingual wordplay and jokes. It means a lot to people like us who work in our own little bailiwicks at home.

And yet... Once in a while, faced with the day's project, I do kind of resent it. There must be days in any translator's life when he or she says “I wish I didn't have to do this.” For that matter, even the most creative careers have to involve a certain amount of routine, and the satisfaction can get lost amid the humdrummery. I imagine that artists, for example, or musicians, must have days when the project or performance looms as just another chore. But they owe it to their fans (clients), and they have to earn a living, don't they? *We* have to earn a living don't we?

It might be interesting to conduct a survey exploring what translators *don't* like about their job, how much of it is fulfillment, say, and how much is, frankly, humdrum routine (“Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 10...”), whether they would take the same path if they had it to do over again.

A lot of it surely depends on the subject matter. When I started full time (earlier I had done part-time translating while holding down regular jobs), I brashly checked about a dozen items on JPRS's list of specialties—agriculture, politics, energy, chemistry, transportation, economics, etc. I wasn't trying to fool anyone. Clueless as I was, I thought I really *could* translate those fields. And—it was a matter of “sink or swim,” a choice between success or poverty and disgrace—before long I really could. Clients liked my work and gave me several commendations.

That's not all. The books and articles that I was assigned to translate were variegated, interesting and freshly informative. I was learning all kinds of exciting new things. I told my friends, “Translation can be broadening.” (And the long-term Georgian scanning project that I've described elsewhere [see link above] was even more fascinating, eye-opening and, yes, fulfilling).

Eventually, though, I hooked up with a corporate establishment to anchor my work flow and income, and the range of subject matter shrank considerably. Challenging it is, certainly. And most of it interesting enough—frequently even amusing—to make up for the diminished variety. I have no complaints (well, maybe a few). And no regrets.

Would I take the same path again? Does it even make *sense* to second-guess the past from the vantage point of now? But.... Yes I probably would.

*NOTE TO SELF:*

OK, you've examined it. Now be of good cheer.  
And get back to work.

Kim Braithwaite, who lives in San Diego, CA, translates mostly from Russian and Georgian and occasionally from Belarusan and Ukrainian. He enjoys it most of the time. He can be reached at [kbtrans@cox.net](mailto:kbtrans@cox.net).

# Let the Translator Beware: The Story of an Attempted Scam

Michael Ishenko



I would like to share an experience I had with *SlavFile* readers. A couple of months ago, I signed up with an online translation database called Translation Directory. They act as an intermediary between translation requestors

and translators and charge no fees for their services. I started getting information about potential translation jobs from them, but soon realized their focus was on translators living in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, who charge much, much less than we do here in the United States. Then one day, just as I was about to close my account as useless, I received a message from an American located in Romania, who was giving presentations on the current financial crisis, through an interpreter, to Russian-speaking audiences. He had some presentations and articles that he needed translated into Russian, so I reviewed the materials and offered him my services at my lowest possible U.S. rates. Still, since the documents were pretty large, my total came to about \$1,200. He emailed to say he thought my fees were reasonable. I wrote back and asked him to send me a check for the full amount and, after the check had been cleared, he would have his translation back within one week. He agreed, but asked me to wait for the check for a week or two, as a colleague of his was returning to the States and would mail me the check as soon as he arrived here. So I did not start translation, but waited for the check to arrive first instead. A couple of weeks later, I received a cashier's check for \$4,000. This made me very suspicious at once, but I wrote him anyhow and asked for an explanation. This is what he wrote:

*Hi Michael,*

*I just got to know this evening that my associate (Isaac Hunter) made out a Cashier's Check for the wrong amount (\$4,000) to you. I instructed him to send just \$1,200 to you and have the rest of my funds sent to my Russian interpreter in Romania, but he made a mistake sending the whole of my funds to you. It seems the figure I faxed to him actually got him confused. However, I am very sorry about this mistake.*

*Kindly proceed to your bank to have the check deposited. As soon as check clears your bank, deduct your own funds(\$1,200) plus whatever tax the check*

*may incur and have the rest of the funds sent to my Russian interpreter in Romania via Western Union using the information below. The fee for the transfer can also be deducted from my balance as that's not a problem. I am very sorry for the inconvenience this may cause you once again.*

*Please, provide me with the MTCN and the exact amount sent or scan the western union receipt to me as soon as the transaction is done so I can forward it to stely. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon. Have a wonderful evening.*

*My interpreter's information:*

*First Name: Steliana Elena Last Name: Panait  
City: Giurgiu Country: Romania*

*Warm Regards,  
Hanks.*

Well, I googled "cashier check scams" and found all the information I needed on how this particular type of scam works. The check, by the way, looked very authentic, except that the drawer was a defunct bank (Indymac) in Pasadena, CA. If I had taken it to my local bank to cash, the bank would have been obligated by law to cash it on the same day, or no later than within two days. Meanwhile, Hanks expected me to send him \$2,800. Instead, he received a goodbye letter from me. (Just out of curiosity, I googled a couple of phrases from the documents he wanted me to translate and located them on the Internet. It was a presentation prepared by a team of German lecturers.) It takes about a week or two for a bank to clear an out-of-town check, so even if I hadn't sent him any money, my bank would ultimately have demanded from me a full refund of the amount plus penalty. TRANSLATORS, BE ALERT!

## Part II. Late-breaking Scam

*Just before we went to press we received the following message from Michael Ishenko. LRS*

Lydia, I thought this correspondence might be of interest to you (my cashier check saga continued):

From: Jessica <doy\_expert@yahoo.com>  
To: mellow060@yahoo.com  
Sent: Fri, Apr 16, 2010 3:28 am  
Subject: In need of a russian translator

Hello My name is Jessica Powell, I am presently in United Kingdom now for some events and by the 30th of April 2010, I will need to talk to some section of Russian Speakers. I will want you to help convert my word document to Russian for the purpose of my Russian speakers. I will like to know how much it would

*Continued on page 13*

**READERS: BE ON THE LOOKOUT NOT ONLY FOR SCAMS  
BUT FOR A NEW COLUMN BY MICHAEL ISHENKO,  
TENTATIVELY TITLED "MORE THAN WORDS,"  
TO BEGIN IN THE SUMMER SLAVFILE**



## WORD BUZZ: NEW WORDS IN RUSSIAN

### Стритрейсеры and стендистки

Yuliya Baldwin

*Editors' note: For the benefit of those who would like to read this article but need help with the Russian phrases, we have posted a glossary on the additional [re-sources page](#) of the SLD website.*

**Стритрейсинг** as an event and a **стритрейсер** subculture have existed in Russia for quite some time. However, if there still is anyone who is not sure what **стритрейсер** means, the 2008 Russian **фильм-экшн** “Стритрейсеры” with the straightforward slogan “**Бензин, резина и любовь**” certainly presents a vivid image of the word’s etymology. Moreover, the movie propelled this neologism into the Russian language, and also encouraged the growth of dangerous **дрэг-рейсинг** (drag-racing) on Russian city streets, although recently participants have had to learn to beware of **спид-камеры** installed by **ГИБДД (ГАИ)** all over Moscow and other big cities!

**Стритрейсеры** are **уличные гонщики** who in order to improve the performance and handling of their vehicles frequently modify them by **тюнинг** or **заточка/расточка тачки**. In order to enhance a car’s looks, **стайлинг, рестайлинг, внешний тюнинг** or **тюнинг салона** may be strongly recommended by auto shops. A desired **крутой** car **апгрейд** is usually performed in a specialized **тюнинг-ателье** that could be easily found in

listings in **тюнинг журналы**. The result of all upgrades is commonly referred to with slang expressions like “**заряженная тачка**” (a pimped car) or “**точило**” (a fast car).

For fun and prestige, a **стритрейсер** might take a **стендистка** (explained below) for a **тест-драйв** in his **лоурайдер** or **хетчбэк**. It’s certainly more amusing **топтать педаль** (accelerate/brake) and burn **петроль** (petroleum) with **шикарная гёрла** in the front seat or a few **чики** in the back. Modern auto shows pride themselves not only on exhibiting **крутые тюнингованные тачки**, but also are famous for exquisite **тюнингованные девушки** known as **стендистки**. **Стендисты** and **стендистки** are defined by modeling agencies as:

*Девушки и мужчины модели, без участия которых крайне тяжело представить товары и услуги фирмы на любой выставке или презентации. Обязанностями стендисток и стендистов являются встречи посетителей стенда, распространение рекламных и иных материалов и коммуникация с потенциальными клиентами для раскрытия интересующих их вопросов ([glamourmedia.ru](#)).*

To wrap up my digest on **стритрейсеры** and **стендистки**, I’d like to quote few lines from the aforementioned movie’s **саундтрек** (as it is often the case with Russian pop songs, the song writer didn’t exert himself working either on the rhymes or meaning):

*Continued on page 14*

### The Story of an Attempted Scam

*Continued from page 12*

cost to convert the word document and I will like to have the name and address you would want my associate in North Carolina USA to mail the check payment to. Lastly, how long it would take you to translate the document.

And my response:

Hello Jessica,

You certainly don’t sound like a business presenter to me, because your English is elementary-school level. I found the document you need to have translated online. Here it is:

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/detail?itemId=1077499966&type=RESOURCES>

Your “associate in North Carolina” and you should also review this:

<http://banking.about.com/od/securityandsafety/a/cashierscheckfd.htm>

I think what you and your “associate” need is not a Russian translator, but a prison term. Do you really believe you can scam a professional who can see through your primitive criminal brain? What you lack is intellect, education, and style. Nothing like the lady from the movie *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. See it — maybe it’ll teach you something. I doubt it, however — scams like that one are definitely out of your league. Go to school, girl (or boy), learn something! And start with English.

Compassionately,  
The Russian Translator Who Failed You

Michael Ishenko translates from English into Russian, from Russian into English, and from Ukrainian into English. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and can be reached at [ishenko@aol.com](mailto:ishenko@aol.com).

Машины мчатся в путь,      The cars are speeding,  
Учащается пульс,      The pulse is beating,  
Пусть уходит грусть,      Let sorrow go away,  
Я больше не боюсь!      I'm no longer afraid!<sup>1</sup>

### **New Car Talk<sup>2</sup>**

None of the “car talk” below could have been imagined, let alone understood by drivers of **Жигули-копейка**, **Москвич-Пирожок (пикап)** or **Запор (Запорожец)** some twenty years ago. Nor would they have dreamt of the cars that today so seductively, and alas, unattainably for most of the population, crowd auto showrooms and auto shows in modern free-market Russia. Yet, this vocabulary is a mundane reality for present-day car owners in spite of the fact that most of these words are clumsy loaners from the global language (examples are taken from yandex.ru):

**линейка автомобилей** (модельный ряд) – lineup  
“Пришла пора приобщиться к самому большому кроссоверу в линейке Hyundai и российским автомобилистам.”

**клиренс** (дорожный просвет) – clearance  
“Нужно лишь держать в голове то, что **клиренс** у этой модели невелик.”

**краш-тест** – crash test  
“**Краш-тест** - это проверка городских и спортивных машин на безопасность и является преднамеренным воссозданием ДТП с желанием выявить уровень ущерба.” (ДТП – дорожно-транспортное происшествие)

**тест-драйв, тестдрайвер** – test drive, test driver  
“**Приглашаем Вас на выездной тест-драйв внедорожников “Охота 4x4 с Nissan”!** Компания Nissan разработала специальный костюм для **тест-драйверов** новых автомобилей.”

**гибридный автомобиль (гибрид)** – a hybrid car  
“В новом и динамично развивающемся секторе **гибридных автомобилей** производители идут на множество ухищрений. Изготовители и средства массовой информацией называют множество автомобилей ‘гибридами’, создавая ложное впечатление, что они все одинаковы.”

**круиз-контроль** – cruise control  
“Еще раз отметим: наиболее полезен **круиз-контроль** тем, кто часто и много ездит по трассе – водителям грузовиков, в первую очередь.”

**климат-контроль** – climate control  
“Кто-то считает **климат-контролем** обычный автокондиционер, а кто-то даже – штатный отопитель салона. Ну, а кому-то и открытая форточка – **климат-контроль** (шутка).”

Car Body Style (типы автомобильных кузовов):  
**купе** – from the French verb *couper*, to cut-coupe  
**седан** – sedan

**хардтоп** (жесткий верх) – hardtop  
**фастбэк** (особая покатая линия крыши, плавно переходящая в линию багажника) – fastback  
**хэтчбэк** (дверь в задней стенке и укороченный задний свес—hatchback, *hatch* – люк, *back* – сзади)  
**лимузин** - фр. *Limousine*: **стретч-лимузин** – stretch limousine  
**лифтбэк** (*поднимающаяся задняя часть*) – liftback  
**минивэн** (небольшой фургон) – minivan  
**джип** (внедорожник) – sport utility vehicle  
**родстер** (двухместный кузов со складываемым мягким верхом—roadster  
**пикап** – pickup truck.

“И хотя **пикап** – машина по определению сугубо утилитарная, многие американцы покупают такие машины “просто так”, потому что нравится.”

### **Car Brands (марки автомобилей)**

Although in most cases the English spelling is used when mentioning foreign cars in advertisements and media, Russians do not *pronounce* most brands the same way Americans do. Often the only difference is that the stress is shifted, but sometimes the pronunciation is so different that the word is hardly recognizable to American ears. Here are just a few examples of the most popular car models and their “Russian” names:

Acura (**Акура**), Audi (**Ауди**), BMW (**БэЭмВэ**), Cadillac (**Кадиллак**), Ford Escape (**Форд Эскейп**), Honda (**Хонда**), Honda Civic (**Хонда Цивик**), Honda CRV (**Хонда СРВ**), Hyundai (**Хундай**), Hyundai Tucson (**Хундай Туссан**), Jaguar (**Ягуар**), Lexus (**Лексус**), Mitsubishi (**Митцубиси**), Nissan (**Ниссан**), Nissan Micra (**Ниссан Микра**), Nissan Pathfinder (**Ниссан Патфайндер**), Subaru (**Субару**), Toyota Prius (**Тойота Приус**), Toyota Tundra (**Тойота Тундра**), Volkswagen (**Фольксваген**), Volkswagen Beetle (**Фольксваген Жук**).

*Not sold in the USA:* SsangYong (**Ссанг енг**), Brilliance (**Бриллианс**), CHERY (**Чери**), Daihatsu (**Дайхатсу**), Geely (**Джили**), Great Wall (**Грейт вол**).

Drive safely! **Счастливого пути!**

Yuliya can be reached at yuliyabaldwin@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> All translations are done by the author.

<sup>2</sup> All examples are taken from yandex.ru.

# SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone



The following was sent to me by Lynn Visson, who got it from a friend, who got it off the Moscow Internet. We usually do not print long excerpts from the Internet but this one was too good not to share in nearly its entirety. I just hope that the majority of you have not already seen it. The italicized phrases in parentheses are my attempts (with the help of Vladimir Kovner) to render the tone and meaning of the original for readers who do not know Russian.

## A Russian-English Business Dictionary

Господи, это опять вы.... (*Oh my God, not another email from you.*)

Thank you very much for your email.

Нам эта ваша сделка сто лет не нужна, но ресторанчик вы выбрали неплохой... (*We couldn't care less about working with you, but the restaurant you have chosen isn't all that bad.*)

This meeting could be an opportunity for our two institutions to investigate if there is any interest in this business activity.

Если до завтра не предоставите документы, пеняйте на себя. Тут вам не детский сад. (*If you do not provide the documents by tomorrow, then you will only have yourself to blame for whatever happens. This is not preschool, you know.*)

We will do our best to proceed with your request, however for the best result the documents should reach us not later than tomorrow.

Вы читать умеете? (*Don't you know how to read?*)

You can find this information in our Terms and Conditions.

Сколько можно напоминать! (*How many times do you need to be reminded?*)

This is our kind reminder

Неужели так сложно подписать документ там, где нужно? (*Is it really that hard to sign on the line marked signature?*)

Please sign in the place marked with a yellow sticker

Что у тебя в школе было по математике?! (*I can just imagine what grade you got in arithmetic when you were in school!*)

Let's reconfirm the figures.

Мы лучше сделаем это сами. (*We had better do this ourselves [so that it is done right].*)

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Я уже сто раз вам это присылал. (*I have already sent this same thing to you at least 100 times.*)

Kindly find attached.

Ага, сейчас все брошу и побегу разбираться. (*Sure thing, I will immediately drop everything and rush to do your bidding.*)

I'll look into it and revert soonest.

Да поймите же вы наконец... (*How long is it going to take to get this into your head?*)

Please kindly review the matter again.

Надеюсь, что теперь вы перестанете надоедать своими вопросами. (*Maybe now you will stop pestering us with your stupid questions?*)

I hope this helps, otherwise please do not hesitate to contact us.

Какой же вы зануда... (*What a pest you are...*)

Thank you for your patience.

Даже и не надейтесь, что мы откроем вам счет. (*Don't even dream about our opening an account for you.*)

We will let you know in due course.

У нас не те масштабы, чтобы возиться с вашей мелочью. (*We're doing big business here and cannot be bothered with your piddling concerns.*)

We would be happy to offer you the most favorable conditions on a case-to-case basis.

Вот когда подрастете, тогда и приходите. (*If you ever get big enough, maybe we can do business.*)

So if you have eventually some needs from your clientele, it can have real added-value.

Ой-ой, напугал! (*Oh, oh! We're shaking in our boots.*)

We regret to know that you are not satisfied with our services.

Ну и пожалуйста. Не очень-то и хотелось. (*To hell with it. Who needs your business?*)

We look forward to hearing from you.

Хотя бы в пятницу отстаньте уже. (*One would think you'd have the decency to leave me alone on a Friday.*)

Good to hear from you and have a nice weekend.

Да идите вы знаете куда... (*You can go you know where.*)

We consider the matter settled and close our files.

Да пошли вы все на \*\*й! (*You can all stuff it.*)

Your opinion is very important to us.

I recently acquired two very large books containing the "best" cartoons from the *New Yorker* magazine from its founding until 2004. As part of my attempt to track references to Russian literary classics in U.S. cartoons, comics, advertisements, etc., I read these from cover to cover. I reasoned that if I had, over the years, been able to find so many interesting mentions in the middle-brow comics section of the *Washington Post*, how many more would I be likely to

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# IDIOM SAVANTS: Threefold Idioms

Vladimir Kovner and Lydia Stone



We continue our series of number idioms with the number three. Considering the importance of the concept of the trinity in predominantly Christian countries, it is surprising that there are so few of these, and the only one with even a vague religious connotation being **Бог троицу любит**. Compared to the strong themes in both sets of two idioms, the only themes we can point to here is three as a small number, and three as an outsider with respect to a group of two (e.g., in **third party, three's a crowd, две собаки дерутся, and третья не приставай**.) As we say in every issue, we invite readers' comments, additions, corrections, and idioms in other Slavic languages. Our addresses are on the masthead.

## EQUIVALENT IDIOMS IN BOTH LANGUAGES

- 1. Third time's the charm (lucky).** Statement of a superstition, frequently used when someone is trying to do something for the third time, after having failed the previous two. *His two ex-wives got together and gave the couple matching tee shirts that said "Third time's lucky!" as a wedding present.* **Бог троицу любит.** Дословно: удача придёт на третий раз, на третий раз повезет? Обе его бывшие жены вместе подарили ему на свадьбу пару футболок с надписью: "Бог троицу любит".
- 2. Third party.** Someone other than the two main parties to a transaction or relationship. *We paid rent to a third party, not the house owner.* **Третья (независимая) сторона / третье лицо** (напр. для урегулирования конфликта); **независимый / сторонний наблюдатель, арбитр.** *Мы платили аренду третьему лицу, а не владельцу дома. Сф.: Из третьих рук.* Не непосредственно от / у кого-либо. *Я не гарантирую авторство этой картины. Я купил её не у автора, а из третьих рук. I cannot guarantee who painted this picture, since I bought it from a third party, and not the painter himself.*
- 3. Third rate.** Of extremely low quality. *I didn't come on my dream trip to Paris to stay at a third-rate hotel.* **Третьесортного / плохого качества; третьесортный; третьестепенный; дешёвый; захудалый.** *Я приехал в Париж, о чём давно мечтал, не для того, чтобы остановиться (жить) в третьесортном отеле.*
- 4. Three strikes and you're out.** Three chances are all you get, or if you do something again (for the third time), you are in trouble. *I would date a man who had been divorced twice but not three times. Three strikes and you're out.* **До двух раз прощают, а в третий бьют** (из В. Даля). Три ошибки / три нарушения (закона), и для тебя всё кончено. *Ещё одно – третья – предупреждение за опоздания на работу, и ты будешь уволен.* Аналог в детской считалке: "Первый раз прощается, второй раз запрещается, а на третий раз не простим мы вас". *Я бы ещё пошла на свидание с человеком, который развёлся дважды, но не три раза!*
- 5. Three's a crowd.** The last part of the saying, *two's company, three's a crowd.* An admonition or excuse not to intrude on the privacy of a courting couple, or other pair. *No, of course, I'm not going to the movies with them—three's a crowd.* **Третий лишний** Нет, конечно, я не собираюсь идти в кино с ними, третий лишний.

## IDIOMS IN ENGLISH ONLY

- 1. As phony as a three dollar bill.** Extremely and perhaps obviously phony. (Three dollar bills have never existed.) *That smile of his is phony as a three dollar bill.* **Очевидная фальшивка / подделка.** Дословно: фальшивый, как трёхдолларовая купюра / бумажка (трёхдолларовые купюры никогда не выпускались). *Его улыбка была фальшивой, как трёхдолларовая купюра.*
- 2. Fish and visitors stink in three days.** A recommendation to guests not to outstay their welcome, or a justification for not prolonging a visit. *We asked them to stay a week, but they cited the saying about fish and visitors and came for only three days.* **Дорогие гости, а не надоели ли вам хозяева?** Рекомендация не засиживаться в гостях или оправдание раннего ухода из гостей. Дословно: Рыба и гости начинают плохо пахнуть (протухнут) через три дня. *Мы просили их остановиться у нас на неделю, но они сослались на известную поговорку о гостях и рыбе, которая протухает через три дня, и приехали к нам всего на три дня.*
- 3. I'll give you three guesses.** Said when the answer to a question is considered to be obvious. *What are we having for supper? It's the day after Thanksgiving, I'll give you three guesses.* **Угадай с трех раз. Ясно, как Божий день;** *Что у нас на ужин?* Вчера был День благодарения, так что угадай с трех раз.
- 4. Third degree.** Prolonged and harsh interrogation, possibly accompanied by rough treatment, used to get information or obtain a confession; from the intensive

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test given to freemasons before they can rise to the third degree of master. *Her boyfriend was afraid that her father would give him the third degree.* **Допрос с пристрастием / с применением пытки / истязаний; грубое обращение.** Дословно: третья степень. *Ухажёр боялся, что её отец устроит ему допрос с пристрастием.*

5. **Third rail.** Something that is dangerous to tamper with or a topic that is frequently avoided because it is so controversial; comes from the high voltage rail that powers an electric train. *All the congressmen avoided the mention of the increase in their salaries like the third rail.* **Неприкасаемая / противоречивая / спорная идея, тема** для любого политика, государственного чиновника и т.п. (напр. повышение налогов), которая может привести к политической смерти. Дословно: третий (токопроводящий) рельс. *Все конгрессмены как огня избегали упоминания о повышении своей зарплаты.*
6. **Three cheers for.** Congratulations to, or good for someone, thanks to. *Three cheers for Liv Bliss for helping with the proofreading for the last issue.* **Гип-гип-ура! Троекратное ура** (в честь кого-либо)! **Да здравствует** (кто-либо)! Молодец (кто-либо). *Троекратное ура в честь Лив Блосс за корректуру последнего выпуска нашего журнала!*
7. **Three martini lunch.** A long, expensive, alcoholic and tax-deductible restaurant lunch actually or supposedly indulged in by high level business executives. This phenomenon, which is possibly less common than previously for a number of reasons, casts the executives indulging in it in a bad light, since it implies that they take unnecessary time from work (time not allowed their employees), further impairing their productivity by arriving back from lunch drunk, and all this at least partially occurs at the taxpayers expense. *Remark to someone returning to the office at 2:00 p.m.: "Did you enjoy your three-martini lunch?"* **Деловой ленч / обед в середине дня с алкоголем** (списываемый на бизнес). Дословно: ленч с тремя мартини. *Замечание кому-либо, вернувшемуся в офис в 2 часа пополудни: "Как тебе понравился ваш деловой ленч?"*
8. **Three moves is as bad as a fire.** Description of the disruption caused by moving to a new house. *"Why is George in such a terrible mood these days?" "They are moving to a new house and you know what they say about three moves being as bad as a fire."* **Три раза переехать из дома в дом / из квартиры в квартиру – всё равно, что пережить пожар.** *"Почему у Джорджа последние дни такое плохое настроение?" "Они переезжают в новый дом, а ты знаешь, что говорят в таких случаях: "Три раза переехать из дома в дом – то же, что пожар пережить".*

9. **Three on a match.** (Not really an idiom but too good a story to leave out.) From Wikipedia *"(also known as third on a match) is a supposed superstition among soldiers during the Crimean War to World War I. The superstition goes that if three soldiers lit their cigarettes from the same match, one of the three would be killed or that the man who was third on the match would be shot. Since then it has been considered bad luck for three people to share a light from the same match.*

*The belief was that when the first soldier lit his cigarette, the enemy would see the light; when the second soldier lit his cigarette from the same match, the enemy would take aim and note if the soldier was friendly or foe; when the third soldier lit his cigarette from the same match, the enemy would fire.*

*There was in fact no such superstition during the First World War. (The light would not be visible if the soldiers were in a trench or bunker, as they usually were when not attacking.) The superstition was alleged to have been invented about a decade later by the Swedish match tycoon Ivar Kreuger in an attempt to get people to use more matches, but it appears he merely made very shrewd use of the already existing belief, which may date to the Boer War. In the 1916 novel "The Wonderful Year" the following explanation is given: "It arises out of the Russian funeral ritual in which the three altar candles are lit by the same taper. To apply the same method of illumination to three worldly things like cigars or cigarettes is regarded as an act of impiety and hence as unlucky."*

**Троим прикурить от одной спички.** Старый предрассудок военных лет, что третий солдат, прикуривший от одной и той же спички, будет ранен или убит.

10. **Three R's.** The educational basics. From: "reading, writing, and 'rithmetic." Since only one word begins with "r" this was originally a joke, but is now used quite seriously. *I've heard that this school is good for children's self-esteem and social development, but how about the three R's?* **Чтение, письмо и арифметика.** *Я слышал, что в этой школе хорошо поставлено воспитание у детей чувства собственного достоинства и социальных навыков, а вот как насчёт чтения, письма и арифметики?*
11. **Three-ring circus.** A scene or situation of total chaos. *We can't hold the book club meeting there; her house is a three-ring circus, especially at bedtime.* **Бедлам; неразбериха; полный хаос; шум и гам; "цирк".** Мы не можем собираться на встречи книжного клуба в её доме; у них – настоящий бедлам, особенно, когда детей укладывают спать.
12. **Three sheets to the wind.** Drunk. Reference is to the sheets, ropes holding a sail, and probably describes a situation where a boat is tossed about when they are flapping loose. *My uncle came home last night three sheets to the wind...* **Вдрызг / в стельку / мерт-**

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## IDIOM SAVANTS *Continued from page 17*

**векки пьяный.** Дословно: три шкота на ветру. На парусном судне шкоты – тросы и цепи, служащие, среди прочего, для постановки и уборки парусов, для растягивания нижних углов парусов. *Пролой ночью мой дядя вернулся домой мертвецки пьяным.*

13. **Three score and ten.** The supposed appropriate length of a human life. From the Bible: *The days of our years are three score years and ten. Psalms XC, 10.* The month before his seventieth birthday, my extremely healthy uncle jokingly kept talking about “three-score and ten” and suggesting the need for funeral arrangements. **Семьдесят.** Из Библии: *"Дней лет наших семьдесят лет... (В русских версиях Библии – Псалом 89,10.)* (Note: contemporary translations of the Bible into English also use seventy instead of three score and ten.) *За месяц до своего семидесятилетия мой вполне здоровый дядюшка, шутя говорил о библейском “семидесятилетии” как пределе человеческого жизни и о том, что пора бы заняться организацией похорон.*
14. **Three squares (a day).** Three filling (if not gourmet) meals every day. *During the Depression many young men joined the Army just to get three squares. Полноценное трёхразовое питание; три плотных / полных еды / приёма пищи (в день). Во время Великой депрессии многие молодые люди поступали на службу в армию только ради трёхразового питания.*
15. **Triple threat.** Someone who is adept in three areas. From football. *The new man we hired is a real triple threat; he has degrees in computer science, accounting and business. Человек, искусный в трёх областях / одинаково хорошо владеющий тремя профессиями; универсальный специалист / эксперт* (напр. универсальный футболист, одинаково хорошо владеющий искусством обводки, скоростью и ударом). *Наш новый сотрудник – настоящий универсальный специалист; у него три диплома: компьютеры, бухгалтерия и бизнес.*

## IDIOMS IN RUSSIAN ONLY

1. **В тридевяти царстве, в тридесятом государстве.** Also **За тридевять земель** (из сказок). Очень далеко. Из А.С. Пушкина. 1) *"Негде, в тридевяти царстве, в тридесятом государстве / Жил был славный царь Дадон".* 2) *"...Что готов душою страстной / За царевною прекрасной / Он пешком идти отсель / Хоть за тридевять земель".* **Very far away.** Literally: in the **twenty-seventh kingdom, in the twenty-seventh land.** 2) **Beyond the twenty-seventh kingdom.** In all cases twenty-seventh (dating from a time when there was number system based on nine) is expressed as “three nines.” 1) *Somewhere in a kingdom far away, in a land beyond, lived great Tsar Dadon.* 2) *A passionate soul, for the*

*sake of the beautiful Tsarevna, he was willing to walk to the ends of the earth.*

2. **Две собаки дерутся (грызутся), третья не приставай (не суйся).** Синоним: свои собаки грызутся, чужая не приставай. Не вмешивайся не в своё дело. *"Они поссорились, они и помирились... Не лезьте в их дела. Помните русскую поговорку: две собаки грызутся, третья не приставай!"* Said when two people (especially family members) are arguing, with the meaning of **keep out of it—it is none of your business. Don't stick your nose in. Don't get between the bark and the tree (French proverb, rare in English).** *They fought without your help and they will make up the same way. Don't get involved. Have you ever heard the saying: Don't get between the bark and the tree.*
3. **Драть (содрать) три шкуры.** Безжалостно, бессовестно эксплуатировать; вымогать с кого-то; притеснять кого-то. *За вход в любой музей или театр в России с иностранцев дерут три шкуры. To exploit someone, to bleed someone dry. Foreigners are bled dry in Russia when they buy tickets to any museum or theater.*
4. **Заблудиться в трёх соснах.** Не разобраться в самом простом. *"Наши-то совсем ещё ничего не понимают. Куда им! В трёх соснах заблудятся!"* Not to be able to understand the simplest thing, **to put two and two together and get three.** *Our guys still don't get it at all. How could they! They're the type to put two and two together and get three.*
5. **За троих** (делать что-либо). Делать что-либо, напр. работать, есть столько, что впору троим / очень много. Из Джека Прилацкого. Перевод ВК: *"Мой пёс, он очень жадный пёс, / Он ест за трёх собак, / Но он же мой любимый пёс, / Мне без него никак!"* **Enough for three people.** Translation of Jack Prelutsky. *"My dog, he is a greedy dog, / He eats enough for three, / He is the dog for me".*
6. **(На) третье.** (На) десерт; сладкое блюдо к обеду. *Она поможет тебе не только приготовить вкусный десерт на третье, но и красиво подать его.* **(For) the third (dessert) course.** *She will not only teach you to prepare a tasty dish for dessert, but how to serve it beautifully as well.*
7. **Наврать / налгать / наобещать / нахвастать с три короба.** Много налгать / наобещать, сильно преувеличивая. Из Некрасова. *"Нахвастает с три короба; а уличишь – отшутится."* Literally: from three boxes. **Exaggerate outrageously, tell bald-face lies, talk someone's ear off, promise the moon.** *He brags outrageously and when you call him on it, turns it into a joke.*
8. **Обещанного три года ждут** (саркастически). Используют в случаях, когда кто-либо даёт какие-то обещания, сеет какие-то надежды, но не торопит-

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find in the decidedly high-brow *New Yorker* and how much more interesting would they be. Yes, reading these tomes took hours and hours but it was time spent in the name of research, so I did not begrudge it. To my surprise I found exactly one reference in all these pages, dating from the early thirties (not specified further). A clearly well-to-do but obviously Philistine older man (of the type shown in the popular media sleeping through opera) is shown in his bedroom dressing for a formal event and says to his wife, “Why should I dress up to see a show about a seagull?” I will not discuss here whether this is funny, why it is funny and what it says about American attitudes to Chekhov (as boring as Lohengrin). But why do you suppose that the multiple amusing references to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, etc. I expected are missing from this book? Perhaps 80 years of *New Yorker* cartoonists really have disdained the attitude behind so many of the references I have found elsewhere, i.e., that despite the preachments of the culture vultures and poseurs no real American is likely to find anything interesting or entertaining in such works and people who say they do are only pretending. Or perhaps such cartoons were legion over the 80 year period but those who selected the best of the best rejected them as being not all that hilarious and having nothing new to say.

Next, the following reference appeared in a *Newsweek* Food column, in which the columnist, clearly a food snob, describes a wager she won with her husband, who bet her that she could not cook for a week using mainly the food she had accumulated in her pantry (such things as pickled figs) and spending only \$50. After an amusing description of the meals she prepared to win the bet, comes the following. “Rod [her husband] suggested we extend the theme and shop only our [existing collection of books] before buying any new [ones], which means I will finally be forced to crack Pevear and Volokhonsky’s translation of *War and Peace* I bought and meant to read three years ago.” Well this is a new and amusing wrinkle on what is really the same ol’ theme. But there is one sign of real progress—the translators are mentioned! Thank you Oprah Winfrey (once again)!

My 7-year-old grandson, Carlos, is hypervocal and can beat me, at least occasionally, at Scrabble (which, I admit with all due modesty, is something that very few adults, with the exception of his mother and aunt, my daughters, can claim). He started to ask me the other day about the Russian equivalents of various English words. When we came to “bad,” he asked if they had decided on плохой (plokhoy) because it sounded like the sound of someone spitting loudly. And you know it sort of does.

ся их исполнять. Он обещал устроить меня на работу, но, как говорится, обещанного три года ждут. Used when someone raises hopes or gives a promise and doesn’t do anything about it. Literally: **you have to wait three years for what has been promised.** *He promised to get me a job, but as they say, don’t hold your breath waiting for what somebody promises you.*

9. **Согнуть в три дуги / в три погибели.** Принуждая, притесняя, привести к полному повиновению. Синонимы: скрутить в бараний рог; (перен.) зажать в кулак кого-либо; вить верёвки из кого-либо; согнуть в дугу. *При таких деньгах и поддержке полиции мэр кого угодно мог согнуть в три дуги.* Literally: to bend in three arcs (like a pretzel). **Through coercion to force someone into complete submission, to bend to one’s will, ram something down someone’s throat, force someone to dance to your tune.** *With so much money and the support of the police, the mayor can make anyone dance to his tune.*
10. **Согнуться в три погибели.** Очень сильно согнуться. *Чтобы пролезть через небольшое отверстие в пещере, надо было согнуться в три погибели.* **To bend (contort) like a pretzel.** *In order to get through the narrow mouth of the cave you have to contort like a pretzel.*
11. **(Сообразить, скинуться, распить) на троих.** Популярная российская привычка “скинуться”, купить и распить бутылку водки или дешёвого вина на троих с целью сэкономить деньги и заодно выпить в компании. *Первый в городе парк стал любимым местом сообразить бутылочку на троих для работяг соседнего завода.* **Literally: to get together a three-way.** A popular Russian custom of three men getting together to buy, and drink, a bottle of vodka or cheap wine in order to save money and at the same time have company while getting drunk. *The first park in the city became a favorite place for workers in the neighboring factory to get together and share a bottle three ways.*
12. **У матери было три сына: два умных, а один – футболист.** Общее (часто – весьма ошибочное) впечатление многих людей о российских спортсменах как людях, в основном, малообразованных и не слишком умных. Expression of the idea held by some that Russian athletes are generally badly educated and not too intelligent. *A mother had three sons; two were very smart and the third was a soccer player.*
13. **Третьего дня.** Позавчера. *Позвольте, но третьего дня Вы говорили что-то совершенно противоположное.* Literally: third day. **The day before yesterday.** *Excuse me, but the day before yesterday you said the exact opposite.*

## 93 Untranslatable Russian Words

*Reviewed by Lydia Razran Stone*

Author: Natalia Gogolitsyna

Publisher: Montpelier, Vermont: Russian Life Books

Year of Publication: 2008

Number of pages: 91

Price: \$12, available from [orders@russianlife.com](mailto:orders@russianlife.com))

This is a well-conceived, well-executed and well-written little reference. The words included are well selected especially for the primary audience of “English students studying the Russian language (and their Russian counterparts studying English).” It perhaps should be noted that there are only 69 entries, the remainder of the 93 words being accounted for by multiple forms of the same root (хам, хамка, хамство, хамский) covered in a single entry.

As Ms. Gogolitsyna, currently a professor at the University of Bristol, UK, states in the introduction, words were included here that, in her experience, can cause considerable difficulty to students and translators when they have to come up with English equivalents. The formal selection criteria for inclusion were that a word lacked a single English equivalent word and/or was defined by bilingual dictionaries with multiple words that are difficult to decide among. Slang and jargon are specifically excluded. In practice, these are the words of general standard Russian, the majority of which most of us first encountered in our reading of Russian literature—words such as бодрый, душа, деятьель and чужой. These are not the new words streaming into Russian, nor the bugbears of legal, technical and bureaucratic Russian that give some of us such trouble on a daily basis. Perhaps the most technical word in the lot is новострой. Abstract words predominate. Only eight out of the 69 are also covered in either volume of Palazhchenko’s dictionary: авось, воля, выступать, закономерный, личность, срок, судьба and хам.

From my own standpoint, that of a long-time translator, some of the words selected (for example, сутки, or кипятки), while they meet the formal criteria for inclusion, are completely adequately defined by virtually any bilingual dictionary and do not really require further treatment. On the other hand, I found some of the other entries useful and enlightening. There were indeed a couple of words included that I do not think I would have been able to translate previously without a dictionary search.

The structure of the entries is particularly well conceived. A whole page or two pages is devoted to each word (or in the case of related forms, group of words). At the top of each

entry, enclosed in a box, is the English translation from the *Oxford* or other bilingual dictionary. This is followed by the author’s comments in English, which are quite brief, but sometimes very interesting and useful. Some examples: 1. Он душевный: “The variants that are given as translations into English do exist in Russian, but they do not convey the meaning of душевный exactly, which is the combination of the adjectives sincere, friendly, and warm.” 2. Он мещанский: “In modern, especially Soviet, times to call someone мещанский was to suggest that they were narrow-minded, philistine and materialistic.” 3. Он пошлый: “In contemporary parlance, ‘tacky’ might work as a translation but the Russian is more profoundly condemnatory.” 4. Он сглазить: “The English word ‘to jinx’ is close in meaning but whereas ‘jinxing’ is something children do in the English speaking world, the fear of undermining some endeavor by being over confident or failing to observe a practice dictated by superstition is adult business among Russians.” 5. Он сплошной: “The nearest equivalent is probably ‘solid’ in phrases like ‘solid mass of ice,’ except that solid means hard rather than merely continuous. (Continuous is more temporal than spatial.)” Throughout these comments the emphasis on the need for translation to be contextual is commendable.

After this explanation there are two columns of quotations, the left one in Russian and the right one providing the equivalent in English (evidently translated by the author in the majority of cases). In most entries the first one or two quotations are dictionary definitions from Dal’, Ozhegov or both. These are followed by illustrative examples, usually from literature (including, very occasionally, poetry), but sometimes from newspapers, journals or everyday speech. Occasionally idioms are used as examples. These usage examples range in number from 2 (the entries

for бездорожье, гололед, дежурный, and деятьель) to 10 (изящный) and range in length from a few words to over 100. Where possible, the author includes examples in which writers discuss the meaning of a word, including an excerpt from Nabokov’s famous exegesis of пошлость.

The English translations of the Russian excerpts are accurate and in excellent English, for which I suspect no little credit should go to Nora Favorov, who copyedited the book. Where I think a native speaker consultant might have been helpful is in the offered definitions. In a number of places I thought there was a more exact equivalent to a Russian term

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# In Memory of Alex Mosalsky

Larissa Kulinich, Past NOTIS President and SLD member

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Alex Mosalsky, past President of NOTIS who served from 2002 to 2003, passed away on June 8, 2009 after fighting prostate cancer holistically for 12 years.

When I think of Alex, my dear friend, colleague, and spiritual mentor, I never cease to be amazed at the incredible depth and diversity of his background, careers, interests, avocations, passions and pursuits. His verbal portrait would be something along these lines: seafarer, sailor, philosopher, poet, craftsman, linguist, free spirit. Many aspects of his life might be described as unique and extraordinary. Only very close friends of his knew that Alex was a duke—he belonged to Russian royalty, being a direct descendant of the Rurik Dynasty. His full name was Aleksei Aleksandrovich Koltsov-Mosalsky.

Alex was born on March 15, 1940 in Shanghai to Russian emigrants. He was raised in the Philippines and San Francisco before his family came to Seattle in 1954. Alex graduated from the University of Washington with a major in political science. Pursuing his career, he worked for AT&T in Washington, D.C., at Boeing, then at the U.S. Information Agency. In 1965-66, he ended up in the former Soviet Union working as a guide and interpreter at a year-long hand tool exhibition.

In the late 1960s, Alex severed all his ties with the corporate world, never to look back, and started a career in the marine industry that lasted for 35 years. Once he told me that his paternal grandfather had been a naval officer, and perhaps he inherited his love for the sea from him. He was a professional sailboat racer and licensed captain/engineer, piloting tourist boats and other vessels in San Francisco Bay. He also went crab fishing in Kamchatka and the sea of

Okhotsk. Alex was an inveterate traveler and traveled extensively all over the world—Asia, Europe, South America, Mexico, Panama, Morocco, the Caribbean, Uzbekistan and Lake Baikal. In the 1990s, Alex worked as a translator, specializing in marine terminology.

Before he retired in 2008, he had been driving buses for King County Metro for six years.

When Alex was NOTIS President, I was Vice-President. Under the tutelage of two great mentors, Ann Macfarlane and Alex Mosalsky, I made my first faltering steps serving on the Board. I learned a great deal from Alex—the technical nitty-gritty of running meetings, and, more importantly, the art of effective communication with people. Alex had an intrinsic talent for this. I believe that those of you who had the pleasure of knowing Alex would agree that his calm, unhurried manner of speaking, tact, respect for and genuine interest in others, his ability to listen and readiness to help made each interaction with him special. Having known Alex Mosalsky for 10 years, I came to realize the real meaning of the word “gentleman” as “a gentle man.”

Alex was an invaluable storehouse of wisdom and high spirituality. He was a source of inspiration for many people. Alex knew and lived by a simple (but not simplistic) belief—you can have much, possessing little.

Needless to say, Alex Mosalsky enjoyed the friendship of many people in the U.S., Russia, and elsewhere, all of whom will miss him sorely.



Alex and Larissa in 1997

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## 93 Untranslatable Russian Words

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than the (perfectly appropriate) ones offered: *one-man woman* (or *one-woman man*) for однолюб and *diamond in the rough* for самородок, for example.

In conclusion, if I were a professor I would include this book in my syllabus for courses in advanced Russian language, Russian literature, Russian translation, and possibly also Russian studies. While it deals with terms whose difficulty most *SlavFile* readers will already have become accustomed to, if not always surmounted, the cost is so nominal, somewhere between 25 and 50 cents per word, that I recommend it to translators and interpreters as well. “Ninety-three” is probably not going to turn into one of your “go-to” references, but it is perfect for airplane, waiting room or bedtime reading, and I would virtually guarantee that you will take away at least a few tidbits that can improve your translation/interpretation skills no matter how many decades of experience you have.