

## Fact-Finding Mission Reports, Primary Sources, and More: Translating Human Rights Documents from Russian into English

Presented by: Lucy Gunderson  
Reviewed by: Lauren Cammenga



Lucy Gunderson speaking of her important work translating human rights documents.

I first became aware of the concept and plight of “stateless persons” through my love for the sport of gymnastics. Maria Filatova was on the leading edge of major change in her sport, and though I watched her retrospectively, her innovative floor exercise routine was no less engaging than it had been in 1976. After winning Olympic gold with the Soviet women’s gymnastics team in 1976 and 1980, Maria Filatova left her homeland in 1992 with her husband and daughter, and eventually settled in the U.S. The only passport she carried with her was Soviet—issued to her by a government that no longer existed. Without citizenship from any country, Filatova was unable to travel outside the U.S. Although Filatova is a native of Leninsk-Kuznetsky, a small city in Siberia, the Russian government repeatedly refused to grant her citizenship, citing “insufficient merit” on Filatova’s part. She was given a U.S. green card in 2012, but by then she had already missed the funerals of her mother, brother, and two of her coaches. Largely due to pressure, both domestic and international, from the gymnastics community, Filatova was finally granted Russian citizenship in 2015. But the unfortunate reality is that most stateless persons do not have the advantage of being Olympic gold medalists—and it was wondering about the experiences of that unlucky majority that led me to Lucy Gunderson’s talk, entitled “Fact-Finding Mission Reports, Primary Sources, and More: Translating Human Rights Documents from Russian into English,” early Saturday morning at the ATA Annual Conference in San Francisco this past year.

The mood there was quite different than in some of the other sessions I attended throughout the conference. The room was smaller, in a quieter section of the hotel, and not particularly crowded—most of the attendees were Russian speakers, many of whom even I, a newcomer, recognized from the Slavic Languages Division dinner. But given the topic, the comparatively

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subdued environment was fitting. Gunderson had kept her slides simple, and this, too, seemed a deliberate choice—rather than keeping my mind busy with pretty pictures or showy animations, the plain presentation forced me to imagine the circumstances Gunderson described.

She began by introducing us to the idea of human rights—its definition and origin, the specific rights the concept encompasses, the relevant conventions and international institutions, the process of ratification by individual states, enforcement, and how the dissolution of the Soviet Union has affected the human rights landscape in the Russian-speaking world. From here, we learned about NGOs—what they are, how they work—and the problems NGOs primarily focus on in Russia and the former Soviet Union. In speaking about these problems, Gunderson also demonstrated why knowledge of the historical context, as well as the present political and economic climate, is incredibly important for translators working in this field. All this served as an introduction to the aspect of her talk of most immediate professional interest to Gunderson's audience: a thorough description and explanation of the types of human-rights-related documents, including specific examples. This preparation allowed us to evaluate each example challenge right along with her.

Once we understood the specifics of the field, however, it turned out that the issues that come up with human rights documents, while at times amplified, are often the same as those we find in any other text: register, tone, keeping oneself detached, and the difficulties that arise when the target text may be expected to serve multiple, competing purposes. Reports, we learned, must sound like legal documents but still be accessible to readers who are not legal experts. In order to be credible, they must appear to be objective, and clients will be sensitive on this front. The example Gunderson used to demonstrate this (a small excerpt from a much longer passage that used phrases like “say goodbye” and “loved ones,” and was deemed too emotionally charged by the client) kept us busy for a good long while. *Was it too emotionally charged? Wasn't the Russian emotionally charged as well? Whose opinion mattered more—the client's or the translator's? And what about accuracy? The question of absolute fidelity versus the purpose of the target text came up again when we discussed direct speech. Should we correct the inevitable grammatical errors in direct speech to avoid miscommunications or to make the speaker sound more intelligent? Or should we attempt to preserve them in order to drive home the speaker's “realness”? Statements are official documents, yet they often have a biting or sarcastic tone. Jargon abounds, and of course topics can sometimes be obscure and require research on the part of the translator. While the context was new, these concerns were familiar to every person in the room, and there were a lot of nods, wry smiles, and resigned laughs.*

But it was the final few examples of Gunderson's work that truly highlighted the importance of the topic and brought the talk to a somber close. One was a scan of a newspaper article—a series of pictures captioned with full names, personal details, and lists

of alleged crimes: a thinly disguised list of enemies of the state, published by the Luhansk People's Republic. You could feel the air in the room change as we all realized that each one of these pictures belonged to a living, breathing human being somewhere out there in the world. The last, and probably most haunting, was a last-minute addition, Gunderson explained, because she had been asked to translate the text in question the very day she had to leave for the conference. It was a letter from activist Ildar Dadin, who had been arrested by the Russian authorities for repeatedly taking part in illegal protests, to his wife. In it, he detailed the torture he had been subjected to in prison and advised his wife that the best way to keep him alive would be to make sure his story reached as many people as possible. Gunderson told us how satisfying it was to see parts of her translation appear on some news outlets, especially knowing how important it was to Dadin that his ordeal be publicized. This truly brought home the significance of this kind of work.

With the looming specter of humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, the tightening grip on power by the Russian regime reflected in the “foreign agent” law, the ever-increasing numbers of migrant workers traveling to Russia from Central Asia, the rise in anti-“gay propaganda” laws all over the former Soviet Union, and the problems faced by stateless persons and ethnic minorities, the need for capable translators in this arena is only increasing.



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## **(URGENT) CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS IN A SLAVIC TRANSLATION SLAM AT ATA58 IN WASHINGTON DC**

The two translation slams (French and Dutch) held at ATA57 were an enormous success (see Tweets at [ATA TWEETS LINK](#)) and the Slavic Languages Division is eager to jump onto this particular bilingual bandwagon.

We are asking for volunteers to be slam participants or administrators in one or more sessions to be proposed for the conference. Unfortunately time is short and **we will need to hear from you by February 22** in order to get proposals to ATA in time.

**WHAT IS A TRANSLATION SLAM?** An interactive session in which two or more translators present their versions of a short text translation and discuss their choices with session attendees. See [SLAM VIDEO LINK](#) to watch a slam and/or read [an article describing one](#).

**WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO? Slam participants:** (2 or even 3 working in the same pair): prepare a translation of a short text and present their choices at the slam session.

**Slam administrator** (Specializing in the same or opposite language pair): choose a source text, track submissions of the slam participants, prepare session materials, for example, create a side-by-side presentation of the source text and the translations highlighting interesting solutions and passages.)

**WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?** Exposure as an expert translator who thinks meticulously about each word and FUN! What more could you ask?

**LANGUAGE PAIRS:** All Slavic language pairs are welcome.

**WHAT'S THAT DEADLINE AGAIN?** February 22, 2017.

**INTERESTED?** Please get in touch with Ekaterina Howard at [ekaterina@atasld.org](mailto:ekaterina@atasld.org). ASAP please.



# THE ADMINISTRATORS' COLUMN

Ekaterina Howard  
ekaterina@atasld.org



I hope that all of the SLD members had wonderful holidays and a chance to recharge and plan for the next year. Although the ATA 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference is still far away, I would like to encourage all of you to get in touch if you have any suggestions on SLD conference events and sessions, or would like to share your knowledge as a presenter.

There are not many updates on the ongoing SLD activities so far. At the time of writing, an SLD Facebook Group is in the works. Also, the SLD ATA Certification Practice Group is gaining new members, and I hope that it will be useful for all the SLD members getting ready to take the examination. Stay tuned for information on our next Greiss lecturer.

In the meantime, I would like to share some resources that might be of interest and/or of use:

- This Freakonomics podcast discusses the 10,000 hours rule and how to “attain excellence at anything”: <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/peak/>. Spoiler: just putting in those 10,000 hours will not be enough. You need “purposeful practice” to get better. If after listening to the podcast or reading through the transcript you are excited about trying to apply the Freakonomics advice on practice, consider volunteering to help out with organizing translation slams for the next ATA Annual Conference – or even volunteer to be one of the participants!
- Tuts+ tutorials for ideas on branding, marketing, social media, checklists, and anything in between: <https://business.tutsplus.com/categories/marketing> and <https://business.tutsplus.com/categories/business>
- Quirkier business advice comes from the Being Boss podcast (despite the name, it is not about being a successful manager – Emily Thompson

and Kathleen Shannon offer tips for creative entrepreneurs. I think that their advice can be useful, even if you do not think that you need to “be more boss” – as the current sign-up form encourages you to do): <http://beingboss.club/>. I especially liked the piece on chalkboarding (<http://beingboss.club/podcast/episode-79-chalkboard-method>), which offers a downloadable template, too.

- If you are thinking about branching out into copywriting or just find it interesting, there’s Belinda Weaver’s website: <http://copywritematters.com/blog/>. Lots of her business advice is applicable to translation (following up, staying creative, and more).
- To take your mind off the challenges of commodization and bidding portals, Kate Toon writes about her experiment of purchasing different services on Fiverr – a marketplace where professional and creative services can be purchased at a set price ([www.fiverr.com/](http://www.fiverr.com/)) – here: <https://www.katetooncopywriter.com.au/i-spent-154-on-fiverr-and-this-is-what-i-got/>
- A terrifying series of lectures on the history of communal apartments (<http://arzamas.academy/courses/6>), in Russian.
- A series of podcasts on Leningrad history (<http://imageradio.podfm.ru/rekshan/>), in Russian, biased, opinionated, and mildly entertaining, a cure for any nostalgic notions.

Do you have any resources that are fun, interesting, or useful? Consider sharing them with your fellow SLD members on these pages!

## ARE YOU PLANNING ON (OR EVEN THINKING ABOUT) TAKING THE ATA CERTIFICATION EXAM?

We highly recommend John Riedl’s article on taking the Russian-English certification exam, which will be helpful for candidates working in any Slavic language pair: [Link](#), page 22.

## SLD CERTIFICATION PRACTICE GROUPS are now being formed.

Contact [mariaguzenko@intorussian.net](mailto:mariaguzenko@intorussian.net) to find out more.

Certified translators who would like to volunteer to help with the groups are enthusiastically welcomed.

# Turn It Around!: Improving Readability in Russian>English Translations

*Presented by Jennifer Guernsey, John Riedl*

*Reviewed by Eugenia Sokolskaya*



Eugenia Sokolskaya

For my very first session of this year's ATA Annual Conference, I was looking for something that would be immediately applicable to my day-to-day translating, and the session titled "Turn It Around!: Improving Readability in Russian>English

Translation" sounded like a perfect fit. What's more, I got two presenters for the price of one: Jennifer Guernsey, with a background in medical and pharmaceutical translation, and John Riedl, with much experience translating in the economic and regulatory field.

Anyone who has translated—regardless of language combination—quickly discovers that sticking too close to the word order of the original is likely to end poorly. Just because it's possible, the presenters warned, doesn't mean it should be done! Not only may the text end up opaque and difficult to understand, the unusual word order draws the reader's attention to the style and the fact that the text is a translation, away from the author's argument or purpose. And while literary critics may rave about this kind of defamiliarization (остранение) in Tolstoy's writing, it has no place in our day-to-day work.

Why does this happen in Russian-to-English translation? In English, grammar is heavily dependent on word order: to give a simple example, "Mom washes the window" means something completely

different than "The window washes Mom." Readability in English is tightly linked to keeping related phrases together and following conventions. In Russian, on the other hand, word order can vary dramatically, with the case system allowing grammatical relationships to remain clear even at a distance. As a restraint on this flexibility, Russian has its own conventions relating to emphasis: Russian readers expect old information to come first, followed by the new (also known as a topic-comment or theme/rheme structure). Therefore, even a grammatically correct sentence that matches the source syntax may carry incorrect emphasis and mislead the reader.

John and Jennifer's suggested fix: turn it around! Turning around a sentence or phrase, (TIA), is really a set of transformations that bring the syntax closer to the rules of English writing. The presenters made sure to acknowledge that their TIA was a description of techniques that all experienced translators use intuitively. Their hope, however, was to give explicit names and descriptions to these categories of changes and add them to a toolbox we could consciously refer to when faced with a syntactic tangle.

Of course, the tools also came with a disclaimer, humorously formatted like a movie rating: "TD: translator discretion advised." Their suggested techniques were not meant to be prescriptive rules, and they would not always be appropriate. Sometimes bending the conventions of English better serves the purposes of the translation, and other times blindly flipping around a sentence might introduce inaccuracy.



Conference attendees listen intently to tips on how to "turn it around," given by Jen Guernsey and John Riedl. PHOTO: Fred Grasso



Jen Guernsey advises discretion in the use of the turn it around advice she and John Riedl are in the process of giving in their well-attended ATA 2016 presentation. PHOTO: Fred Grasso

Having thoroughly convinced us of the usefulness of TIA, John and Jennifer spent the remainder of the session on “red flags”—specific syntactic structures that should encourage us to dig into the TIA toolbox. All of the red flag categories came with examples and challenges for us, the audience, to try our hand at TIA. This format made for an interactive, hands-on session that drove home the usefulness of this approach.

### Adjective/noun order

Even native speakers aren’t always aware that adjectives (and nouns acting as adjectives) have to follow a specific order in English—they simply place the adjectives in the right order without being able to formulate why, for example, one needs to say *two big long red bats*, not *red big two long bats*. It was useful to finally have that order spelled out: quantity/number, quality/opinion, size, age, shape, color, proper adjective (nationality, origin, material), purpose or qualifier.

### S/V/O order

As mentioned above, the Russian case system allows for significant word order flexibility. In formal Russian writing we often see verbs, objects, and prepositional phrases long before we see a subject, since the subject is often the new information (“rheme”) of the sentence.

As an example, John and Jennifer challenged us to translate the following sentence: В 1-ю группу **вошли** **10 женщин**, которые принимали таблетки А (subject in bold, verb in italics). Our answers to the challenge yielded two potential solutions. One maintained “women” as the subject: “**Ten women** who took tablet A *were included* in group 1.” The other maintained the sequence of concepts, but flipped the subject and the object: “**Group 1 included** 10 women

who took tablet A.” Both translations require TIA in one form or another, but the second solution demonstrated that TIA is not just about moving words around: it can involve changing frames of reference and grammatical relationships as well.

### Strings of genitives

One of the classic symptoms of a poor Russian>English translation is a long line of nouns strung together with “of the.” English has two tricks up its sleeve for avoiding these awkward strings: adjectivized nouns and possessives. In many cases you can place one noun in front of another and—voilà! It becomes an adjective. Why say “training of the medical staff” when you can save yourself some words and say “medical staff training”? When this word order trick doesn’t cut it, a possessive may be in order, such as when rendering «отношение ко мне медицинского персонала» as “the medical staff’s relationship to me.”

As a caveat, John warned us about taking too many liberties with the possessive and accidentally changing the message. With the “medical staff’s relationship” example, we could have been tempted to introduce the possessive “my” and end up with “my relationship with the medical staff.” This warning goes back to not applying these rules blindly and making sure to keep our brains switched on.

### Chronological order

A more subtle difference in Russian and English texts is that English readers expect narratives and instructions to run in chronological order—particularly when readability is a key objective. While Russian is able to introduce new information in the midst of an instruction (mix in the cells, *which had previously been treated for 1 hour*), English will read better with steps separated out and put in order (treat the cells for an hour, then mix in). As an English speaker, I know that I would be very disappointed in a recipe, for example, that told me about a preparatory step after I’ve already thrown the ingredient in the pot. At the same time, I know that as a Russian speaker and translator, I can easily get caught up in the text as presented and forget that my English brain would not take it well. In this case, TIA involves stepping back and putting myself in the shoes of my future English reader.



## Impersonal/passive constructions

To be honest, I was expecting the entire presentation to be about impersonal and passive sentences, because that is where I find myself having to turn sentences around most often. Russian loves its passive constructions, whereas in English they are looked down upon or at least reserved for special cases. We have been taught that passive sentences should be transformed into active sentences wherever possible. The examples for these transformations also satisfied the English preference for S/V/O order, since the grammatical subject in Russian was often tucked toward the end of the sentence. Even if the sentence cannot be made active, the grammatical subject should be brought out to the beginning.

### Adverbial phrases

Russian is perfectly content to slip almost an entire sentence right in the middle of another one, such as the underlined clause here: Поместите картридж, без нарушения равномерности распределения гранул, в аппарат. Splitting up the verb and the noun is also perfectly fine in Russian's book. Not so in English! Clauses should be kept together as much as possible, which often means that these adverbial phrases need to be shunted off, either to the beginning or the end.

Can you write a grammatical English sentence with a clause inside another clause? Sure! However, as we heard many times during this presentation, just because you can doesn't mean you should, unless your goal is to make your reader stumble over your text.

### Misplaced modifiers

In the absence of a case system like that of Russian, English is frequently forced to specify grammatical relationships through proximity. For this reason, it is crucial that modifying phrases end up close to the element of the sentence that they modify, especially if they can be misconstrued as applying to another element. In Russian, for example, it is clear that in the sentence 100 г мятных конфет растворяют в смеси 100 мл молока и 1 л кофе при температуре 80°C в течение 30 мин, the 30 minutes refers to the dissolving. However, when the English translation renders при температуре 80°C as "heated to 80°C," suddenly the 30 minutes appears to refer to how long it takes to heat the mixture.



John Riedl ponders a point made during his presentation with Jen Guernsey.

PHOTO: Fred Grasso

## Strong noun/strong verb

Another characteristic of Russian writing is that the semantic weight of the sentence is often contained in nouns, rather than in verbs, whereas English prefers the opposite. Whenever we see сумма составляет or проверка проводилась or предоставление осуществляется, our instinct should be to replace those strong nouns and prepositions with strong, contentful verbs: totals, tested, provided, and so on. In such cases, even a passive verb is better than not much of a verb at all! We may lose a few words in the process, but the meaning will come through much more clearly and efficiently.

The session closed out with a chance to get up and move, to the tune and general feel of that cultural touchstone, the Hokey Pokey:

You put the good words in  
You take the bad words out  
You put the good words in  
And you move it all about  
You do the Hokey Pokey  
And you turn your text around  
That's what it's all about!

With that, John and Jennifer released us back into the wild, our TIA toolbox fully stocked!

Eugenia Sokolskaya is a certified Russian to English translator. She has been translating on the side since 2010. After receiving her MA in Translation from Kent State University in May 2016, she finally realized her dream of freelancing full time. She specializes in legal and financial translation and actually finds preparing taxes to be fun. She can be reached at [sokolskayatranslations.com](http://sokolskayatranslations.com).

**DO YOU HAVE A TRANSLATOR/  
INTERPRETER RESOURCE  
TO RECOMMEND,  
STEER OTHERS AWAY FROM,  
OR ASK READERS QUESTION ABOUT?**

2017 is *SlavFile's* **Year of the RESOURCE** (hardware, software, websites, dictionaries and textbooks, among others). We are seeking reader contributions, from a full-length article to a sentence in length.

# Textual Cohesion in Russian and English

Presented by Larry Bogoslaw

Reviewed by Maria Guzenko



This presentation focused on cohesion and its importance for translation. The speaker started by sharing Mona Baker's definition of cohesion:

"the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations which provide links between various parts of a text" (Mona Baker, *In Other Words*, New York: 2011, p. 190). Larry, who chairs the Russian>English grader group within the ATA Certification Program and is the official certification grader trainer, emphasized that cohesion can make or break the flow of the text and is at least as important for passing the ATA certification exam as terminology or grammar, if somewhat harder to pinpoint.

Next, Larry gave a brief overview of cohesive devices. Although this framework was first developed by Halliday and Hasan for English (M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, New York: 2013), Larry argued it could be applied to Russian, as well. (The audience suggested "связность" as the Russian equivalent for "cohesion.") Larry presented the following categories and examples of cohesive devices in English.

- **Reference:** identity between two expressions, for example between a noun and a pronoun or between an antecedent and a demonstrative
  - *The notorious criminal* hopes everyone will forgive *him*.
  - *The notorious criminal lied*. No one will forgive *that*.
- **Substitution:** replacement of a lexical item with another item other than a pronoun.
  - *I like movies*. *I do*, too.
- **Ellipsis:** omission of an item, with the unsaid concept still understood.
  - Joan *brought* carnations, and Catherine daffodils. ("brought" is implicit in the second clause)
- **Conjunction:** formal markers for relating parts of the text to each other.
  - Additive (and, moreover)
  - Adversative (but, nevertheless)
  - Causal (because, consequently)
  - Temporal (then, finally)
  - Continuative (of course, anyway)

- **Lexical cohesion:** vocabulary selection for establishing links between lexical items.
  - There's *a boy* climbing that tree. *The idiot*'s going to fall if he isn't careful.

Larry's presentation focused on reference, ellipsis, and conjunction. Paul Gallagher, who was in the audience, suggested adding other cohesive devices to the list. For instance, he noted that tenses and articles were used in English, while Russian made extensive use of governance.

To expand on Paul's point, I would like to refer to the framework of subordination presented in traditional Russian grammars. For instance, Rozental and Telenkova (D.E. Rozental and M.A. Telenkova, *Slovar'-spravochnik lingvisticheskikh terminov*. Moscow: 1976) distinguish between three types of subordination (подчинительная связь):

- Agreement (согласование): the subordinate word in a phrase has to be in the same number, gender, and case as the main word, e.g., "ранним утром" ("early in the morning");
- Governance (управление): the main word determines the form of the dependent word, e.g., "интересоваться спортом" ("to be interested in sports");
- Adjunction (примыкание): the dependent word does not change, and the subordination is inferred only from the meaning and word order, e.g., "много читать" ("to read a lot")

Larry pointed out that a particular cohesive function may be performed in more than one way within a given language or across languages, which makes cohesive devices hard to identify and translate. Mistranslating cohesive devices can not only disrupt the flow of the text, but also misrepresent major aspects of meaning.



Larry Bogoslaw discusses his presentation with audience member Paul Gallagher. PHOTO: Fred Grasso



To deal with this challenge, translators need to apply top-down processing, looking at the text as a whole and relying on extratextual knowledge to make lexical decisions. It is often possible—and recommended—to replace one cohesive device with another.

Next, the presenter moved on to specific examples of cohesive devices and the challenges they pose in translation. The first text we looked at was a Russian [newspaper report](#) of a 2015 Obama-Putin meeting that had been translated into English by a translation student. The translator’s misunderstanding of cohesive devices made her translation misrepresent the logic of the source text. An excerpt from the article is cited below:

На вопрос, возможно ли участие российских войск в наземных операциях в Сирии против ИГИЛ, Путин категорично заявил, что «о наземных речи не идет и идти не может». **А вот** от ответа на вопрос, как могло бы выглядеть участие России в борьбе против ИГИЛ, **ушел**: «Мы с президентом Обамой обсуждали различные аспекты борьбы с ИГИЛ [...]».

“А вот” is used in the Russian as an adversative device, meaning that Putin avoided answering the second question, which is further indicated by the verb “ушел” (literally, “walked away from, shirked”). The translator misinterpreted the former to be an additive device and translated it as “a follow-up” and missed the avoidance aspect of “ушел,” rendering it simply as “answered.”

*As a follow-up to the previous question, someone asked, “What would Russia’s participation in the fight against ISIS look like?” Putin **answered**, “President Obama and I discussed various aspects of fighting ISIS [...]”*

Finally, an English-Russian translation was also discussed—a short story titled “Playing the Black Piano” by Bill Holm. The translator solicited feedback on decisions made over the course of translating this text into Russian. Again, the translator’s misunderstanding of cohesive devices at times distorted the meaning of the story, which describes a terminally ill doctor who painstakingly learns to play piano. It takes him two years to play one piece of music clumsily, and another year to learn an additional melody.

*After two years, Bach’s little minuet for Anna Magdalena sounded like “The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers.” After three years, **a piece** finally came right.*

As Paul Gallagher mentioned, articles may play a cohesive role in English—here, “a piece” indicates that it is another piece and not the same minuet (otherwise, it would be called “the piece”). The translator misinterpreted “a piece” as referring back to the



Svetlana Beloshapkina has a question to ask of Larry Bogoslaw after his talk. PHOTO: Fred Grasso

minuet, so the reference to the second piece of music was not translated:

После двух лет практики небольшой баховский менуэт для Анны Магдалены звучал наподобие «Марша деревянных солдатиков». Тремя годами позже он звучал у него безупречно.

Larry also included examples of successful substitution of cohesive devices. In the second half of the story, the narrator decides to play for his dying friend some pieces the friend would not have the time to learn.

*I take **my own** hands to the black piano thinking this may be the last music this lovely man hears in this world.*

The translator signaled the transition by substituting the pronoun (“my own”) with a time expression (“в этот раз”) in the Russian.

***В этом раз** я опустил руки на клавиатуру рояля, думая о том, что, возможно, это окажется последним музыкальным событием, которое прекрасный этот человек услышит в этом мире.*

In summary, Larry’s presentation pointed out that cohesion is at least as important for translation as terminology and grammar. Awareness of cohesive devices and their function can help translators understand the logic of the text and recreate it in their translation. Instead of processing the text at the phrase level, translators need to look at it as a whole, understand the logical links, and represent them in the target text—sometimes with the help of a different cohesive device.

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# THE PITCH FOR FINDING YOUR NICHE ABROAD

*Alyssa Yorgan-Nosova*



One would be hard-pressed to find a more diverse group of people than the 1800 or so attendees of last year's ATA conference. Of course, the fact that dozens of languages and cultures were represented at a T&I conference comes as no surprise. A casual onlooker, however, might not expect to see the sheer diversity of educational backgrounds and career paths that have led people to the language services industry. To give you a general idea, among the sessions I attended, one was led by a PhD in chemistry (Karen Tkaczyk), another by an MBA in Marketing (Tess Whitty), and yet another by a PhD in musicology (Rosamund Bartlett). As a recovering academic (like Rosamund, I pursued the unlikely musicology route), I can't overstate how enlightening it was to realize how many variations there are on the translator theme. The fact that our path is not rigorously prescribed (as in, say, the academic humanities) helps us keep each other honest and contributes to the constant expansion of our profession in exciting and sometimes unforeseen ways.

Though many of the presenters were clearly able to turn their backgrounds in other fields into translation specializations, for others this path is not as clear. In her lecture, "Finding and Targeting a Niche Market," Christelle Maignan pointed out that sometimes a job leads to a specialization rather than the other way around. And Chris Durban encouraged audience members to address their subject matter blind spots just as they would work to improve their source language knowledge. In making these points, Maignan and Durban were clearly addressing a particular segment of translators—those of us with backgrounds in fields that can't be leveraged into a translation specialization as readily. So how does someone develop a specialization area that aligns with their interests and skills and will result in a steady stream of work? I'd like to make the case that packing your bags and moving to a country where your source language is spoken is a great way to do it!

Of course, not everyone can just pull up their roots and move (and if you have piles of student debt or major family obligations, it might not be advisable). But for the relatively-unencumbered and adventurous among us, there are many opportunities abroad for those breaking into translation. This was what I discovered over the course of four years working in

Moscow (with a detour to Kiev halfway through). By the time I returned stateside, I'd found my niche in digital marketing and IT and expanded the services I offer to include copywriting.

So what are the advantages of working as a translator abroad? Well, for starters, native English speakers who can get through an interview in Russian and are hunting for jobs locally are rare birds indeed. This makes sense when you consider that most expats are either doing a stint abroad for their multinational finance, investing, etc., company in exchange for moving up a rung on the career ladder, or they are local hires in fields where advanced knowledge of the local language is not a prerequisite. Thus, by dint of being in a smaller pond of into-English language professionals, your chances of finding the type of work you want are much higher.

An added advantage of being a relatively scarce resource is that employers are often willing to train you in their subject matter and may even let you continue your education on company time. When I started at Yandex, I was far from an *айтишник* (tech head), but there was no expectation that I would be translating articles targeted at developers on day one (and, indeed, the vast majority of content that is localized is for end-users or advertising clients). Even so, there was a learning curve, which could at times be steep: the Yandex.Direct and Metrika documentation, for example, was thorny enough to warrant us sitting in on the same courses used to train the sales staff. To my mind, getting paid to develop subject matter knowledge in one of the more sought-after translation specializations was a pretty great opportunity. I think one would be unlikely to find a similar vacancy stateside, where the expectation is that you should come in ready to dive into the deep end.

Lest you think that my experience was the exception rather than the rule, I can assure you that others had similar experiences working as translators for companies in totally different fields. One friend found work with PricewaterhouseCoopers after completing her BA in Russian in the U.S. She went in with a pretty limited financial vocabulary, but ended up working her way up to a management position over the course of several years. Others found their way in various news agencies: Interfax hires regularly, and RT apparently pays pretty handsomely to compensate for the pangs of conscience that many Westerners would experience on the job. In a nutshell, most companies that are multinational or at least have a PR

strategy that reaches beyond the Russian-speaking world will inevitably have a need for translators.

One other advantage to pursuing work abroad is that you develop an understanding of the local business culture as you hone your translation skills and subject matter expertise. This could prove advantageous if you plan on including copywriting or cultural consulting among the services you offer. You'd be amazed at some of the red flags I had to raise with colleagues over content that would not fly with a non-Russian audience ("no, you can't label all non-heteronormative behavior as 'perversions' in the porn-indexing directions on Yandex.Toloka" [a crowdsourcing marketplace]). You'll find that there is a lot to be gained from not only studying, but living and breathing your source language culture.

So now that you are aware of some of the advantages to finding your niche abroad, let's talk about some tips for how to land a job. First off, I can't stress enough that you just need to be there in the flesh; it's essential to get some face time with whoever is hiring. If the idea of just picking up and moving to a foreign country with no job in hand is terrifying, rest assured that you can always find gigs teaching English, including some that pay quite well. Despite the economic downturn, there seems to be no shortage of families in the ritzy Rublyovka area of Moscow that will pay you \$\$\$ to speak English to their three-month-old. Furthermore, companies that are willing to pay for business English lessons with an imported teacher tend to be those in the same lucrative industries that translators migrate towards—pharmaceuticals, oil/gas, and IT were always my three biggest assignments.

I found teaching to be a great way to get a feel for the city, meet a ton of driven young professionals (both expat and local), and get an inside look at the culture and politics of a lot of different businesses – all things that can help you land a job in the area that most interests you. The fact that networking leads

to opportunities is, of course, not news, but in my experience, the need to have an "in" is even more essential when dealing with Slavic cultures. It gets back to that divide between *свои и чужие* (you're either one of us or a total stranger) that you become hyper-aware of the minute you land in a city like Moscow. This doesn't mean you have to be the boss' cousin though; it's just that having a mutual contact in itself gets you way farther than it would in the U.S. For an HR employee who has little experience recruiting or evaluating foreign applicants, that reference makes you *свой* by proxy.

Obviously, this advice is geared toward total newcomers to the profession, as I was myself just a few years back. While working abroad was a positive experience overall for me, I would be remiss not to note that the political and economic climate has certainly taken a turn for the worse since 2011. Likewise, the potential impact of the weakened ruble and the fact that random people will judge you to be the embodiment of every perceived ill that Western society has inflicted on Mother Russia should be factored in to your decision to move. That said, there are still opportunities to be had (particularly with companies willing to peg salaries to the dollar, hint hint) and fewer expats there to take advantage of them. At the very least, you will never have a dull moment!

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## Marian Schwartz on her Recent Translation of *Anna Karenina*



*Editors' note: Those of us who wish for every ATA conference slot to contain an SLD presentation were mollified to find this year that the first Literary Division presentation (thankfully not scheduled opposite any of ours) was entitled *Translating Anna Karenina: Two Approaches*. The presenters were Marian Schwartz and Rosamund Bartlett, both of whom in 2014 completed new translations of what many consider to be the greatest Western novel, the former published by Yale University Press and the latter by Oxford World's Classics. SlavFile's editors were so delighted to attend this talk that they failed to attend to the fact that ATA was no longer recording presentations and thus neglected to arrange for a reviewer beforehand. Marian Schwartz referred us to the translator's note in her book and readily agreed that a reprint of it would be an appropriate substitute for a review. The note below occupies pages xxiii-xxvii of Marian's *Anna Karenina* (A Margellos World Republic of Letters Book; 2014) and is reprinted here with the very kind permission of Yale University Press. We have taken the liberty of replacing the few transliterations of Russian words in the text with Cyrillic. We hope to receive similar permission to publish an analogous piece by Rosamund Bartlett in the next issue of SlavFile.*

*Anna Karenina* has captivated English readers at least since Constance Garnett's much-loved translation of 1901. Tolstoy's work, considered one of the supreme novels, is especially beloved for its psychological and spiritual insight into the human condition, as applied to some of the most vivid characters in world literature. Many existing translations have conveyed these aspects with some success.

What English translations have yet to address effectively, however, is Tolstoy's literary style, which can be both unconventional and unsettling. Beginning with Garnett, English translators have tended to view Tolstoy's sometimes radical choices as "mistakes" to be corrected, as if Tolstoy, had he known better, or cared more, would not have broken basic rules of literary language.

When I reread *Anna Karenina* fifteen years ago, I was struck by the exact opposite: Tolstoy clearly meant every one of his "mistakes." He used language to convey meaning, to express his spiritual and moral concerns, and to show what he believed to be beautiful. I found the so-called roughness so widely remarked upon both purposeful and exciting, and I was eager to re-create Tolstoy's style in English.

The *how* of writing meaningfully in Russian was much on Tolstoy's mind at precisely the time he was beginning *Anna Karenina*.

On March 22, 1872, Tolstoy wrote to his editor, N. N. Strakhov, asserting that the Russian writer was "unfree," calling literary Russian "repulsive." Tolstoy abhorred affectation on moral as well as aesthetic grounds and sought to express what was true, rejecting the conventional in literary Russian and embracing what was "specific, clear, beautiful, and temperate" – language he associated positively with the peasant and negatively with "society." Tolstoy's language became an instrument of his worldview. Although these concepts were played out more explicitly in later works, they are amply represented in *Anna Karenina*.

I thus produced my translation in the firm belief that Tolstoy wholly intended to bend language to his will, as an instrument of his aesthetic and moral convictions. Eschewing the predictable metaphors, idioms, and descriptions, he put repetitions, stripped-down vocabulary, and long sentences to brilliant effect to meet his higher literary and philosophical ends. Tolstoy's characters speak – and think – in language all too true to their nature.

A review of the entire Literary Division session, **Translating *Anna Karenina*: Two Approaches**, can be found in the Winter Issue of the Division's publication *Source* at [Link](#). The same issue contains reviews of two other Literary Division presentations given by Marian Schwartz and Rosamund Bartlett. We will be publishing more material on these presentations in the Spring issue of *SlavFile*.

Tolstoy's use of style to relate pointed moral observations begins at the very beginning, with the famous opening sentence: "All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The first half of this now-famous saying is often translated using the word "alike." The sentence thus rendered becomes aphoristic: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." It is a tidy package, but not the package Tolstoy wrote. Tolstoy said not that happy families are "alike" (одинаковые) but rather that they "resemble" one another (похожие друг на друга). By not using the expected word in that first half, Tolstoy makes the reader take a second look and points to a more complicated opinion about those happy families. "Alike" here is pat, almost dismissive, whereas "resemble" requires additional verbiage ("one another") and a more subtle interpretation. Tolstoy's phrasing is deliberately dense, forcing the reader to pause and introducing nuance.

If the first sentence eases us into our subject, the second sentence is the book's moral and stylistic cornerstone – on which English translators have heretofore stumbled.

The Russian sentence is short and elegant: Все смешалось в доме Облонских (word for word: "Everything was confused in the house of the Oblonskys"). In Russian, this is a lovely, rhythmic line employing a concise reflexive verb form. It bluntly



states Tolstoy's underlying premise of the pain and suffering brought upon the characters in the book arise from "confusion," (perhaps not coincidentally, this same verb is used in the Bible in connection with the aftermath of the Tower of Babel). The Oblonsky house is in tumult. Stiva's actions have violated the proper order of things, gravely wounding those closest to him.

Translators of this sentence have been betrayed by a misguided loyalty to preservation of word order, a loyalty that leads in English to a clumsy passive construction and a sentence unworthy of launching this monumental work. A word-for-word translation explains only the Russian syntax and ignores the effect the sentence achieves through concision and rhythm, yielding two consecutive prepositional phrases in English and nearly doubling the word count of the original sentence. The solution lies in writing an *English* sentence that is similarly concise and rhythmic and has the same taut vigor as the Russian: "The Oblonsky home was all confusion."

These are just the first two sentences of a very long book full of intriguing sentences and innovative devices.

*Anna Karenina* is replete with repetitions of words and phrases. Tolstoy deliberately limited his vocabulary, avoiding the "elegant variation" that conventional literary language advocates. Often it is quite ordinary words that appear over and over, but this is also true of phrases, sentences, and even roots. These repetitions form a fine web of connections between people and events that is progressively cast over the full length of the novel, but the repetitions begin at the very outset.

In the first long paragraph, Tolstoy practically bludgeons the reader with his insistence on the consequences of Stiva's actions when he repeats (with slight variations) the same phrase three times in the space of two sentences, twice back to back:

This had been the state of affairs for three days now, and it was keenly felt not only by the spouses themselves but by *all the members of the family and the servants as well. All the members of the family and the servants* felt that there was no sense in their living together and that travelers chancing to meet in any inn had more in common than did they, the *Oblonsky family members and servants*.

Why does Tolstoy commit this apparent faux pas? The existing transitions treat it as a mistake; none repeat it in exactly this way. Before we go "fixing" Tolstoy, however, let us first view the positive effect of

this device, which is to provide emphasis in a striking and pointedly unconventional way. This repetition slows the reader down, makes the reader dwell on this point of consequence simply by giving him more words to read and in this way making him spend more time on this idea. Tolstoy says with pointed understatement that the situation was “keenly felt,” but does not say outright that Stiva is bad, or that he has sinned. Instead, he emphasizes that Stiva’s violation of the proper order of things has brought misery down upon the very people to whom he owes happiness. Their suffering far outweighs Stiva’s personal failings in importance because they are innocent.

Tolstoy also uses repetition globally, insisting, for example, on a number of key words throughout the text. For example, there is a striking frequency of the adjective *весёлый* and related words with the same root: *весёлость* (noun), *веселиться* (verb), and so on. When possible, I’ve used “cheerful” for this because it has similar grammatical variations and broader semantic application than any other choice. Of course, the substitution cannot be automatic because the “same” two words in different languages will always have different ranges of meaning; there were times when the translation had to be “gay” because that was the meaning. In all, Tolstoy uses *весёлый* and its variants 316 times, and as the repetitions build, it begins to take on ominous associations. The reader begins to wonder just how cheerful anyone really is.

Stiva, to whom the adjective is first applied, almost always appears of good cheer, but his moral character decidedly does not shine. As Professor Gary Saul Morson writes in “Prosaics and *Anna Karenina*,” “Stiva is the villain of the book, its representation of what evil is. And the first thing to note about evil is that it is quite congenial – as is the devil in *Karamazov*. Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy had it in mind to dispute the notion that evil is grand, satanic, ugly, and alien; on the contrary, it is the most familiar thing in the world. We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

*Весёлый* and its variants even appear in the kind of close quarters repetition mentioned above, as in the following: “It was as if something *cheerful* happened after the doctor’s departure. The mother *cheered up* when she returned to her daughter, and Kitty pretended to *cheer up*” (part II, chapter 1).

Over and over again, previous translators have balked at reproducing this kind of repetition, thus depriving the reader of what should be an arresting effect.

A wonderful example of the use of repetition to create connections and inject meaning comes in part VIII, when Kitty summons Levin to the nursery to admire their infant son, who sees his father and “smile[s] radiantly.” Four short paragraphs later, as Levin is leaving, Kitty “smile[s] radiantly” at him, too. The wording, save for the grammatical subject, is identical. Instantly, Tolstoy demonstrates rather than states the visceral bond between mother and son and sets up an identity in their relationship to Levin.

The consistent failure of previous English translations to repeat this one construction diminishes the moment’s intense emotional poignancy.

*Anna Karenina* abounds in counterintuitive devices beyond repetition. Tolstoy strips his vocabulary. He rarely uses synonyms (a variation on the repetition device), particularly within paragraphs, a practice ordinarily considered just as deplorable in standard Russian as it is in standard English. Routine physical descriptions and lyrical descriptive passages are few. Tolstoy does not routinely describe characters or places, and what visual memories he creates attach to key moments, such as Stiva’s pampered self, Anna and Kitty at the ball, Levin mowing the fields, Vronsky’s horserace, and Nikolai Levin’s squalor. He wields the cliché, usually the nemesis of good writing, with irony and often humorously.

We know that Tolstoy produced many drafts of this novel, so there are no grounds for considering such rule-breaking mere carelessness. With this translation, I have endeavored to honor Tolstoy’s concern about “false” language. But the way he used language in *Anna Karenina* to convey his beliefs and ideas must also be seen as intrinsically bound to his notion of beauty. At the time, he believed that literary Russian was “spineless” and could not be beautiful. With *Anna Karenina* he created language that could be beautiful because it was not false.



# SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone

Cheapskate though I am, I will order any non-exorbitantly priced Russian<>English dictionary of idioms or phrases sight unseen. I figure that even if I find the book to contain absolutely no new useful information, there is a good chance I can turn it into a humorous column. Indeed, [the most popular column](#) I ever wrote had that as its theme.

Dear readers, in honor of *SlavFile's* Year of the Resource, let me introduce you to the worst dictionary from the standpoint of utility, and yet one of the best for entertainment value, I have ever encountered—“Англо-русский словарь типовых фраз и выражений повседневного языка” (English-Russian Dictionary of Standard Phrases and Expressions of Everyday Language), Chief Editor: L. Alekseyeva. Moscow: Si ETC, 2006.

What is wrong with it? Well, virtually everything. First of all, it is clearly a reversal of some Russian-English dictionary or someone's private and unreliable collection of phrasal equivalents. And even with perfectly correct material, reversed dictionaries are virtually always much less useful than the original. How do I know it is a reversal? Well, the English is riddled with typos and, while the vast majority of the Russian phrases are, if not standard, at least fairly ordinary and clearly expressed, the English frequently veers into the laugh-inducing bizarre. Consider these two randomly chosen examples, Russian: 1) Он ушел на кривых негнувшихся ногах. (He walked away on (his) stiff and crooked legs); English (the supposed original “standard phrase”): He walked off in a stiff rickety merengue; 2) Russian: Это превосходит все (That beats all); English: Hellthe world. More examples of this kind to follow.

Next, the terms are grouped in seemingly arbitrarily selected categories (e.g., Exclamations; Transportation; Wisdom; Phrases Beginning with Not; Various; Requests, Orders and Desires) and within each category are alphabetized (though not always correctly) by the first word of the English phrase, which, it turns out, is most frequently “And” or “He.”

One might expect phrases that start with “The” to be equally plentiful, but, although no mention is made of this anywhere, the English phrases included begin only with letters in the first part of the alphabet, through “I.” If a second volume were intended, this is also not mentioned. Since there is no index of any kind, it would be completely impossible to find any term one was looking for in either English or Russian (or conclude it was absent) through look-up alone. Indeed, the only way to approach this dictionary, other than discarding it as useless, is to read it from cover to cover or browse it at random seeking ludicrous English equivalents, or perhaps less interesting decent if pedestrian translations of Russian phrases that you might consider using at some time in the future.

I chose to look for the hilariously wrong and propose to spend the rest of this column sharing some of them with readers.



Russian	Appropriate Translation	Translation in the “Dictionary”
В этом деле он предоставил нам полную свободу	He gave us a free hand in the matter	He gave us a full swing in the matter
Он тщательно ощупывал меня	He frisked me thoroughly	He prowled me over carefully
Он совершил свои преступления без всякого раскаяния	He committed his crimes without the least remorse	He sinned his crimes without compunction
Он достал гитару	He got his guitar	He unlimbered his guitar
Блеск опускающейся сабли ослепил его	The glare from the descending saber blinded him	A glance from a moving sword fell across his eyes
Я притворялся спящим	I was pretending to sleep	I was possuming sleep
Комната враз опустела	The room emptied all at once	All in a heap the room was empty
Он должен выбрать подходящий час	He must choose a suitable time (hour)	He must choose a towardly hour
Он сделан из другого теста	He is made of different stuff (literally “dough”)	He is of different paste
Он болван	He is a dolt	He is timber-headed
Он был убежденным сторонником брака	He was a staunch advocate of marriage	He was an inveterate marrier
Он был особенно хорошо подготовлен	He was particularly well prepared	He was peculiarly prepared

Его ничего не интересует кроме фактов	The only thing that interests him is facts	He's a whale for facts
Его поступки противоречат его словам	His actions contradict his words	His actions are repugnant to his words
Его довод весьма неубедителен	His argument is highly unconvincing	His argument is quite pregnable
В его статьях чувствуется биение жизни	His articles pulse with life	His articles palpitate with actuality
Он страдает одышкой	He suffers from shortness of breath	He has a bad wind
Ее последний вздох	Her last breath	Her utmost breath
Его игра произвела ошеломляющее впечатление на всю округу	His playing made a stunning impression on the whole district	He petrified his whole neighborhood with his playing
У него винтика не хватает	He doesn't have all his marbles	He has not all his buttons
Она не могла оторваться от зеркала	She could not take her eyes off the mirror	Her face was glued to the mirror
Его взгляды еще не установились	His views have not yet firmed up	His ideas are in solution
Перед нами предстала мрачная картина	A gloomy picture lay before us	A gloomy view saluted us
Он был оставлен под надзором	He was put under surveillance	He was placed under the superintendence of
Его принимали по-королевски	He was received (treated) royally	He was guested royally
У него очень мощная машина	He has a powerful car	His car has plenty of soup
Пью за ваше здоровье	I drink your health	I look towards you
Не преувеличивайте	Don't exaggerate	Draw it mild
Убирайся к черту!	Go to the devil	Go to grass rude
Удачное перефразирование	A successful rephrasing	A well-done hash
Ограниченных способностей	With limited abilities	Bedrid in his faculties
Этот перевод — трудное дело	This translation is a difficult matter	This translation is such a piece of work
Он спросил, что мне нужно	He asked me what I needed	He demanded my business
Он пытался заткнуть мне рот	He tried to shut me up	He tried to pipe me down
Она говорила убийственным тоном	She spoke in a murderous tone	Her diction was deadly
Женщина, которая его родила	The woman who gave birth to him	His carnal mother
У него есть достоинства	He has (his) merits	He has good manners
Он свалился с ног от усталости	He was dead on his feet	He panned out
Его отношение начинало ей надоедать	His attitude was starting to get on her nerves	His attitude tended to rub her
Ему тридцать лет	He is 30 years old	His date is thirty
Его склонность к языкам	His talent for languages	His hang for languages
Мне сегодня не по себе	I am out of sorts today	I am a worm today
Он был вынужден прятаться от своих кредиторов	He was forced to hide from his creditors	He was forced to play bo-peep with his creditors
Опоздание привело его просто в бешенство	The delay made him simply rabid	He was simply rampant at the delay
Ее глаза светились добротой	Her eyes shone with kindness	Her eyes oozed kindness
Ее сердце было переполнено горем	Her heart was full to overflowing with sorrow	Her heart was surcharged with grief
Его лицо стало страшным	His face became terrible	His face assumed a terrific expression
Деревня была окружена холмами	The village was surrounded by hills	A village was embosomed in hills
Скалы, нависшие над ним	Cliffs looming above it (or him)	Cliffs impending over him

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If these do not amuse you *per se*, you might try the game of trying to identify the cause of the mistranslation from Russian. I have identified the following: random selection among semi-synonyms, with a preference for the most elegant-sounding one; confusion among words with similar sounds and spellings; the assumption that virtually every English noun can be made into a verb; an inability to handle phrasal verbs; searching for equivalents in English (and predominantly British) dictionaries of previous centuries; cutting off the ends of otherwise appropriate translations; no editing by a competent English native speaker. Can you think of any more?

As you see, one or more people wasted a great deal of time and effort producing a work that is unlikely to either turn a profit or be of practical use to anyone who might be motivated to buy a dictionary with this title. This is the case even though the majority, if not the great majority, of the translations are more or less appropriate. Maybe one rotten apple does not spoil a barrel, but a significant number of them will certainly cause one to seek another fruit purveyor.

What moral could be drawn from all this wasted effort? Possibly that no bilingual dictionary should be created without the participation of native speakers (preferably translators) of both languages, even if one only acts as editor. Another moral is caveat emptor, although this particular emptor is quite satisfied at having gotten a column for a modest price. Perhaps a third moral would be to apply the caveat to the vendor, who, in my view, has the responsibility to make sure the books he sells are at least minimally usable for their stated purpose.

Here is another relevant saying: Old dogs cannot learn new tricks. After writing the above, I was moved by a ridiculously good sale at the same bookseller to order a couple more linguistic references. One of these, titularly a Russian-English “dictionary” of “winged words” (“Русско-английский словарь крылатых слов и выражений”, Г. А. Котий, под ред. А. С. Дробашенко. 5-е изд. М.: Флинта: Наука, 2011), was actually of common Russian proverbs and idioms easily found (and better translated) in almost any other idiom or proverb dictionary. On the other hand, look-up, though misses would vastly outnumber hits, was relatively easy. Russian phrases were alphabetized on the basis of first words, and even a cover-to-cover search would not take long, since the whole book with its small format and generous line spacing was only 37 pages – a mere booklet. Indeed, given the quality of some of the entries, I would be tempted to characterize it as a “booklet of deplorables.”

Here are some examples. If you are tired of reading this type of list, I suggest you at least look at numbers 9, 11, and 14, the translations of which might lead an unwary nonnative English speaker into inadvertently causing offense. What I do not understand is, given the obvious ambient level of computer sophistication in the Russian Federation demonstrated by recent news reports and the .ru scams I keep receiving, how is it that a dictionary editor or publisher cannot use Google to find out when an English translation is ludicrous? Does no one in the chain that starts at the compiler and ends at me take the short time to determine that a supposed reference book should not be published without an “As Is” sticker? On the other hand, I hope readers find this column as much a needed source of levity as I do.

1. бахвальство (boasting, bragging) rendered as “baked wind,” a term I found in a dictionary of historical slang that was evidently popular only through the 1920s
2. возьми себя в руки (gain control of oneself): “be yourself”
3. дать стрекача (to hightail it out): “pull foot”
4. держи карман шире (don’t bet on it): “I’ll see you further first!”
5. держи ухо востро! (be on your guard): “mind your eye”
6. знать, как свои пальцы (know like the back of your hand): “be dead nuts on”
7. искать иголку в стоге сена (look for a needle in a haystack): “look for a needle in a bottle of hay”
8. не лезь в чужие дела (mind your own business): “everybody’s business is nobody’s business”
9. нужда научит горшки обжигать (necessity is the mother of invention): “need makes the old wife hot”. Note that a similar phrase (using “trot,” not “hot”), according to Google, can be found in an 1898 reference.
10. прикидываться (dissemble): “to look as if butter”
11. пропустить рюмочку (have a little nip/of alcohol): “damp oneself”
12. толочь воду в ступе (to persist in some fruitless endeavor): baste flints with butter (not present on the Internet as a phrase; “baste” is apparently a long-obsolete word for a small fortified house)
13. чтоб тебе пусто было (to hell with you): “learnt me!”
14. язык мой – враг мой (me and my big mouth): “my unruly member”

Happy New Year, readers!



# Interview with *SlavFile* Poetry Editor Martha Kosir

Interview conducted by *SlavFile* editors



Martha Kosir

**SF: Translating poetry is thought to be the most difficult form of translation. Translating into a non-native language is also no mean task, even in the case of prose. And yet you translate poetry into two non-native languages that are not even closely related to each other or to your native tongue. You**

**translate out of Slovenian and understand multiple Slavic languages; speak excellent English—well enough to translate poetry into it, a skill that even most translators lack; and are a tenured professor of Spanish and also translate poetry into that language. Could you tell us something about how you acquired all these skills?**

MK: I have always been fascinated by languages. Having grown up in Slovenia, I was exposed to a number of languages besides English, which was a part of every school curriculum. In high school, I chose to study Russian, simply because the majority of students studied French. Other commonly taught languages were German and Italian, but I didn't study German until later. All foreign films and TV shows were subtitled, so it was normal to hear a variety of languages. After graduating from high school, I completed all my university studies in the U.S. and chose languages as my future career. I earned a Bachelor's degree with a double major in Spanish and German from Duquesne University, a Master's in Spanish from the University of Notre Dame, and a Ph.D. in Spanish from Vanderbilt University. Throughout my graduate studies, I continued to pursue courses in German to keep up with the language. As an undergraduate student, I enjoyed going from one class to another, switching from one language to another. Just for fun, I took two literature survey courses in Russian as well. Yes, it probably sounds nerdy, but I really enjoyed being a student. This is probably why I love what I do and appreciate working in a university environment, where learning never stops. I also find teaching, although challenging at times, to be a very gratifying experience.

Regarding translation, it began to fascinate me in graduate school, but I did not translate poetry until much later. One of the things that has always fascinated me, besides the linguistic differences among

different language groups, is how meaning is created through sounds joined together into words. It is exciting to think that those combinations of sounds are anything but random. What is more, our thoughts depend completely on language, a medium through which they are verbalized and consequently shared with others. The question that intrigues me is how accurately language can convey thoughts. I feel like there is always more than meets the eye (and the ear for that matter).

On the subject of translating into a non-native language, Josip Osti, the poet that I've been translating for a number of years now, a translator himself, makes an awesome observation—he compares writing in a non-native language to swimming across a river without banks in search of a secure footing. When working in another language, you feel that you are moving farther and farther away from the banks of your native language, but at the same time as if you can never truly reach the banks of your second language and enjoy that same secure footing as the native speakers do.

**SF: Some of the most impressive of your translations published in *SlavFile* over the last eight years have been by Josip Osti from Slovenian. In 2014 you published a book of his poetry translated into Spanish and entitled *Todos los amores son extraordinarios*. Now you have translated the same book of his into English with the title *All Loves Are Extraordinary*. Do you ever translate poetry into your native Slovenian or any of the related South Slavic languages? If so, what are the differences, if any, related to the characteristics of Slovenian or the fact that it is your native tongue in process or results?**

MK: So far, all my poetic translations have been into English or Spanish. Occasionally I may translate into Slovenian, but in those instances, I normally translate prose (the latest example was a letter written by Josip Osti's mother and meant for inclusion in a manuscript he is currently working on). I have to admit that I actually feel a lot more comfortable working in English, despite the fact that I read a lot and regularly translate from Slovenian. Part of this simply has to do with living in an English-speaking environment and being continually exposed to the language, academically and in everyday communication.

As for the differences, one of the things I noticed in my latest translation into Slovenian pertained to the word order in a sentence. I have to be careful not to let the English sentence structure creep into my Slovenian text, which happens occasionally. As for the process, it really is no different than for translating into English or Spanish. I first translate to deliver the intended meaning, then I edit the text to make sure it 'flows' more naturally. However, when translating poetry, there is another dimension to respect, which is the aesthetic one. Translating for meaning alone deprives a poem of its essential beauty, which is often hard to describe, but easy to perceive.

**SF: How did translating Osti into Spanish affect your work on him into English?**

MK: Interestingly enough, translating Osti's collection into Spanish made translating his poetry into English neither easier nor harder. When translating the poems into English, I rarely looked at the translations into Spanish. Translating the poems into English first, however, would have made it easier because translating from English into Spanish comes a lot more naturally to me than from Slovenian into

Spanish. I suppose that this has to do with the fact that I learned Spanish through English, by comparing English to Spanish grammar, not to mention the many common lexical roots between the two languages and the cognates. However, a poem will ultimately sound better to me in Spanish.

I often am asked what language I think in, and my answer would be that in most cases it is English now because it is the language I speak most. A specific linguistic environment thus influences your cognitive and linguistic processes and consequently your output. It is both interesting and amusing, though, to exist in different linguistic realms and switch from one to the other.

**SF: Now we come to the most interesting question: How properties of a particular target language affect translation, especially poetic translation. Could you select a poem you translated into both languages and discuss some of the differences in the translation process and resulting translation using it as an example?**

<p>LJUBIMCI PADAJO Z NEBA, Z NEVIDNEGA TRAPEZA</p> <p>sanje postajajo vse krajše in hujše nespečnosti pa vse daljše in neznosnejše</p> <p>vse pogosteje se nama tresejo roke gre pena piva čez vrč...</p> <p>na nočni omarici vse večji kupi tablet za pomiritev in spanje</p> <p>ali bo tudi tokrat uspela najina najnevarnejša točka na nevidnem trapezu</p>	<p>THE LOVERS ARE FALLING FROM THE SKY, FROM THE INVISIBLE TRAPEZE</p> <p>dreams are becoming shorter and grimmer and the insomnia longer and more unbearable</p> <p>increasingly our hands are shaking and the beer foam is flowing over the pitcher ...</p> <p>on the nightstand ever increasing piles of tranquilizers and sleeping pills</p> <p>will we succeed this time again in our most dangerous act on the invisible trapeze</p>
<p>LOS AMANTES SE ESTÁN CAYENDO DEL CIELO, DE UN TRAPEZIO INVISIBLE</p> <p>los sueños se hacen cada vez más cortos y más terribles y el insomnio cada vez más largo y más insoportable</p> <p>cada vez más nos tiemblan las manos y se cae la espuma sobre el jarro de cerveza ...</p> <p>en la mesita de noche se amontan cada vez más tranquilizantes y somníferos</p> <p>triunfará también esta vez nuestro acto más peligroso sobre el trapezio invisible</p>	

MK: Before speaking of grammatical challenges, I would like to point out that the poems in this collection are structurally very interesting: they lack punctuation and capitalization. The lack of punctuation in questions was particularly challenging (for example, the last two verses in the poem above). It required a careful exercise in reading, the use of suitable verb tenses to clarify the meaning, and appropriate word order in a sentence. The titles, on the other hand, are fully capitalized, include punctuation, and are generally quite long. The titles frequently appear as independent units and they tend to contain a story of their own, which is artfully interwoven into the remainder of each poem. Although many of the poems in the collection are rather short (with the titles sometimes even longer than the poems themselves), the message conveyed is always complex and intriguing. Attuned readers would quickly realize that the brevity of some of the poems in no way undermines the density of their content and message.

Grammatically, one of the unique characteristics of the Slovenian language is its rare dual form. In the poem above, a plural form 'ljubimci', not 'ljubimca' (dual) is used in the title, however, in the continuation of the poem the dual form is revealed ('nama', 'najina'—'to us', 'ours', 'nos', 'nuestro'). In Slovenian, the form alone indicates a couple (two lovers), while in English and Spanish those distinctions are not clear from the grammatical form alone, but depend strongly on the context of the poem.

Another interesting point is the use of grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, neuter). It is especially fascinating to compare Slovenian to Spanish nouns, where the article is the indicator of the grammatical gender. In the poem above, for example, *nespečnost—insomnia*—is feminine in Slovenian, and masculine in Spanish—*el insomnio*. For a native speaker of Slovenian, it is not uncommon to assume grammatical gender in another language based on the gender of the same noun in Slovenian (I always find it interesting, for example, that most animals in English are referred to with the pronoun "he," like a squirrel, while a squirrel to me is a "she"). In English, on the other hand, grammatical gender is not relevant as it does not determine the use of articles and declensions. Speaking of *nespečnost—insomnia—el insomnio*, in the original Slovenian, the plural form of the noun is used, while in translation into Spanish and English, the singular form of the noun simply worked better. While grammatical gender does not play a significant role in English, the use of articles (or the omission thereof) creates a substantial challenge for speakers of

Slavic languages. *SlavFile* readers are well aware of this challenge, and they recognize that the correct usage can only result from extensive practice. For the purpose of this interview, I will simply mention the importance of the translator's understanding of the nature of a noun in question – is the reference to a noun in the original general or specific. In translations into English or Spanish, the correct determination of the nature of the noun will play a very significant role in the reproduction of the text and its intended meaning.

Regarding verb tenses, what I always find challenging is the use of the present or past progressive in both Spanish and English, as those tenses do not exist in the Slovenian language. Many translators into Spanish and English prefer to avoid the progressive forms altogether and stick to the indicative. I find the use of the progressive form very important, as it, in my opinion, accurately captures the ongoing aspect of the action. In the poem above, the use of the progressive form in the title seemed the best choice for both English and Spanish translation. I believe that the progressive form recreated a perfect image of the lovers' act of falling. In the poem itself, I retained the progressive form in the English translation ("increasingly our hands are shaking/and the beer foam is flowing over the pitcher..."), however, it did not seem to work for me in the Spanish translation, where I chose the simple present over the present progressive ("cada vez más nos tiemblan las manos/y se cae la espuma sobre el jarro de cerveza..."). The progressive form in this case seemed to interrupt the sound and the flow of the poem.

The last point of interest in the brief poem above was my choice to omit the verb "accumulate" in the English translation of the poem, but include "amontan" in the Spanish translation in the following verses: "on the nightstand ever increasing piles of/ tranquilizers and sleeping pills" (English), and "*en la mesita de noche se amontan* cada vez más / tranquilizantes y somníferos" (Spanish). In Spanish, the inclusion of the verb "amontan" worked very nicely, while in English, the verb "accumulate" seemed redundant.

In addition to the points presented above, I would like to mention that the use of the subjunctive versus the indicative mood can present another challenge for Slavic speakers. As the subjunctive does not exist in Slovenian, navigating among the myriad of options in Spanish that include the present subjunctive, the imperfect subjunctive, and the present and past perfect subjunctive, is not always an easy task. In the indicative, the use of the imperfect tense (in English



and in Spanish), which does not exist in the Slovenian language, can be tricky as well. Finding the correct tense that captures the nuances of meaning is critical. The poem above is rather simple, because only the present and the future are used; however, many other poems in the collection required a very careful consideration of both the verb tenses and the mood.

**SF: What are your future literary plans?**

MK: I would love to translate into English a selection of short stories from Josip Osti's recently published 300-page collection entitled *Duhovi hiše Heinricha Bölla* (*The Spirits of Heinrich Böll's House*). In this work, described by the author and the critics as a kaleidoscopic novel, Osti depicts his encounters and friendships with a myriad of writers and poets from the former Yugoslavia. Many of those characters are extraordinary individuals, exceedingly peculiar and eccentric. In a fascinating mixture of humor and tragedy, Osti masterfully recreates the rich and vibrant literary scene on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

What is interesting about Osti's prose is that the poet claims that there really isn't much difference between his poetry and prose. In fact, he calls his prose poetic. In one of the stories from the book *The Spirits of Heinrich Böll's House* entitled "Pesem v prozi in obratno" ("A Prose Poem and Vice Versa"), the poet observes that even the brief prose pieces that were included in his first book of poetry, entitled *Snokradica* (*Thief of Dreams*), were never referred to

by critics as prose, but were assumed to be poetry. In my conversations with the poet, he likes to mention that he sees himself first and foremost as a storyteller, not only in his works of prose, but also in his poetry. He sometimes jokes that even some of his haiku embody short stories or even short novels.

**SF Your translations that we have published were in free verse. Is that because this is what the majority of south Slavic poets write, or is it your preference?**

MK: It is my personal preference. Also, all the poets I have worked with so far write in free verse. Maybe one day, I will attempt to translate into rhyme, but for now, free verse will do. ☺\*

**SF: Anything else you want to talk about.**

MK: On behalf of *SlavFile*, I would like to encourage readers and fellow poetry lovers to consider contributing to *SlavFile's* poetry feature. We are looking for translations of poetry from all Slavic languages, along with a discussion of the translation process or a study of the poet featured. As Walter Benjamin argued in his famous essay "The Task of the Translator," the purpose of translation is to give the original a "continued life." Let's not hesitate to do so.

\* For Martha Kosir's list of publications, please see [www.gannon.edu/FacultyProfiles.aspx?profile=kosir001](http://www.gannon.edu/FacultyProfiles.aspx?profile=kosir001)

Dr. Kosir would be happy to send copies of the last two book translations to all who contact her directly at [kosir001@gannon.edu](mailto:kosir001@gannon.edu).

**ATTENTION READERS WHO WORK WITH SLAVIC LANGUAGES OTHER THAN RUSSIAN!**

Are you disappointed to find so few articles in our pages pertaining to your Slavic specialty? Frankly, so are we, but only you can do something about this deplorable situation. Volunteer to write something pertaining to your language(s); alternatively, suggest an article you know of that we might get permission to reprint. We do not require our authors to be members of ATA; we are pleased to publish relevant articles from those who are not. We do require that articles be under 2500 words in length and written in English, except of course for examples in Slavic languages.

Send contributions related to:

- Polish to Christine Pawlowski: [pawlow@verizon.net](mailto:pawlow@verizon.net)
- Ukrainian to Olga Shostachuk: [olgalviv27@yahoo.com](mailto:olgalviv27@yahoo.com)
- Bosnian, Serbian and/or Croatian to Paul Makinen: [pmakinen\\_2712@yahoo.com](mailto:pmakinen_2712@yahoo.com)

We are without language editors for the remaining Slavic languages (would you like to volunteer?), so send contributions on them to Lydia Stone: [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net).

**We very much look forward to hearing from you!**

# CAT SCAN: MemSource

Daria Toropchyn

Recommended minimum configuration for reliable performance:

CPU: Intel Core 2 Duo 1.66 GHz

RAM: 1 GB

Bandwidth: 1 Mbit/s

Pricing available at [www.memsource.com/pricing](http://www.memsource.com/pricing)

There are continuing debates out there over whether machine translation will ever replace human translators. Personally, I don't see this ever happening, but there are a few by-products of artificial intelligence development that translators can benefit from in the here and now.

As a student and translator, I have had the opportunity to try various translation tools as part of my academic program. This has included guided access to Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools, which I can use for various projects without the pressure of having a client to satisfy.

The two main features of CAT tools that translators find most helpful are translation memory and a terminology base. A translation memory allows users to save translated segments (in most cases, sentences) and reuse them later for future projects. A terminology base helps translators keep terminology consistent throughout an entire project.

According to ProZ, the most popular CAT tools today are SDL Trados, Wordfast, memoQ, Déjà Vu, Across, SDLX, and OmegaT.

I would like to discuss my own experience using MemSource. This tool is not as widely known as the SDL suite, for example, but in my opinion, MemSource is a great CAT tool for certain types of work. My working language pairs are English>Russian and Czech>Russian, so I will be reviewing this tool from the viewpoint of these languages.

MemSource was launched in 2010 in Prague, Czech Republic, by the company's founder, David Canek. The CAT tool was released for public use in 2011, and by the end of 2015 it reported 50,000 users (SDL Trados, by comparison, has 225,000 users). MemSource has both cloud- and desktop-based software versions. That means you can install it on your computer (the files will only be available there) or use the cloud-based version and have access to the files anywhere from any browser on any device, as long as you have an Internet connection. I use a cloud-based version, and I'm glad I chose that option. (Note, however, that

many clients have confidentiality concerns and won't allow you to work via a cloud-based system.)

MemSource is available as a Personal Edition (free for up to two files for translation of 10 MB each at one time) or Freelance Edition (free for 30 days, then \$27 per month, can be used by multiple users, allows for unlimited files, and includes translation memory and a terminology base).

I have been using MemSource for a year now both for school and for work. MemSource has become my primary CAT tool. It supports over 50 file formats for translation. Of those, the ones I am most familiar with are .doc, .ppt, .txt, and .srt (for subtitling).

Here is what the Editor looks like in the browser, where all the work is actually done:

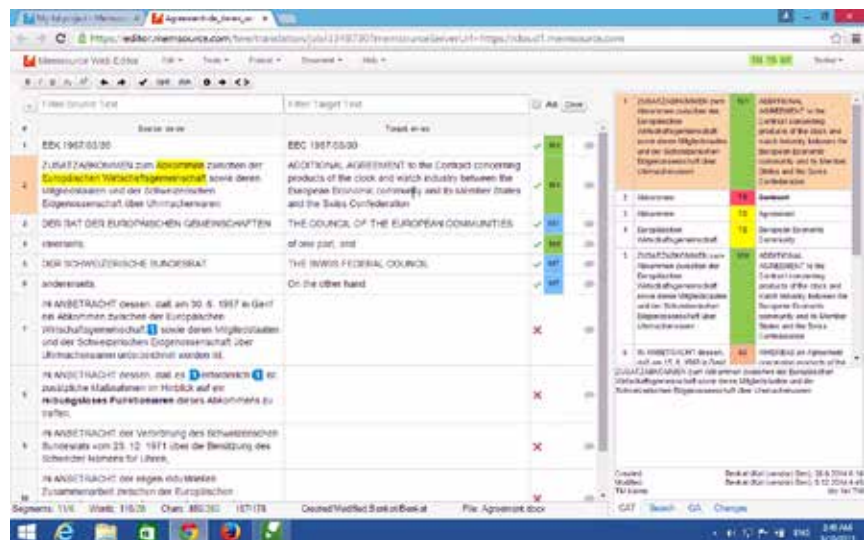


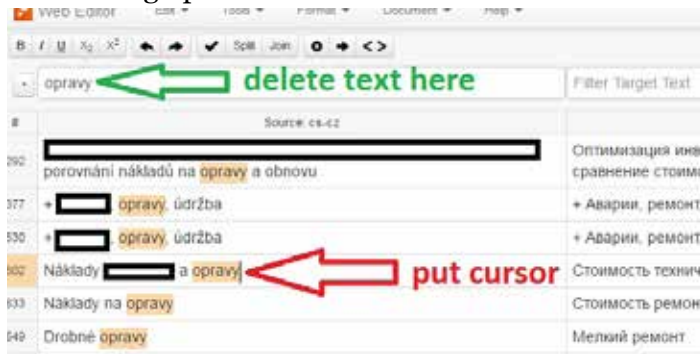
Image source: MemSource official web site

The Editor window is very user-friendly and clean. If you know how to use Microsoft Word, you won't have any trouble using MemSource's Editor window. MemSource also provides short video tutorials that explain the Editor and pretty much everything else this CAT tool has to offer.

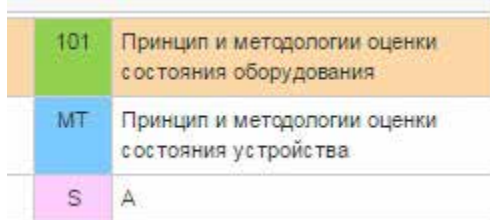
MemSource has a couple of great features that I haven't found in other CAT tools:

- Halfway through a lengthy document (over 1,000 segments long), I realized that I had already translated a similar sentence. In the top left area, "Filter Source Text," I typed a few words that were definitely translated previously, and MemSource gave me six results where these words were used. So, to the right of the sentence, I typed in the translation.

But how could I get back to where I was before? I could either erase my filter criteria and scroll down all the way to segment #602 (where I was last), or I could leave my cursor on the filtered sentence and delete my search parameters. In the latter case, MemSource automatically brings me back to segment #602, and I can carry on translating. This sounds like a non-critical feature. But if you don't know it is there, you can waste a great deal of time scrolling up and down.



- While translating, I try not to confirm segments (“confirming” the segment means saving it in the translation memory). Because my translation memory is already big enough and has similar sentences saved in it, in the top right corner MemSource shows me source and target sentences that can be helpful. These subsegment matches are marked with pink. While they are not 100% matches, most of the time they open up new possibilities or just inspire me to continue the search for “the right word.”

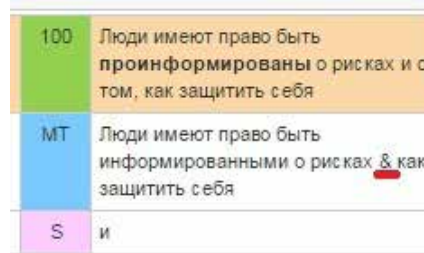


The green “101” means that MemSource has found a 100% match in my translation memory; the blue “MT” offers a machine-translated variant; and the pink “S” is a subsegment feature that recognizes a repetition within the segment and offers a translation. (The A refers to an outline heading in this case.)

Of course, MemSource is not perfect. Here are a few features that need improving or might be a reason to wonder if MemSource would be the best CAT tool for you:

- MemSource does not replace the & symbol with its translation in an MT-offered sentence. This is not a big deal, but when you work in the English>Russian language pair, you can waste significant time just replacing this symbol (in 100% of cases, the

“&” does not change between languages). As you can see, though, MemSource does offer a subsegment version of the translation, since it has “learned” that I replace “&” with “и” in my translations all the time.



- Once I had a Czech docx file to translate into Russian, and MemSource produced so many tags (indicators of a recognition problem) that I was forced to translate the old-fashioned way, without using any CAT tool.



However, this was the only Czech file of the more than 20 I have translated that caused MemSource any difficulty.

Overall I feel that MemSource is a great tool for translators who work mostly with files such as .doc, .txt, and .ppt. I like the quality of the machine-translation suggestions, which are easy to work with. And when general topics are translated, the majority of suggestions do not need serious editing. I have been able to add and edit terminology “on the go” without the need to upload a new termbase every time I have to add or edit a term. For those translators who work while traveling, the cloud-based version is a highly useful option and would save the day if the translator’s computer died when there was a tight deadline and no backup, since it allows the use of a borrowed, Internet café computer or even a publicly available computer. How awesome is that? And \$27 per month (totaling \$324 per year) for a Freelance Edition is relatively affordable, without the need to pay a significant amount of money up front (such as the \$825 purchase price for SDL Trados). You can access your document from any computer or laptop with any operating system (Microsoft, Apple) anywhere in the world at any time. Isn’t this the kind of freedom translators dream of?

Daria Toropchyn is an English, Czech > Russian freelance translator who was born and raised in Russia, spent several years in Czech Republic, and is currently living in the U.S. She received an undergraduate degree in International Economics and is currently pursuing a graduate program in Translation for Professions at the University of Illinois. She lives in California and can be reached at [info@dt-translation.com](mailto:info@dt-translation.com)



# IDIOMS IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN NEWS REPORTS: A MINEFIELD FOR TRANSLATION

Presented by Lydia Stone, Svetlana Beloshapkina and Vladimir Kovner

Reviewed by Larry Bogoslaw



Larry Bogoslaw

This talk grew out of Sveta's and Lydia's prior research on translating proverbs and idioms between Russian and English. Many SLD members will recall with pleasure their presentation on that subject at the 2015 ATA Conference in Miami, where they gave abundant examples of colorful phrases translated from English into Russian and vice versa, often in rhyme! At the time, they concentrated on set multiword phrases whose contextual meaning could not be properly or fully determined from the meanings of the constituent parts, traditionally classified into five types:

- (1) Proverbs and sayings
- (2) Winged words, quotes, aphorisms
- (3) Phraseological units
- (4) Formulas
- (5) Buzzwords

However, while they were still preparing last year's presentation, they found that the overall topic of idiosyncratic phrases was broader than the above categories. Thus, they expanded their research to include "anything that would be understood by an educated source native speaker member of the target audience that would be likely to limit complete understanding/create translation problems to a similarly educated target language native speaker translator and not likely to be resolved by the most used bilingual dictionaries." Starting in summer 2015, Lydia started compiling such expressions in English from the newspapers *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. Once the presidential primary season heated up in February 2016, she shifted her attention to campaign coverage, chiefly in *The Washington Post*. By the time of the 2016 ATA presentation, Lydia had collected over 6,000 English phrases that posed various types of translation challenges. To the San Francisco audience, she acknowledged that although the *Post* is a "liberal-leaning" paper, she chose idioms for this talk based on their linguistic value, and did not name parties or figures unless a pun was being made. Lydia also stressed that she had made and would make every effort not to offend anyone of any political persuasion

with the idioms selected, and to balance the number of positive and negative assessments of the candidates.

Before delving into these examples, Lydia repeated some advice that she and Sveta had offered last year: (1) work with a partner in your complementary language pair (leads to superior understanding of the source language, as well as wonderful friendships); (2) don't rely on dictionaries, either in print or online; but (3) do rely on the Web in general, especially by searching source-language sites for the exact phrase, as well as consulting Wikipedia (for background information) and using the Google search operator "define:" to learn terminology.

As one might expect from the sheer volume of 6,000 expressions and the intentionally broad heading under which they were collected, classification proved challenging. Lydia sorted her data along at least two dimensions: thematic (over 20 categories, including sports, literature, food/eating, bodily gestures, war/conflict, medicine/disease, etc.); and structural (at least seven categories, including phrasal verbs, new metaphors, mixed metaphors, expanded/combined idioms, truncated idiomatic phrases/allusions, modified/subverted idioms and allusions, and puns that do not fall into any of the above categories). Among the "thematic" categories, the most common by far was sports, with 617 examples. Among the "structural" categories, the most common was phrasal verbs (661 examples – e.g., *walk away*, *slow down*, *cozy up to*).

Using a plethora of examples from the above categories, Lydia presented a "Big 8 list of some of the mines in the minefield of translating English idiomatic phrases" – noting in passing that this phrase itself includes a sports idiom and a mixed metaphor!

1. An insight gleaned from teaching immigrants is that the Germanic core of English tends to present major problems in understanding, especially in the area of verb + preposition combinations. For example, although the positioning verbs *lay* and *put* are often synonymous, idiomatic phrases that include them often hide semantic distinctions, as in *lay something on the line* vs. *put something on the line*.

2. Even if a phrase or idiom can be found in a dictionary, the tone (attitude of the speaker) and register (level of formality) are often not noted. For example, if a columnist says “everything is *peachy* (or *peachy keen*) in the inner circle of some party,” a competent source language speaker immediately recognizes the expression as meant as sarcasm – but some dictionaries describe it as merely informal. Another example is the phrase *slay Washington*: the most salient element here is not the archaic nature of the verb, but its typical collocation with *dragons* – thus implying that those who want to do the “slaying” see themselves as “knights in shining armor” with the mission of conquering something evil.
  3. Expanding on Point (1) above, Lydia pointed out that phrasal verbs account for more than 600 entries, or over 11%. She considers these as a linguistic unit somewhere between true idioms and a kind of analog to the Russian system of verbal prefixes and infixes (although, she says, “only if that system had been attacked by a power eggbeater”). The number and variety of phrasal verbs is more than enough for a future ATA presentation.
  4. As mentioned earlier, the most prevalent thematic category is sports. Based on Lydia’s research (in collaboration with Vladimir Kovner – see their separate paper on this subject (<http://atasld.org/sites/atasld.org/files/slavfile/fall-2016.pdf> page 22)), there appear to be at least 10 times as many sports idioms and metaphors in current usage in English as there are in Russian. Therefore, it is neither necessary nor possible for a translator out of English to find sports-related analogs in the target language for all of these used.
  5. Another large thematic category is human gestures and physical reactions (233 examples out of the 6,000). For further discussion of this category, see the paper by Lydia and Svetlana Beloshapkina in this issue of SlavFile (page 30).
  6. A great number of idiomatic phrases (550) allude in some way to events and phenomena in the realms of history, culture, entertainment, etc. (Note: This is a separate category from Classical, Biblical and literary allusions!) Lydia sub-categorized this group into:
    - allusions that are not specific to US culture (examples: *Rosetta Stone*, *Occam’s razor*, *jackboots on cobblestones*). There were 82 of these, 17% of the total.
    - allusions that pertain to US history or culture but are of some non-ephemeral importance (*continued plantation life for DC residents*, *face their Alamo*, *circling the wagons*, *Morning in America*). There were 144 of these, or 30% of the total.
  - US-specific allusions that are ephemeral or of trivial importance, or both (*High Noon face-off*, *homecoming float*, *horse whisperer*, *the Professor and Mary Ann*). There were 237 such allusions.
- Summarizing this point, Lydia commented that 53% of these allusive idioms are of trivial importance, especially from an international perspective. She also noted that many US-specific allusions were active factors before the 1990s, i.e. during a period when there was relatively little cultural sharing between the US and the Soviet Union. This factor makes these “trivial” allusions particularly difficult to translate from English into Russian.
7. An additional category not mentioned above is conversational idioms – i.e., expressions used by American authors/columnists in writing that sound as if they are chatting with their readers. A few examples:
    - *um*, *OK* (meaning “yes, I acknowledge hearing what you just said, though I do not agree, and want very much to change the subject”)
    - *but*, *duh* (might be paraphrased as “acknowledging the arguments against it, it would be incredibly stupid not to do or think what we were discussing”)
    - *I’m just saying* (a conversational tag line uttered after one has said something offensive but refuses to accept the addressee’s being offended)
  8. The set of categories that Lydia was most eager to talk about was my favorite too – and, judging from audience reaction, I was not alone. These are idioms that have been modified in some way – expanded, combined, mutated, truncated, subverted, or otherwise “transgressively played with” (to quote Lydia). A few of my favorites from this list:
    - More like a rock behind Door 1 and a hard place behind Door 2.
    - Although we were not able to shatter the glass ceiling, it had about 18 million cracks in it.
    - Party A served up a hanging curveball for Party B to smash into the upper deck, if they manage not to whiff.
- For every “straight” use of an idiom in its canonical form, Lydia claimed to have found at least one modified example like those above. An important insight she drew from this set of examples is that although idioms are sometimes defined as set phrases, they are not set in concrete: perhaps, she said, jello is a better analogy. These playful usages highlight the way idioms originated in the first place – as metaphors, in

which some component of literal meaning is used to represent or symbolize something else. For that matter, Lydia pointed out, even phrasal verbs were originally based on metaphors. Building on this insight, I would also mention that any multi-word expression that is a set phrase in a given language – including an idiom – can be conceived of as a single unit of meaning, analogous to a word (see Hüning and Schlücker, in *Word-Formation*, ed. Peter Müller et al.; De Gruyter Mouton 2015, pp. 450-467). As such, just like any word, it can then be combined with other units of meaning – including other idioms, phrasal verbs, etc. – to form new meaningful utterances.

Lydia spoke with the lucidity and wit that all of us who know her have come to expect. Her fascination

with words and with the vicissitudes of interpersonal communication came through loud and clear. Another strong point of this presentation was the theme of open-endedness: an important take-away was that the categories offered here are fluid, open to question and reinterpretation; furthermore, the creative usages of language itself are inexhaustible.

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## Pies in the Sky versus Birds in the Hand: Real-Life Idiom Dictionaries

*Nora Seligman Favorov*



*In 2015, shortly before her death that September, Sophia Lubensky edited a translators' "roundtable discussion" of idiom dictionaries that appeared in the International Journal of Lexicography. We hope to be able to publish, in part or full, a number of the Slavic-language-*

*related contributions to this roundtable, starting here with the one by SlavFile's own associate editor, Nora Favorov.*

I am not a lexicographer; I am a translator, a greedy consumer of lexicographic resources. What do I want out of these resources? My desires are, no doubt, unreasonable, since so few resources come close to meeting them. In the case of idioms, I look to lexicographers to search the seemingly infinite universe of usage and identify the most eloquent and accurate matches between idioms in my source language, Russian, and my target language, English. Not only do I want Russian idioms to be explained (literal and figurative meaning, context, register, mood, temporal and geographic diffusion, alternative word orders, grammatical information, as well as associations with classes of people, events, or situations), I want examples – from literary works and news reports, blogs and advertisements, pop culture and scholarly articles – that have been translated by only the most insightful and knowledgeable translators.

For now, these demands are pie in the sky. Just finding the examples I so greedily seek would take an army of Russian-English lexicographers (and the funding sources to support their efforts). Then, in the print arena, there is the issue of space and the limitations imposed by the overall economic equation.

My unreasonable, pie-in-the-sky demands notwithstanding, I am generally pleased with the Russian-English idioms resources at my disposal, which range from the precise, detailed, and scholarly to the sprawling and unreliable. Writing this essay is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the resources I use and how I use them.

### **Нечего греха таить (Why Deny It?)**

There's no use denying it: sometimes convenience takes precedence over quality in my decision to choose one resource over another. *Время – деньги!*, i.e., Time is money! There are deadlines and limited hours in the day. This is why the first resource I turn to in most cases when I encounter an unfamiliar Russian idiom is ABBYY Lingvo x5 – not because it is the best but because it is the fastest and easiest to access. Instead of breaking my bond with the keyboard and interrupting the flow of words onto my monitor, Lingvo allows me to highlight a phrase (assuming I'm translating a digitized text and not squinting at a piece of paper) and tap out a quick Ctrl+C+C. *Словно по щучьему веленью* (as if by magic) I am offered, for example, two suggested translations of *нечего греха таить*, i.e., "let's face it" and "to be honest" from



ABBY Lingvo's own *Russian-English Dictionary: The American Variant*, and two Russian equivalents (незачем скрывать; нужно признаться) from S.A. Kuznecov's *Comprehensive Russian Explanatory Dictionary*. These are just two of the 220 dictionaries that ABBYY has brought together in the Lingvo x5 package. Two others of potential value in deciphering Russian idioms are D. I. Kveselevič's (2001) *Modern Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms*, which offers examples from literature, and Lingvo-Pro, which features translations contributed by users of the ABBYY Lingvo.Pro website. According to Lingvo's "About Dictionary" pop-up, 'On the ABBYY Lingvo.Pro website, you will also find the full versions of the ABBYY Lingvo x5 dictionaries and usage examples from bilingual text corpora.'

The infrastructure ABBYY has provided with its Lingvo products and website holds tremendous promise and can already be extremely useful, but there are serious problems. First, the infrastructure itself frequently fails. For example, after some time-consuming investigation, I did discover a lengthy entry for чего греха таить from Kveselevič 2001 that was not offered in response to my initial Ctrl+C+C (presumably because his entry only covered this precise wording, and not the synonymous нечего variant). Second, although I have not made a thorough study of any of the components of Lingvo's overall idiom package, the quality and number of English equivalents offered is often wanting and, on occasion, laughable. It is hard to have confidence in a resource that offers, for растрясати жир, for example, one literal equivalent 'shake off one's fat' and one that is simply wrong ('slenderize') and tops it off with the following example: Орудуйте познергичнее... Полезно, очень полезно растрясати жирок, translated as: 'Put a jerk in it!.. Shake off your fat, it's very good for your health'. (A better translation – with thanks to Sophia Lubensky's dictionary discussed below – might be: *Use some elbow grease! It'd do you good to shed some of that blubber.*) That particular entry is taken from what Lingvo identifies on screen as 'Idioms (Ru-En),' in other words Kveselevič (2001), who has drawn his example from a Russian novel that has sunk so deeply into oblivion (Fedor Gladkov's socialist realist *Energy*) that the only hits we get when we plug the Russian example into any of the top Russian search engines come from Kveselevič, not Gladkov. In general, Kveselevič's examples seem to be taken from Soviet-era translations produced by native Russian speakers who, one suspects, never set foot in an English-speaking country (it is telling that none of the translators are credited). To the contemporary

American ear, such renderings as *jiggery-pokery* for по щучьему веленью are odd and, in some cases, utterly unfamiliar. Furthermore, all of Lingvo's idiom resources suffer from a dearth of usage notes, collocations, contextual restrictions, etc. And when it comes to the sort of 'crowdsourcing' offered by Lingvo-Pro and its (perhaps dominant) competitor Multitran.ru, the wealth of possible solutions offered can be both a blessing and a curse. High-quality translations are often lost in a sea of infelicities, usually contributed by non-native speakers of the target language. This is why I often do go to the trouble of breaking my bond with the keyboard and turning to my favorite paper resource for Russian idioms.

### **Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда (No Pain, No Gain)**

As the Russian saying goes, without effort, you won't even get a little fish out of a pond. This idiom applies both to the decades of labor that no doubt went into producing Sophia Lubensky's *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms* and the translator's effort involved in using a paper resource – trivial by comparison, but a factor in the day-to-day translation process. No doubt plenty of hard work went into putting together sprawling resources such as Lingvo x5 and Multitran, but it was not the sort of disciplined, scholarly, and painstaking labor (along with the help and cooperation of some top Russian-into-English translators, credited in the acknowledgments) that produced the resource I turn to most often when the idiomatic challenge warrants removing my hands from the keyboard and bending down to pick up a heavy tome (usually sitting on the floor right by my chair). With my 'Lubensky,' I know that every entry has been expertly vetted, most offer gems of examples from literary translations, and furthermore the work is targeted at the contemporary American audience. (In contrast to Kveselevič 2001, the translations are all attributed, and the list of literary sources runs fourteen pages.)

Again, as I am in a hurry, my eyes usually rush straight to the bold print offering English equivalents (the decision to put these equivalents in bold type has saved me what will eventually add up to significant time). Next (unless I am rushed and have already seen the solution to my translation problem), I read the examples taken from literature or, in some cases, invented. If the context in which the idiom is being used in my source text does not make the choice of equivalent immediately clear, I next read the explanatory information preceding the equivalents. Finally, only if I find an idiom to be so appealing that I think (a) I might want to work it into my active

Russian and (b) I will actually remember it do I read the grammatical information, word-order restrictions, etc., at the beginning of the entry.

When precision is essential, such as when I was translating a series of documents featuring words spoken or written by Joseph Stalin (an imaginative user and abuser of Russian idioms!), I use this resource exclusively. To offer just one example, when Comrade Stalin voiced the charitable (if, as subsequent events proved, insincere) opinion that the peasantry should not be seen as a colony from which industry could *драть десять шкур*, lit. 'to strip off ten hides,' I greatly appreciated the wealth of information offered by Lubensky's dictionary as compared with Lingvo. First, Lubensky provided separate sub-entries for two variations on this idiom – a shorter version that does not specify a particular number of hides (generally used to convey a threat) and a longer version that usually refers to seven (and sometimes two or three) hides (I suppose Stalin's ten hides were for emphasis) – and provided different explanations and English equivalents for the short and long versions. While Lingvo (*The American Variant*, in this case, although the bulk of Lingvo's entries for this idiom came from Kveselevič 2001) did offer one equivalent not included by Lubensky that I considered using (*fleece smb.*), the latter's explanation ('*highly coll* being in a position of power, to exploit s.o. pitilessly by making him pay large taxes, very high interest, exorbitant prices, etc.')

helped me choose what I thought was the best English idiom for the context: *to squeeze dry*. In short, I consider the Lubensky idiom dictionary made almost как по заказу, i.e., made 'to order.' Since limitations of time, space, and the print medium prevented the inclusion of literal translations and more examples, I would call it *му синица в руках*, i.e., proverbial bird in the hand, if not предел мечтаний, i.e., dream come true.

### На закуску (To Top Things Off)

In closing, I would like to mention one other resource I have benefitted from in deciphering Russian idioms, although it is not exclusively devoted to that particular form of speech. In my ideal world, where everything I ever wanted to know about a phrase I've encountered in Russian is assembled in one searchable space, I would like to have Pavel Palazhchenko's *My Unsystematic Dictionary* (2003-2009) included. Palazhchenko, a highly regarded translator and interpreter who is best known for interpreting for Mikhail Gorbachev, is not a lexicographer. He puts Russian and English usages he finds interesting under a microscope and shares his thoughts about their possible equivalence.

Take, for example, his discussion of the English phrase *the bottom line*. Palazhchenko devotes almost two pages to examining how well one meaning of this phrase coincides with the Russian phrase *cyxoй остаток* (a term used in chemistry to signify the dry residue that is left over after evaporation). Drawing on excerpts that fall within a relatively short timeframe and come from the close-knit world to which *New York Times* opinion writers belong, he still manages to find examples that make the exact usage algorithm for *the bottom line* rather hard to pin down.

His first example comes from a November 2002 *New York Times* opinion piece by Thomas Friedman: *Bottom line: Many Europeans today fear, or detest, America more than they fear Saddam*. Palazhchenko comments on the 'new tendency' to omit an article in certain breezy styles of writing and suggests that this usage is roughly equivalent to 'in summary'.

Another example he offers from the *New York Times* that uses this phrase is a February 2003 editorial that asks how the United States can 'get France and its supporters to define their own bottom line rather than simply criticizing Washington's.' Here, Palazhchenko offers the Russian equivalents of *fundamental position* or *last straw* as useful phrases in translating *bottom line*, although it strikes me that *define their own bottom line* might have just as easily been expressed as 'state what is most important to them'. But what I like about the loose ('unsystematic' – the disclaimer is right in the book's title) format of Palazhchenko's work is that it enables him to share his thought process. Following the logic of the *Times*' editorial board, he notices that France's *bottom line* is contrasted with the *overriding concern* of the United States. He concludes that *bottom line* and *overriding concern* are being used synonymously.

Of course, Palazhchenko's two-volume dictionary is indeed unsystematic. (Only at the conclusion of the entry does he mention, almost as an afterthought, the common use of *bottom line* to refer to the final line of a financial report.) But unsystematic resources produced by translators and interpreters, such as Palazhchenko (whose website features interesting discussions of terminology, including idioms and set phrases) and Michele Berdy, who regularly demystifies Russian idioms for readers of *The Moscow Times* and *Russian Life* magazine and has published a book on the subject, *The Russian Word's Worth*, are valuable supplements to the more disciplined works of the professional lexicographer.

If greedy translators like me ruled the world, there would be armies of trained lexicographers monitoring usage across all languages in order to *отделить зёрна*

от плевел, i.e. to separate the wheat from the chaff – to separate outlying usages from standard usages and mistranslations from accurate translations, and catalogue their findings in a searchable database. Alas, we do not rule the world, so for now part of our job is to assemble a range of systematic and unsystematic resources and apply our own common sense and judgment in selecting equivalents.

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## Update

Time marches on and, as might be expected, digital on-line resources evolve and improve. Some of the details of this article, which was written almost two years ago, are out of date. What was then Lingvo-Pro is now Lingvo Live. I hope that one of our readers will step forward to produce a thorough updated assessment of Lingvo's electronic dictionaries. For now, I include an interesting item I called up with a new search for "чего греха таить" that appears under the rubric "Examples from Texts." Although these two particular examples, one based on an original Russian text (by Turgenev) and the other on an English one (by Wodehouse), are of limited usefulness to translators looking for a ready translation of this phrase in what is likely to be a different context, the approach of aligning quality translations with their source texts is extremely promising.

The screenshot shows the ABBYY Lingvo Live interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'ABBYY Lingvo Live', 'SEARCH FOR TRANSLATION', 'QUESTIONS & ANSWERS', 'Log in', and 'SIGN UP'. The main content area features a search bar with the text 'чего греха таить' and a 'Translate' button. Below the search bar, there is a sidebar with 'LINGVO DICTIONARIES' and 'EXAMPLES FROM TEXTS'. The main content area is titled 'Examples from texts' and displays two examples of the phrase in Russian and English. The first example is from Turgenev's 'Zapiski otkolnika', and the second is from Wodehouse's 'Jeeves in the offing'.

RU	EN
Да, благо, подле чужой межи оказалось; а только, <b>что греха таить</b> , на нашей земле.	But, luckily, it was found near the boundary, on our side of it, to tell the truth.
<i>Тургенев, И. С. / Записки околника т. 1</i>	<i>Turgenev, I. S. / A Sportman's Sketches v. 1</i>
Но ловушки, но каверзы, которые ждут меня в вустерширской глухомани! <b>Что греха таить</b> , при мысли о них я почувствовал себя очень неудобно, и, когда я закуривал утреннюю сигарету, рука моя заметно дрожала.	Nevertheless, it would be paltering with the truth to say that I was at my ease as I thought of what lay before me in darkest Worcestershire, and the hand that lit the after-breakfast gasper shook quite a bit.
<i>Вудхаус, П. Г. / На помощь, Джинс!</i>	<i>Wodehouse, P. G. / Jeeves in the offing</i>



# GESTURE DESCRIPTIONS, THEIR USES, AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES (WITH ENGLISH INTO RUSSIAN EXAMPLES)

Lydia Razran Stone and Svetlana Beloshapkina

An earlier version of this paper was published in the Russian journal *Mosty*

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For nine months, between February and November, I, the first author, read *The Washington Post* and collected all the idiomatic uses of English found in articles about our current presidential campaign. By the time this is published, I will surely have more than 6000 of them. One of the most interesting types of common usages in my data, one I can find very little discussion of, involves descriptions of human gestures, or call it body language: metaphors used to convey a person's or group of people's emotional reactions (*jumping up and down; wringing their hands*), attitudes toward something (*gritting their teeth; turning up their noses*), or some other aspect of behavior that almost certainly does not imply the literal use of that gesture (*kicking the cat; off the top of his head, bending a knee*). Such usages are quite common in the newspaper data I have been examining. The second author and I have been examining the issues such phrases present for the translator—in particular the translator into Russian.

Since the human body is a shared element across cultures and physical actions and reactions are constrained by biology, with the exception of subtle nuances, physical descriptions of any of these gesture phrases can be translated literally and will certainly be understood in physical terms. (We recognize that we are stretching the meaning of the word “gesture” in our discussion, but we could find no term that perfectly covers all of the human-anatomy-related metaphors we found.) However, the fact is that many and possibly the large majority of these literal translations will not have the same meaning and function in the target text as they do in the source. Furthermore, in general writing a large number of gesture phrases are used without the actual physical gesture having been, or even postulated as having been, performed. They are purely metaphoric. And yet only the most common and straightforward or the most opaquely idiomatic of such phrases find their ways into idiom dictionaries.

It seems to us that, from the standpoint of translation, the treatment of gestures or body language descriptions can be divided into at least the following categories.

1. Universal human gestures, with the same clear meaning in both languages: *smile; have tears in one's eyes; sigh in relief*. The translation of these can certainly be literal, and at the same time will be metaphorically correct.

These phrases generally refer to gestures that have actually been made.

- 1a. There are also gestures that may correspond in the target and source language but, although they seem natural, are not universal or evidently biologically determined, for example, *nodding one's head yes and shaking it no*. These too can be translated literally, though some care needs to be taken that the verb typical for the appropriate meaningful gesture in the target language is selected (*кивать* not *клевать*; *качать* not *трясти*).
2. The source language may refer to a gesture that is both physically and in meaning similar in the target, but which is described in terms that are not a literal translational equivalent. Although the conveyed meaning of the English *shrug* can be appropriately translated—in terms of both the emotion conveyed and physical action performed—as *пожимать плечами*, another Russian phrase, *развести руками*, which describes a movement involving the shoulders but focuses on the accompanying movement of the arms, is used metaphorically just as frequently. When gestures unlikely to be actually performed are used metaphorically to convey some reaction or attitude, even very different physical gestures can be considered nearly universal translational equivalents, such as *to bend over backward* and the certainly more dramatic *из кожи лезть вон* (*crawl out of one's skin*).
3. Target and source languages may differ as to whether a universal gesture that can express a variety of emotions needs to have the emotion specified or simply conveyed by context. *Throw up one's hands* in English means to refuse to continue or confront in frustration, disgust or despair, where the analogous gesture *всплескивать руками* can be a reaction to any number of strong emotions, including delight. The English would have to be translated with a specification of the implied emotion.
4. Some references to human gestures are not physically possible (*twist oneself into a pretzel; put your foot in your mouth*) or are based on animal rather than human body language (*wagging one's tail; getting one's back up*) and are of course always used metaphorically when referring to humans. These may be translated literally (physically) if that rendering is common enough to be understood in the target language as a metaphor or by translating the conveyed meaning, i.e., emotion or reaction. It should be remembered, however, that, even if an animal gesture idiom in the source is likely to be understood in the target as a metaphor conveying mood



Katia Jacobs, daughter of Svetlana Beloshapkina, demonstrates two Russian gestures пальчики оближешь (you'll lick your fingers) and развести руками (shrug or sometimes throw up your hands).

or attitude, if it is not in common use in the target it may be interpreted as more disparaging than it is in the source.

5. Particular pitfalls for translation are groups of similar gesture phrases that differ only slightly in phrasing but have quite different meanings and connotations. These may confuse even the most competent translators. For example: 1) *grit one's teeth* (do something despite the distress it causes one: *стискивать зубы*), *grind one's teeth* (physically but covertly express or experience stress): *скрежетать зубами*), *gnash one's teeth* (demonstrate to others frustration and rage, as in the Biblical *wailing and gnashing of teeth*, also translated as *скрежетать зубами* though the distinction is meaningful in English); 2) *cross one's fingers* (a supposed magical gesture to make something hoped for happen) and *have one's (hidden) fingers crossed* (a child's way to make a lie not really a lie or a promise not really a promise).
6. A category involving similarly subtle differences is the use of different verbs/nouns to convey different connotations or assessments of essentially the same gesture: *smile* (*улыбаться*) versus *smirk* (*ухмыляться*); *wink* versus *blink* (*подмигивать*; *моргать*). Here a smile is just a smile, but a smirk is a smile of evil or at least reprehensible/offensive self-satisfaction, even if the difference is all in the eye of the beholder. A wink is an intentional gesture suggesting friendliness, or romantic invitation, or used as a covert signal of complicity. A blink is simply the involuntary or physically induced analog. Both the latter terms enter into a number of idioms and set phrases with different conveyed meaning. *In the blink of an eye* (very short time; *в мгновение ока*), *didn't even blink* (showed no reaction; *глазом не моргнув*), *wink at certain behaviors* (pretend not to see; *смотреть сквозь пальцы*), or the parenthetical *wink, wink* (a sign of complicity or insincerity directed at collaborators; perhaps, *перемигиваться* in Russian).
7. A category posing real translation difficulty involves actual identical or very similar gestures that have different culturally established significances in the source and target. Lynn Visson in *What Mean?* ("Русские проблемы в английской речи (слова и фразы в контексте двух культур)", Moscow, R.Valent, 2011, p. 189), cites an incident in which a Russian gesture meaning "*I am fed up with this situation*" (*с меня хватум*) was interpreted by the person it was directed at as a "*throat slashing*" threat of violence. A translator in such cases must be sure to translate what the gesture referred to means rather than its physical nature or the Russian phrase describing a physical analog.
8. Descriptions of gestures that touch or are directed at another person frequently are meant to convey the gesturer's attitude to the "gesturee." When the description of a transitive gesture is used metaphorically, the phrase itself may convey an attitude even more unambiguously than an actual physical gesture would. For example the phrase "*patting someone on the head*" virtually always conveys a patronizing attitude if the object is an adult. *Погладить по головке*, with its pejorative diminutive, may be a good equivalent here, though Katzner translates this as *pat on the back*. *Pat on the back* in English has no such patronizing connotation and oddly today seems to be most commonly used in the phrase "*pat yourself on the back*."
9. Some gesture descriptions, while straightforward in themselves, (e.g., *bite off*), may be included in larger idioms (*bite off more than one can chew*). One Russian equivalent idiom offered for this is *не по плечу*, which refers to someone confronted with a task that is too hard or great for him. However, the Russian does not convey the idea that the person has chosen the unperformable task himself. This additional information can easily be added. Or a non-gesture translation such as *не рассчитывать своих сил* might be used.
- 9a. One characteristic of the use of idioms in English is that they are very often not just cited in their canonical form but elaborated on, altered, turned into "anti-idioms," or alluded to. In such cases, the meaning is highly likely to be expanded or altered as well. Here is just one of many examples in the newspaper collection alluding to *bite off more than one can chew* and referring to the

methodical step by step approach of Hillary Clinton: “*She wants everyone to make sure to chew their manageable bites of progress carefully.*” A paraphrase of the meaning conveyed would not be anywhere near as vivid a description of the approach as the original. Unless the gesture translation was highly similar in both languages, translation of such elaborations retaining all nuances would seem to be virtually impossible, although in this case, Svetlana suggested a translation that comes close: “*Клинтон хочет, чтобы прогресс наступал не сразу, а с удобоваримой скоростью в час по чайной ложке.*”



Charlie Perez, grandson of Lydia Stone, performs a teen-aged eye roll gesture.

10. Because many parts of the human body have multiple functions, different idioms referencing one of them are likely to focus on different actions. It would thus be a mistake to assume that the action focused on in one idiom referring to a body part is the same as in another idiom citing that part. For example, consider the idioms in our data set using the word “finger”: 1) *not lift a finger to help*—perform (or here not perform) useful work; 2) *did not lay a finger on*—did not deliver even a minimal physical blow; 3) *finger on the pulse*; *finger in the wind*—implying using the finger as a sensor; 4) *put a finger on the scale*; *finger on the button*—manipulation for diverse purposes; 5) *drumming the fingers*, *snapping the fingers*—producing sound in a conventional percussive gesture (the latter in a commanding gesture, the former in a conventional and physical sign of boredom); 6) *you can count on your fingers*—fingers as an aid to computation; 7) *slip through their fingers*—evade grasp; 8) *point a finger at*—designate, especially in order to blame; and 9) *wagging one’s finger* (admonition); *jabbing one’s finger* (provocation); or the obscene *give the middle finger* (a strong provocation, both offensive and dismissive)—three separate stabbing type gestures differing in degree of aggression. Even though the gestures referred to are used as metaphors, it is truly important for the translator to recognize both their nature and their tone and match them to the appropriate target phrase. Good correspondence to Russian finger phrases exist for: *point a finger*=*показывать пальцем*; and *not lift a finger*=*палец о палец не ударить*.

One English finger phrase that did not show up in the newspaper data deserves mention because two (near) literal translational equivalents convey somewhat different meanings in the two languages. *To have someone twisted or wound around your little finger* means in English to have the person under your complete control, while the Russian equivalent (*обвести вокруг пальца*) means to deceive or dupe someone.

It is further amusing that the phrase “*finger-licking good*,” which I have always thought was coined in an advertisement for fried chicken, has a very close Russian equivalent “*пальчики оближешь.*”

11. When translating English body language phrases into Russian and, even more important, translating in the other direction, one has to work around intrinsic differences in the obligatory distinctions the two languages make. Some of these distinctions stem from the structural differences between the two languages: English lacks the complicated Russian set of prefixes that can be used to make subtle modifica-

tion in the characteristics of an action when describing it; Russian lacks our definite and indefinite articles. More important to our context is the failure in Russian to distinguish routinely between arms and hands, legs and feet, and toes and fingers. Luckily, in some cases the context makes it clear. However, for example, *wave one’s hands* and *wave one’s arms* are quite different gestures in English both physically and metaphorically, and might well be confused going into Russian.

12. Idioms often contain phrases in which a gesture is negated; *didn’t even blink*; *didn’t lift a finger*; *did not turn a hair*; *nothing to be sneezed at*; *don’t sweat*. Some Russian analogs are: *не покладая рук*, *руки не доходят*, *не выходит из головы*, *не брать в голову*, *не отводить глаз*. If the meanings of these are not already known to a translator they are even harder to interpret without help than are gestures described positively. After all, sneezing, or sweating, or blinking can at least be visualized, while not sneezing, sweating, or blinking might mean anything. The existence of positive counterparts (e.g., *I was really sweating that exam*) may or may not help with translating a negative.

When a gesture is referred to only or primarily in the negative, e.g., *didn’t lay a finger on* (either never attempted the slightest violence or tried and failed, as for example, a boxer, in attempts to do violence) or the Russian *палец в рот не клади* (don’t stick your finger in his mouth, i.e., don’t trust this guy), translators unfamiliar with the associated idiom will require an authoritative dictionary or expert. Negative gestures that seem to be near translational equivalents physically may have quite different conveyed meanings. For example, *didn’t raise a hand to someone* means in English, never attempted to do violence, while a similar Russian expression, *рука не поднимается*, is used when one person lacks the resolve or courage to kill or beat another. Consider the consequences of a native English speaker confusing this phrase with the very similar *руки не доходят*.



13. Finally, there seems to be a new trend in English to use adjectives based on reactions to describe phenomena (on the model, say, of the established *brehtaking*) that are considered striking. Some of the common ones are *jawdropping*, *eyepopping*, and *cringeworthy*—it matters little that such reactions are seldom called forth by the objects of these descriptions (which are most frequently used to attract a reader’s or buyer’s attention). We know of only one Russian analog to this with no adjectival equivalent in English – *сногшибательный* (that which knocks you off your feet). Less gestural terms for astonishing, etc. would be perfectly appropriate translations. The Russian analog to *finger-licking good*—*пальчики оближешь*—may offer a template for translating some these more idiomatically, if desired.

### Examples of How to and How Not to Translate Gesture Phrases

Near identical body language description, analogous meaning (the actual gesture may or may not have been performed): *sigh of relief*—*вздых облегчения*; *couldn’t take my eyes off*—*не отводит глаз*; *wave off*—*отмахиваться*; *point a finger at*—*тыкать пальцем*.

Somewhat different gestures described and used metaphorically, same conveyed meaning:

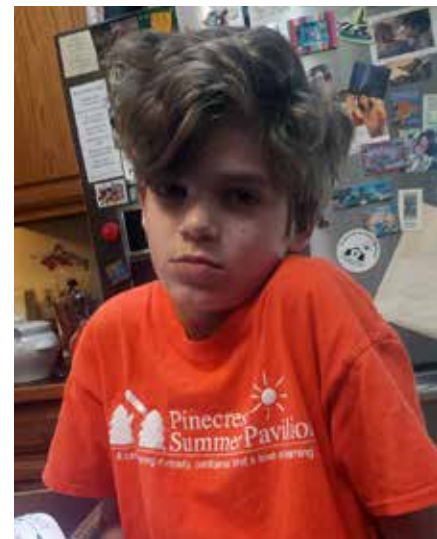
*wink at*—*глядеть сквозь пальцы* (literally: look at through one’s fingers).

Different gestures used metaphorically with the same or very similar meaning: *rolling their eyes (making a face) when someone wasn’t looking*—*кукиш в кармане*.

Descriptive gesture used metaphorically limited to one emotion or attitude in one language, but used variously to refer to a number of them in the other. See number 3 above.

A gesture-based phrase in the source may frequently need to be translated by an idiomatic phrase that does not correspond to any gesture, position, or physical reaction: *head over heels in love* for example, is best rendered as *любить без памяти*. How then might one handle the ironic “heart over head in love” used in a newspaper story (perhaps, *без памяти и без мозгов*).

Gestures that are the same or quite similar in target and source may be clearly obscene in one language while merely rude and not indecent in the other. This is the case with the gesture described by *to give someone the middle finger* (actually or metaphorically), which is not completely absent in our newspaper data. This is not infrequently translated as *показать фигу/кукиш*, a negative Russian gesture involving the same finger and readily interpreted



Jamie Perez, grandson of Lydia Stone, demonstrates the American shrug.

visually as suggesting a sexual act, which is merely rude and dismissive but not obscene, signifying a very strong no. The actual analogous obscene Russian gesture involves chopping a hand against the opposite elbow.

If, as may happen not infrequently, there is no gesture or idiom in the target that matches the source, it should virtually always be possible either to use a non-idiomatic description of the gesture meaning, or to describe the gesture and specify what it conveys in the source culture.

Even a quite interpretable target language metaphor used to translate a well-established source idiom may overemphasize the gesture description. Literal (physical) translations of gestures that have established metaphorical significance in the source should not be used if they are extremely unusual in the target. For *kiss someone’s ring* we suggest *низкопоклонничать*, not a physical description of the ritual gesture—possibly unknown to Russian readers. Of course when the physical gesture is actually performed its physical description is appropriate and possibly necessary.

Sometimes, even with both physically and metaphorically equivalent gestures, a slight adjustment needs to be made in the translation. In English, you would say *with their hands out* to refer to multiple people asking for money, but in Russian you would still use the singular *с протянутой рукой*.

We invite readers to send us further gesture idioms in Russian and English, or to discuss any aspect of this paper. Address emails to [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net) and/or [svetlana@beloshapkina.com](mailto:svetlana@beloshapkina.com).