

***For many years Raphy Alden wrote a popular column for SlavFile entitled The Slovist about the various challenges he encountered working as an interpreter. A number of these columns are reprinted below, along with various suggestions he received from his readers.***

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## **Spring 1998**

The purpose of this column, as I see it, is to share some thoughts about and suggest translations for various deceptively simple, but tricky words and phrases used in colloquial speech. No scientific or technical terminology, just everyday stuff. Ideally the solutions in this forum will provide just what is needed by a Russian<>English translator or interpreter at some time in the future. If not, at least participants and readers may have some fun and stretch their brains.

Every interpreter and/or translator has encountered some seemingly simple words, or words with a specific flavor, idioms for example, that he or she found difficult to translate. I myself have been there more than once, hence this column.

Often, while we manage to translate these words adequately, we know that a truly perfect translation lurks out there somewhere. Frequently interpreting from English into Russian helps me find just the right English word or phrase, one that I had not been able to come up with previously while interpreting from Russian to English.

Here are some examples I would like to share with you:

Для меня это серьезный напряг.

I once had a problem translating the word *напряг*. The very next day as I was translating from English to Russian, someone who was being asked to assume some additional duties said, "This is going to be a real stretch for me." Bingo!

*Вычислить* in "Я не мог его вычислить".

I couldn't place him.

Other suggestions are most welcome.

Put some heat on him, or light a fire under him.

"спокойно" in "Я могу спать спокойно."

I can sleep easier.

“стыкуется” in “То, что вы говорите сегодня не стыкуется с тем, что вы говорили вчера.”

What you're saying today doesn't add up (or jibe) with what you said yesterday.

Now, here are a couple of English phrases that take a little effort to translate into Russian:

"Don't give me a hard time." Someone has suggested: "Пожалей человека." to me, but personally, I don't like this translation.

Can someone think of a better one?

Or what about: "Use it or lose it."

*[For this one Laura Wolfson suggests “Применяй или потеряй!]*

"Designated driver"

How would you translate this into English?

«Он работает в щадящем режиме» Or "в условиях щадящего режима." Perhaps, "He certainly doesn't kill himself (or knock himself out.)"

## Spring 1999

First, I would like to thank all of you who sent me suggestions. They are always interesting and useful.

Needless to say, idioms sometimes present a major problem for interpreters and translators alike. I have a small notebook in which I write down various idioms I cannot translate either because I do not know what they mean when I first hear them or understand their meanings but cannot come up with any Russian equivalent that is good enough... Here are a few of them (the problematic part is in bold): the solutions after the idioms are only tentative and I encourage readers to send me other, better ones.

You did it and now you have **to face the music** – Тебе и отвечать за последствия.

Do you mean to say she is a golf widow? – Жена проводит выходные в одиночестве.

Are you asking what I would do if I were in your shoes? **Just grin and bear it.** - С улыбкой переносит трудности.

**You are the doctor.** - Ты хозяин, как скажешь.

**It'll take a month of Sundays.** - Целую вечность

When **your name is mud**, you keep a low profile. Когда у тебя подмочена репутация, когда ты опозорен.

It's on the QT. - Тайно, тайком.

I was **quaking in my boots** because I had to see the Big Boss. - Поджилки трясутся, трястись от страха.

The deal was **under wraps**. - Секретно, под покровом тайны.

**You can say that again,** - Совершенно верно, точно.

I would like to hear your suggestions for all of the above, as well as for those that follow:

«Let's go kick some butt», said my boss as we headed for the conference room for negotiations with our Russian partner.

Sometimes you have to ask the speaker to be more specific, because the word or expression is too slangy or can mean lots of things. For example, I once heard a speaker say: «Приехала комиссия с проверкой, а наша рабочая группа наворотила такого, что не передать.» When I asked him, what he meant by «наворотила», he answered: «Наворотила значит наворотила, чего тут не понять.» «Well», I said to myself, «you're on your own. Find a way out.» Can anyone help me to find the right word here?

**Злые языки** говорят, что ему уже найдена замена.

Я этим интересуюсь постольку поскольку. One learned interpreter/translator suggested, «I am interested in this to certain extent.» Not bad, huh?

Talking about three-car garages, one Russian official said: «Наша страна еще **не доросла** до этого.»

**У всех на слуху** один и тот же лозунг: «**Ельцина на мыло**». The SlavFile Editor suggests: Yeltsyn to the glue factory!

The following came from Paul Gallagher:

The OECD has estimated that getting such a sector on its feet would require a cash infusion of approximately \$1 trillion. Bake sales and IMF loans are unlikely to do the trick.

To me, the interesting part is the last two sentences:

1. getting such a sector on its feet
2. bake sales
3. are unlikely to do the trick

Very tentative suggestions:

- 1 становление / создание такого сектора

(the former sounds more Russian/passive to me, the latter more English/active)

2. The term refers to a traditional way small nonprofit organizations such as PTA's, school teams, clubs, and so on raise small amounts of money. It sounds very sarcastic in this context.

3. вряд ли дадут желаемый эффект/результат.

My proposed solutions sound too stuffy to me; the English is more casual/slangy.

## Summer 1999

Idioms, idioms, idioms. Communicating without the use of idioms may not be easy, but, on the other hand, translating them is no piece of cake.

Here are some for you:

**“Share the pain, share the gain”** – with these words the VP of a joint venture began a toast.

Most American movies shown on TV in Moscow these days do not have subtitles, but are dubbed. I happened to be at a friend's house when an old Clint Eastwood movie was on TV. Although I had seen the movie before, I started paying attention to it in order to listen to the interpreter. I was waiting for the well-known episode in which Eastwood says: “Go ahead, **make my day**.” I wanted to hear how the interpreter would render this phrase. And when I heard him say, **“Ну давай, сделай мне приятное,”** I felt I had wasted my time. Please give me your suggestions. I will make sure to pass them on to the interpreter in Moscow.

He was expected to be **a man for all seasons**.

American and Russian partners assembled for a JV meeting. Both parties approached the conference room. It was locked. Someone was sent to fetch the key. The person returned in 30 minutes with the key. **“Тебя только за смертью посылать,”** commented one of the Russian bosses.

Father: "Is he taking good care of you?"

Daughter: "Yes, father."

Father: "**He'd better**".

Доедете до города Печора, а дальше **на перекладных**.

"Why was he [a recently hired corporate attorney] laid off?"

"He had very **poor judgment**".

And while you are at it, try this:

"I will agree to this although **it is against my better judgment**."

At the time it was translated "хотя это против моих принципов".

I interpreted a speech by the newly appointed director general of a joint venture. Here are some sentences from his speech that gave me a hard time:

Один поручил другому, другой перепоручил третьему, тот еще кому-то и получился **испорченный телефон**. *Editor suggests: "It was like a game of 'telephone.'"*

**В изощренности** при решении арбитражных споров **им не откажешь**.

Все эти разговоры ведутся **на пустом месте**.

Я не сторонник **кадровой чехарды**, но в данном случае именно так и придется поступить.

I translated this as "**personnel reshuffling**," but I would be happy to hear something from you.

Я **все-таки** 25 лет проработал в нефтяной индустрии..

*Editor suggests: After all, I **have** worked in the oil industry for 25 years.*

Будете плохо себя вести – **не взыщите** – уволю.

В работе я требую полной **самоотдачи** от всех подчиненных.

Сложилась ситуация, при которой **третий – совсем даже не лишний**.

**Editor suggests: A situation arose in which the third person was in no way the odd man out (or perhaps a fifth wheel).**

That was some speech, wasn't it?

"**We'll be right back**," - the phrase used before a commercial on TV, turned out to be a problem for Russian TV interpreters. Often in Russia it is translated as: "А сейчас - реклама." What do you think?

With regard to the idioms published in the last issue, a number of readers sent suggestions.

These came from Masha Entchevitch

... to face the music – ты натворил, тебе и ответ держать, тебе и отвечать

quaking in my boots – у меня поджилки затряслись от страха

Let's go kick some butt – пойдем покажем им / ему, пойдем зададим им жару, разнесем в прах

Злые языки – nasty gossips Editor suggests: evil tongues.

He доросла до этого – our country is not there yet, hasn't gotten there yet

getting such a sector on its feet – поставить такую отрасль на ноги

bake sales – благотворительная продажа булочек, благотворительные чаепития

Vanda Voytkevych provides a definition for “... **группа наворотила такого...**”

Согласно электронному словарю LINGVO 5.0 перевод на русский глагола «наворотить (наворачивать)» (что-л., чего-л.) в прямом и переносном смысле – hear up; pile up. Однако, по контексту я бы перевела как “to make mess of...”

## Summer 2000

Last year I had an unexpected opportunity to edit translations (not my favorite pastime, I must admit) and to watch others interpret. (I was present as a “standby” interpreter). Following are the results of the above-mentioned activities as well as my personal observations:

- **Недоделанный!** (people are called this for various reasons in Russia), and the poor interpreter struggled with this word trying to come up with the English equivalent. Eventually, she said, “He’s a little cuckoo!” Well, maybe... .
- Через неделю они **благополучно** забыли про скандал. The word **благополучно** was interpreted as *easily*. I do think that we can come up with a better word. What would you think of fortunately?
- **Видит око да зуб неймет.** The interpreter could not remember *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*. I always translate this idiom this way and it works, but I am sure there are other translations. (I did not look it up in the Dictionary of Idioms by Sophia Lyubensky.) Editors note: Lyubensky translates it as “so near, and yet so far.”
- Don’t mess with him. He is a real **brainiac**.” I had a problem interpreting **brainiac**. The first thing that came to mind was the association with **maniac**. So I just interpreted it as У него голова хорошо варит. Not the best interpretation, I must admit, so I am hoping that someone may come with a better translation.

- Банк **сыграл на опережение** и выпустил новые акции - The interpreter came up with "The bank decided to play a preemptive game and..." Do you agree with this interpretation?
- **Не обошлось без** тостов за здравие и упокой was translated as: "As always there were toasts..." Suggestion from the editors: How about inserting the words "the obligatory?"
- На совет директоров собираетесь; А как же, **святое дело**. This was a tough one. The interpreter hesitated, not knowing how to interpret **святое дело**, looked at me for help, and all I could come up with was *This is a thing not to miss*. I do not like this interpretation and hope to hear a better one from you. Editors' suggestion: I wouldn't think of missing it; board meetings are sacred.
- Не хочешь не пей - **мне больше останется**. I interpreted this as *all the more for me*. Any suggestions?
- **В одну реку два раза не войдешь**. If there is an English equivalent of this saying, I am not familiar with it. From the Editors: Although this quote from Heraclitus is not used as frequently in English as in Russian, it is known and is translated as "You cannot step into the same river twice."

Finally, some very interesting suggestions that came from Irene Reisner. I liked them and hope you will too. Here they are:

*quality time – I believe that there is no equivalent phrase in Russian. The sentence may be translated as: «Родители должны проводить больше времени (уделять больше внимания своим детям) со своими детьми»; Note from Editors: To the contrary, it is a justification for not spending more time with children—that the little time one does spend is "quality," whatever that means.*

*I'm impressed! – may be translated as «Потрясающе!», «Впечатляет!» ;*

*поиздержавшиеся олигархи – impoverished might be a little strong, but close to the original meaning of the phrase;*

*доогрался – I never obeyed the traffic rules, passed other cars left and right, until it finally caught up with me.”;*

*зажимают – “The state (country, government) has plenty of bread, they just won't let it out of their grasp.”*

*team player – I realize that the word «коллектив» is loaded with negative Soviet era overtones, but it best describes the concept behind the word “team”. Thus, team player is «настоящий член коллектива».*

Talk to you again soon.

RaphyAlden

## Fall 2000

My teacher of interpretation once told me, "If you want to become a good interpreter, one of the things you can do is to interpret most of everything that you hear. Make it a habit." Good advice. I remembered it, and that's exactly what I have been doing, on and off, in the last couple of months. I would like to share with you some words, phrases and dialogs that I heard on the streets, at a barbershop, at the supermarket and such. I will also try to offer my interpretation of what I heard. As always, I look forward to your suggestions and comments.

Here we go:

-Развозить пиццу на почти новенькой - это кощунство! I am fairly certain about what кощунство stands for. But in this case *blasphemy* did not sound right to me. Can you think of a better word. Someone suggested *crime*.

-Доктор, я буду жить?

-А смысл?

I heard this joke from a very good translator, and I could not come up with anything satisfactory for А смысл? *What's the use? Why would you want to live?* Stuff like that. Not good enough.

-Это он назло послал нам такую плохую копию. *He sent us a bad copy for spite*. Not bad at all.

-Тяжела ты, шапка Мономаха. All I could come up with was *Heavy is the head that wears the crown*. I thought knew the proper translation, but I can't remember it now. Can you help?

- В эти тяжелые дни банк держал глухую оборону. (I heard this on Russian TV.)

- Работа эта непыльная, чего ж тебе еще? Can we interpret this as *It's a clean job, what else do you want?*

- Это 6-этажное здание из серого кирпича, без претензий... *It's an unprepossessing 6-story gray brick building*. I had to talk to a native speaker of English speaker before I came up with *unprepossessing*.

- Ну вы закончили уборку?

- Почти. In this case there was a local interpreter who translated it as *Are you done with cleaning up? Almost*. But I thought that *Just about* would sound a little better, than *almost*. What do you think?

- Дедушка, ну почему люди так поступают?

- Обычная человеческая вредность. Here is the situation whereby this dialogue took place. A car was parked between two other cars. The car in front of it and the one behind were parked so close to it that it was impossible to get the car out. So the driver of the car (parked in the middle) was stuck between these two cars unable to drive away.)

Suggested interpretation *Why do people do things like that? They are just being mean. A little heavy, perhaps, but to the point.*

Вскоре все забыли про скандал. *Soon everybody happily forgot about the scandal.* I am not happy about suggested interpretation for благополучно, but at the moment I can't make any other suggestions.

Am I right, or am I right?

I was interpreting at negotiations when I heard this stupid phrase. The Russian party spoke little English but understood it quite well. But he did not understand this expression and was looking at me a little puzzled waiting for the interpretation. So I said casually *Я прав или как?* Please send me your suggestions.

Now I want to bring to your attention some "incredible and linguistically incorrect statements" which I heard in the Russian community in Los Angeles:

Инджойте!- said a saleswoman in the Russian food store handing some food to a customer.

Кого нам билловать? Вас или компанию? I think what this person meant was *Whom do we send the bill to? You or the company?* Maybe.

Я такая забизеная - совершенно нет времени для себя. Interpretation: *I am so busy; I don't have a minute for myself.*

Some things are best left uninterpreted. Don't you think?

## Winter 2001

How hard should you try to retain the flavor of the original in your translation? Sometimes circumstances demand the maximum flavor. But it's always the translator's job to make the decision.

Here are some words and phrases that presented problem of translation or interpretation to me. I have provided suggested translation for some of them and look forward to your feedback. Here we go:

**'Недоделанный'** – I couldn't come up with a good translation for this word, so I just interpreted it as **'jerk'**.

No strings attached. **The Russian translation read** 'Никаких обязательств с вашей стороны.' **Another version:** Вы не связаны никакими обязательствами.

**Возвращаться домой проходными дворами.** This one was a bit tough for me to translate correctly; I just said **'To get home via side streets'** knowing full well that it was not a good rendering.

Чистосердечное признание облегчит вашу участь. **I jus want to know the correct translation of this cliché.**

-Вы тоже доктор наук?

-Доктор наук? **Куда уж нам!**

The translation of **Куда уж нам!** is probably quite simple. But what is it?

В нашем отделе работают только классные специалисты **один лучше другого.**  
Sure, sure! But I still do not know a good English translation.

**С вами бросишь!** (wife arguing with her mother in law in her husband's presence. The husband is smoking and watching. In the heat of anger the wife says: А ты бы лучше курить бросил. To which the husband replies **С вами бросишь!**

My **technically challenged** manager is becoming a pain in the rear part of the body. I keep trying to come up with something funny for **technically challenged** and couldn't. Hope you will. **Технически безграмотный** is too simple and not funny.

XYZ warrants that all services performed by XYZ for Customer will be provided in a **workmanlike** manner. Workmanlike? Does it mean efficient, skilful, competent or all three? Any suggestions in Russian?

Зашли в дом, **поломали все что можно** и ушли was translated **broke everything they could**. The editor corrected this translation as follows: "**broke everything that was breakable.**" I think the difference is minor, if it exists at all.

My friend Boris Silversteyn wonders if you have interesting suggestions for translating **Consenting adults**. I kind of wonder too.

Some reader suggestions pertaining to the last Slovist column.

From **Kevin Hendzel**:

Доктор, я буду жить?  
**А смысл?**  
**(А какой смысл, right?)**

Anyway, the comment from the doctor seems to me to be a bit more hostile than "Now, why would you want to do a thing like that?" which works nicely in English but is almost playful without any dark undertone. I wouldn't go so far as "What makes you think I care?" but perhaps something reflecting black humor would be more appropriate. The idea is that living is worse than dropping dead, right? How about: "That is the LEAST of your worries." (OK, perhaps not, that one converts Russian black humor into American irony.)

Обычная человеческая вредность

"They are just being mean" is exactly what they are being, but I wonder if the intent of *обычная* is not getting lost with "just." In English, "just" softens the hostility instead of really modifying it. It seems to me that the intent is "people being jerks like people sometimes are," so a good match might be a colloquial English phrase like "plain old-fashioned orneriness."

Q: Why do people do things like that?

A: Plain old-fashioned orneriness.

Вскоре все благополучно забыли про скандал

"Soon everybody happily forgot about the scandal" is about right, but the impact of "happy" in that sentence in English suggests that they went on partying and left the scandal behind. The real intent, it seems to me, is that they are glad to be rid of the damn thing -- more likely, glad to no longer hear about it. I would suggest something like: "Soon enough, the scandal was just a blessed memory for all." Here, the operative phrase "just a blessed memory" triggers the "thank God I don't have to hear about it any more" nerve in Americans.

From **Igor Belyaev**:

“*Непыльная работа*” (or, more “colloquially”, «*непыльная работёнка*») has little to do with cleanliness. Of course, it may be a clean job in an air-conditioned office, but it may well be a dirty and, actually, even *dusty* («*пыльная*») job as well. The main point here is that this is an *easy* job providing bearable income with the *minimum* effort made. So, probably, a “cushy job” given in the Yu. Apresyan’s New E-R Dictionary would fit better.

I (Raffi) received quite a number of suggestions, but all of them except the two above were emailed as email text, not attachments and. I couldn’t read them. Please send me your suggestions as attachments to your email messages. Thank you.

Most sincerely,

**Raphy Alden**

P.S. The other day I came across a new acronym - PITA!? It stands for the increasingly popular expression: **Pain In The Ass.**

## Spring 2001

I think it would be useful to talk about set expressions and/or sentences frequently used by both Russian- and English-speakers. Perhaps we can come up with some really good translations that would help us all in our work. Let's start with very simple ones:

**It's good to be here**- the chief negotiator started his monologue. A very good Russian interpreter said, **Мне очень приятно присутствовать на этой встрече**. I have also heard a different version, **Мне очень приятно здесь находиться**. There certainly are more, and I hope you can suggest some interesting translations for use in translation and interpretation.

One speaker was using a lot of **понимаете ли** in his speech. For example: **И сегодня, понимаете ли, мы элементарно не в состоянии использовать недавно приобретенную новую технику** ..... The interpreter wanted to retain the flavor and started interpreting **понимаете ли** as **if you know what I mean**, which, I think, is incorrect in this situation. Does anybody know a better translation of **понимаете ли**? A suggestion from the editors of the *SlavFile*: **See?**

**Н грозился** приехать -- так что встреча может быть интересной. **Грозился** here probably doesn't mean **threatened**. Any suggestions? Editors suggest: **He was making noises** about coming.

How about a well known Russian expression **закусывать надо**, молодой человек. I cannot think of any similar expression in English.

Приехал, **поцеловал замок** и уехал. According to *Lubensky's Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms*, this phrase can be translated as **no one was home** or **no one was there**, but this translation surely lacks the flavor of the original.

Я к ним со всей душой, приехал, понавез подарков, а они меня встретили **мордой об стол**. (**fell face down?**).

I heard the following saying: **A camel is a horse designed by committee**. Translation?

**Dot-Commers and Artists: can't we get along?** (This was a headline I saw somewhere.)

His way of life **sucks!** Would it be enough to say, **Мне противно/ тошно от того, как он живет/ от его образа жизни**.

PS. Someone asked me to translate the word **засранец** into English. I did not think that saying **He is a piece of crap** would be an accurate translation. There must be a better way to translate this popular word.

Boss: *Ну и пузо у тебя!*

Driver: **Что есть то есть.**

Interpreter: *You've got a huge belly, man.*

**What you see is what you get.**

I do not think the second sentence conveys the meaning of the Russian expression. Do you? Editors suggest: **Well, that's life.**

**Shit Happens!** –I saw this written on a T-shirt. Very true! I totally agree with this observation, but when asked to give a Russian equivalent as succinct, clear and meaningful as the English original, I simply couldn't come up with an acceptable translation. I hope you can help me. (The person requesting the Russian equivalent wanted to have it printed on a T-shirt.)

As always, I look forward to suggestions from you, to be included in the next column of *The Slovist*.

## Summer 2001

Hi All:

I have added some subheadings to my column, which, I hope, will help clarify how the material was selected and why it is grouped as it is. The following section (“Not good enough”) includes some words, phrases and idioms (in **bold**), which were fun to translate or to interpret, but which I did not render to my own satisfaction. Your suggestions are appreciated.

Not good enough

1. *Чем занимается ваш сын?*  
*Да ничем, дурака валяет.*  
*What’s you son doing? Nothing much – just fooling around.* This was the best I could do for **дурака валяет**.
2. *Когда в очередной раз начальник стал на меня орать, я решил не оставаться в долгу и ответил ему той же монетой.* I interpreted this sentence as follows: *The next time my boss started screaming at me, I decided to reply in kind (to give him a taste of his own medicine).*
3. *I am going to show you these [bad] reviews of your report only if you take it with a grain of salt.* My translation: *Я покажу тебе отзывы на твой отчет только при условии что ты отнесешься к ним скептически.* I could not think of any other translation for **take it with a grain of salt**.
4. *He could have shot N, returned to work, and no one would have been the wiser. И никто бы не догадался / не сообразил, не додумался, не узнает.*
5. *He is involved in this up to the hilt. Более чем кто либо.*

How do you translate...

Readers, can you suggest good translations for the following?

1. **Clear and present danger**
2. The word **privacy** cannot be rendered exactly in Russian, hence translation of this word depends on the situation and the circumstances. Here are some examples:  
Chief Accountant: I need to discuss some issues with my Russian counterpart, and we need/would like some **privacy**.  
*Interpreter. Мы хотели бы остаться наедине.*  
Another example: *He doesn’t mind working in a cubicle because he doesn’t much care about privacy.* Suggestions?

Surprise, Surprise

I had been wondering how to translate *жить на чемоданах*, and recently I came across this sentence: *She was moving every day like a gypsy, living out of a suitcase*. There you go!

## Your suggestions

This section consists of suggestions sent in by readers.

**Asya Sokirko** writes:

➤ ***technically challenged*** (Winter 2001)

There is a nice Russian expression *страдать топологическим кретинизмом*, which means that you are bad with directions and frequently get lost.. We could attempt a parallel expression, such as *страдать техническим кретинизмом*, or the more euphonious *страдать компьютерным кретинизмом*.. The second choice would result in *мой страдающий компьютерным кретинизмом начальник*.

**Mark Colucci** writes:

From *SlavFile*, Fall 2000

— *Ну, вы закончили уборку?*

— *Почти.*

The question was whether ***just about*** sounded better than ***almost*** as a translation for *почти*. I would say that in this case, ***just about*** and ***almost*** are synonymous and that both sound fine as translations here. Even though ***just about*** is more colloquial than ***almost***, ***almost*** is probably used in conversational English as often as ***just about***.

— *Дедушка, ну почему люди так поступают?*

— ***Обычная человеческая вредность.***

. In the Winter 2001 issue, ***plain old-fashioned orneriness*** is proposed as a translation of ***обычная человеческая вредность***, and it is suggested that including ***just*** softens the translation unduly. Although I agree that ***plain old-fashioned orneriness*** is a good translation, the first expression that came to mind when I read the Russian version was: ***It's just human nature***. Another possible translation, even freer, and perhaps even closer to the meaning of the original is: ***That's just the way people are***. Calling the meanness ***человеческая*** implies that it is an intrinsic human quality, which would make it part of human nature. Also, I would interpret *обычная* as signifying that the meanness is common—nothing special or unusual, an idea that the word “just” conveys.

Re: Winter 2001

— The question was about the meaning of ***workmanlike***.

**Workmanlike** implies being competent, responsible, and professional and getting work done on time or without any unnecessary delays, but implies that inspiration or some intangible extra is lacking. (I too would be interested in knowing a good Russian translation of the word!)

— **поломали все что можно**

**Broke everything they could** was the translation, which an editor changed to **broke everything that was breakable**. The original translation was definitely better. Literally, **поломали все что можно** (that is, **поломали все что можно было ломать**) means “they broke everything that it was possible to break,” which is somewhat ambiguous in English. But clearly, the meaning is that they broke everything they had the opportunity to break, or **they broke everything they could**. To say **they broke everything that was breakable** not only sounds strange, but could be read as **meaning they broke everything that was fragile**, which certainly does not appear to be the intent of the original.

Alla Toff writes regarding the column in Spring 2001:

— **Понимаете ли** - is either **you see** or **you know**.

— **His way of life sucks** – perhaps: **Он отвратно живёт**. or **Он ведёт поганый (или отвратный) образ жизни**.

— **Ну и пузо у тебя!**

**Что есть, то есть.**

This statement simply means: **That's right, man!**

— **Shit happens - Жизнь - дерьмо, как ни крути.**

Irina Knizhnik writes (re Winter 2001)

— **А ты бы лучше курить бросил.**

— **С вами бросишь!**

**You should quit smoking I would if it weren't for you.**

— **Technically challenged - технически недостаточно подкованный; технически тупой, равнодушный к технике, технически ущербный.**

The problem is that none of the above can render the flavor of **technically challenged**, which parodies so-called politically correct phrases, because political correctness has not infected Russia so far.

— **Workmanlike - квалифицированно и/или добросовестно.**

- **Consenting adults** - **совершеннолетние лица, изъявившие обоюдное согласие**. When there is a verb present, the **phrase совершеннолетние лица по обоюдному согласию** could be used, as well.

Igor Belyaev writes (re: Fall 2000):

**Непыльная работа** (or, more “colloquially”, **непыльная работёнка**) has little to do with cleanliness. Of course, it may be a clean job in an air conditioned office, but it may well be a dirty and, actually, even *dusty* (**пыльная**) job too. The main point here is that this is an *easy job* providing adequate income for *minimal* output of effort. So, probably, a **cushy job**, the translation given in the Yu. Apresyan’s New E-R Dictionary would fit better.

Alex Svirsky writes (re: Spring 2001):

- **Засранец** is **loser**. However, the Russian is pretty vulgar. You have to be careful whom you say this to. .
- **Что есть, то есть**. Well, what are you gonna do?
- **Shit happens**. И не такое бывает..

Liv Bliss writes (re Winter 2001):

**Недоделанный**: we have a lovely adjective in UK English— **half-baked**. But if you're looking for a noun (as your suggestion of **jerk** seems to imply)... nothing I can think of really seems to convey **half-bakedness** to perfection, though **chowderhead** and **numbskull** are fun.

**Чистосердечное признание облегчит вашу участь**: **Confession is good for the soul** came to mind initially, but that certainly doesn’t carry the foreboding implications of **облегчит вашу участь**. Still, **making a clean breast of it** works nicely for **чистосердечное признание**.

**А (какой) смысл?** I thought of: **Why bother?** Although the doctor’s response is clearly not on the level of: **Now, why would you want to do a thing like that** banter, I didn’t perceive hostility in it; to me it sounded just world-weary. And isn’t it more satisfying to match the rhythms and cadences of the source Russian as closely as possible? (Or are you feeling too world-weary to care at this point?)

Lydia Stone writes (Winter 2001):

What I like best for **недоделанный** is any in the series of *one short* expressions: **one slice short of a sandwich, one neuron short of a synapse, missing a couple of screws somewhere, elevator doesn’t go up to the top floor** etc.

**Bill Keasbey** writes (Summer 2000):

- *Вскоре все благополучно забыли про скандал.* I would say, *Soon everyone blithely forgot about the scandal.*
- *Банк держал глухую оборону.* I would say, *The bank stonewalled.*

**Masha Entchevich** writes (Summer 2000):

- *Недоделанный – he is some piece of work.*
- *... благополучно забыли про скандал. -- In a week the scandal was safely forgotten.*
- *He is a real brainiac --Он жутко башковитый.*

Thank you all very much for your suggestions and comments

Sincerely,

RA

## Winter 2002

Hi everybody:

Here are some words and expressions that represented various degrees of challenge to me while I was interpreting (causing a pause that was a bit too long) or translating (a word seemed simple enough, but I couldn't find it in my dictionaries or wasn't satisfied with my translation).

### My best guesses:

- **Ratpack** - “Коробочка” (a well known character from Russian literature).
- **Умник** - **smartass**.
- “I can only offer you black coffee. No cream or sugar.  
No problem. I **am not particular**.  
**Я не привередлив.**”
- “Ничего, **переживет**.  
That's ok. **He'll live.**”
- Ему тоже **досталось** (от начальства).
- **He took a beating too**.
- Playing video games is one of my **guiltiest pleasures**.  
Люблю играть в видео игры – **грешен**.
- I expect you to be there. **No excuses!**  
**Никаких отговорок!**
- **Могучая кучка** (a group of famous Russian composers headed by Balakirev) is translated as **The mighty handful**.

A manager was making a proposal, which met with severe criticism from Board members. Frustrated, he started tearing up the proposal.  
What are you doing?

**What does it look like I am doing!**

My suggestions **Разве не видно? Or А вы как думаете?**

### I was wondering if:

- “Seems like I **got the name without the game**” (said someone who was rumored to be having an affair with a woman he hardly knew working at the same company) can be interpreted as **Без меня меня женили?**

- “Might as well **go out in a puff of smoke**,” said someone who has just been fired and planned to do/say something in public can be interpreted as **Уходить так с музыкой?**
- There is a Russian equivalent for **The Happy hour** (at a restaurant). Suggestions please.
- There is a nice (or maybe not so nice) Russian equivalent for the word **abuser**. Any suggestions?
- Он такой **запасливый** can be translated as He is very **resourceful?**

**I need your help** translating the following into Russian/English:

- **Life is a bitch! (and then you die).** My suggestion: Жизнь стервозная штука.
- He is an undisputable **master of understatement.**
- **Отдел по борьбе с американскими банками.** (From a newspaper)
- Что он такой злой. **Прямо как с цепи сорвался.**

Ciao,

RA

## SUMMER 2002

Hi everybody:

I received a couple of very good suggestions for the best translation of *Clear and Present Danger*. The one I like the best is Реально существующая опасность

1. The following are translations I liked enough to add to my glossary:

Его не уволят. Он *на хорошем счету*. **He is in good standing.**

*Все к лучшему*. **Things work out for the best.**

*Без зазрения совести*. **Without compunction.**

*Пойман с поличным*. **Caught in the act.**

Когда-нибудь *попадетя*. **Some day it'll catch up with him.**

*Доверяй, но проверяй*. **Trust but verify.**

*Умопомрачительное число* пациентов. **Maddening number of patients.**

*На ее счету* более 100 статей. She has more than 100 articles (in leading scientific journals) **to her name.**

*Гуляй пока гуляется*. **Have fun while there is fun to have.**

*Заслуженный* отдых. **Well-earned retirement.**

2. My best guesses:

I am an accountant; *that's what I do and that's pretty much what I am.*

Я бухгалтер и **ЭТИМ ВСЕ** сказано.

*Остудило его пыл*. That seemed **to take the wind out of his sails.**

*Gofer* **Шестерка**

*Who died and made you a king?* **Раскомандовался, понимаешь.**

3. Now, as always, more words and expressions that represented various degrees of a challenge to me. I am looking forward to your suggestions.

*Any port in a storm.*

*When the going gets tougher, tough gets going.*

*It's my way or the highway.*

Sincerely,

RA

## Fall 2002

Hi all:

About four times a year I interpret at a board meeting. Aside from the eight board members, there are invitees, but sometimes some people show up uninvited, and this is what happens.

*"You are not welcome here,"* said a Westerner (from the non-exSoviet world or American West? might be better to say something like official participant) to someone who was not supposed to attend Board meetings for some (unknown to me) sins of the past. Olga (not her real name) was interpreting; I was listening. She said: **Вы здесь не желанный визитер.**

Later she asked me how I would interpret this phrase. I suggested: Ваше **присутствие здесь не желательно.** Probably, this is not the best possible interpretation, and I am hoping you can suggest something better.

I must admit that during my last interpreting assignment, I was at a loss for an acceptable interpretation more than once. Perhaps, I was just having one of those days....

Here are some examples from my notes and suggested interpretations:

*Мы решили не рубить с плеча вначале проанализировать ситуацию.*

My suggestion: **Rather than shooting from the hip, we decided to analyze the situation first.**

*It's just an idle remark –Это я так про между прочим.*

*Как бы то ни было, мы должны принять решение. Be that as it may.*

*"Sorry, I was out of line"* said an engineer after being reprimanded by the chairman for making rather rude remark during the meeting.

I very much wanted to interpret this phrase using the exact Russian equivalent of *"I was out of line"*. But, as you all well know, there is never enough time to think during interpretation (duh), so I just said: **Извините виноват.**

The meeting lasted for three days and after it was over, there was a closing banquet at which I, a very tired interpreter, hadn't had a chance to get a bite to eat (what else is new!), but I did take some more notes. Here are some of them:

Toast: *We walk the walk and talk the talk.* I was a bit taken aback at first then said: **У нас слово не расходится с делом.** I think it's a correct translation and I can use it in the future.

*Дорог не подарок - дорого внимание.* I know the English equivalent of this expression, and I want to mention it here: **It's not the gift – it's the thought that counts.**

'*The proof is in the pudding*'. My suggestion: **Все проверяется на практике.**

Two days later I arrived home, tired and sleepy. The next day I got a short translation job (some marketing brochure). I opened it and started reading. One of the paragraphs began as follows: "Our company is a lead dog providing a customer-centric proactive solution to your problems." I said to myself: Who do they (writers) think we (translators) are? Magicians? They expect us to translate everything they write so that it makes sense no matter how badly it is written. Well, sometimes it does take magic, doesn't it?

### **Suggestions from our colleagues:**

Dov Lederman wrote:

*Вскоре все благополучно забыли про скандал.* The благополучно here simply means fortunately, meaning that the scandal was fortunately forgotten.

*Поломали все что можно.* **They broke everything they could lay their hands on.**

Siân Freck suggested the following translation for: Гуляй пока гуляется. .

"Make hay while the sun shines."

Cheers,

RA

## Spring 2003

Hi all:

I am back with some more material that I would like to share with you.

I was interpreting at dinner party when one of the guests decided to tell a joke (oh well...). I am not going to tell you the joke in its entirety, just the beginning.

**Стой. Кто идет?**

**Свои**

I paused for a second surprised finding I didn't quite know how to interpret **Свои**. It's amazing how fast (sometimes!) the mental process works. It occurred to me that in the military the world is divided into friends and enemies. Hence what I said was:  
*Halt. Who goes there?*  
*Friends.*

Since my boss wants me to interpret everything that is said in Russian, I have to deal with lots of seemingly simple everyday set phrases and expressions. Here are some examples from my notes and suggested interpretations:

**Не стой над душой/головой** – *Do not crowd me.*

He takes in thousands of dollars for **looking the other way**  
*Смотрит на это сквозь пальцы*

**As good as it gets**

*Лучше не бывает/быть не может/Лучше не придумаешь*

I would like to discuss this project with you **in a more private setting**  
**... в более спокойной обстановке**

**Of interest:**

Наконец наступил **долгожданный** день: At last the *long-awaited* day has arrived

**Не спасение от всех бед** - *...is no cure-all*

This is yet another evidence of **growing stupidity** in this company  
Еще одно свидетельство, что *идиотизм в компании крепчает*.

**How would you interpret these?**

Вы меня не пугайте. Я **пуганный**. *Don't try to scare me; I've been around, you know.*

Toast: One of the things we value about Vadim is his ability **to make a difference**.  
????????????????

If somebody doesn't like me, well, **I am not their cup of tea**.  
*Совсем не обязательно чтобы я всем нравился/меня все любили/Если я кому-то не нравлюсь, ну и ладно.*

Cheers,

RA

## December 2004

I no longer have the pleasure of going out on interpretation assignments, so for this issue of *SlavFile* I have used my old notes.

I don't know how you would translate/interpret the examples below. I can only write about how I did it. Here we go:

It was one of those speeches made by a manager who had power and quite a bit of influence within the company, and offering a biting criticism was his favorite pastime.

*За последние несколько недель компания наняла несколько уродов...* Turning to me, he said: I hope you understand what I mean by *урод* here. You can hope all you want, I thought, but I am the one who needs to either find the right word if it is stored somewhere in my memory, or make up one, or even use descriptive interpretation (I call it making a detour). In any case, all I could come up with was: *The company has hired some freaks lately.*

В компании появился новый слесарь-сантехник, вообще неизвестно кто и откуда.  
*A new plumber that came from nowhere and whom nobody had known before has been hired.*

Этот тип с очень необычным именем – Гамлет...  
*This individual with the unlikely name of Hamlet.*

Не кривя душой скажу, что...  
*I will not play the hypocrite and will be straight with you* (looking back I realize that *will be straight with you* is redundant).

Как поется в песне: что не сложилось больше не сложишь.  
As the song goes: If it didn't work out the first time, it never will.

Как дела, многоженец? (to a 31-year old man who just married for a third time)  
*How are you, Mr. Polygamous?*

Его ревматизм мучает  
*He is afflicted with rheumatism.*

Moscow 2002. After successful negotiations (it does happen sometimes, you know) and a good dinner, both parties (Americans and Russians) decided to play pool. Everybody was in cheery mood, and that's when it started – telling jokes. I love telling jokes myself, but the major challenge here was making the other party (i.e., those who listened to the jokes) laugh. I had a real hard time with this one:

Husband: Honey, how about a quickie?

Wife: Quickie as opposed to what?

Муж: Дорогая, как насчет по-быстрому трахнуть? У меня есть пара минут?

Жена: Пара минут! А что у нас это когда-либо длилось дольше?

Well, the Russians did laugh, so I said to myself 'mission accomplished.'

### **Not good enough**

*Вам нужно притереться друг к другу* (to two accountants working in the same room and not liking it a bit). I really didn't know how to interpret притереться to my satisfaction, so I just said: *You really need to get to know each other better*. Which is not nearly as good as it should be, so please send me your suggestions at [raphael\\_ag@hotmail.com](mailto:raphael_ag@hotmail.com).

Ciao,

RA