

BEGINNER'S LUCK

*Liv Bliss (perennially novice translator)
Lakeside, Arizona*

Reader to Liv: You've been in the translation business for over 20 years, so how come you're writing a column for beginners?

Liv to anyone who's listening: Point taken. But you must have noticed that translation is one of those bottomless professions that it's impossible to master completely, ever. And I'm not just talking about the skills, techniques, and instincts needed in the act of translation itself, though they alone are enough to keep any thinking person awake all night. What about the technology? (Or, in my case, the serious shortfalls and general obsolescence thereof.) What about the effervescent explosion of information sources? What about the nuts-and-bolts business issues involved in getting a full- or part-time enterprise off the ground and keeping it aloft? I could go on (and frequently do), but you get the idea.

In that sense, you see, we're all beginning translators. And at the same time we all—yes, even you sitting shyly in the corner—have something to share with our colleagues: a tip, a hint, an obscure snippet of information, a question, a suggestion, or even just a recent experience too rich to keep to ourselves.

Or you could tell us something about yourself. What brought you to translation? How were you trained? What kind of translation or interpretation are you doing now? Full-time or part-time? Why? How insane do your friends and relatives think you are?

SlavFile used to have a "getting acquainted" feature, in which newcomers to the profession introduced themselves to the rest of us. I haven't seen it for a while and I miss it. Probably the great, wonderful congregation of potential contributors thought, as I did, that there was nothing to say that could be of the slightest interest to anyone else. Wrong!! As translators/interpreters, we're all dataholics. No getting away from that, so flaunt it. And where better to indulge our addiction than here?

OK, then, I'll start. I'm British by birth and education, American by choice. There are no other language professionals (or even language amateurs, for that matter) in my family and I have no formal training in translation. I wasn't even particularly encouraged to get into it. In fact, my Russian literature professor, whom I adored, told me that it was impossible to make a living in translation. (I have no idea where he got his information, but I have long since forgiven him.)

But in Moscow with my then-husband, who was teaching at an English-language school there, I saw a chance to sneak in under the radar. Samples in hand, I breezed into Progress Publishers one sunny morning and announced that I was a translator. Astonishingly, they seemed to agree, took me on, and gave me a mentor, from whom I learned, in a matter of months, enough to fill a dozen columns. (Don't get me started on the benefits of mentoring, when the chemistry is prime...) Strange and rocky trails brought me to the US, where I freelanced for a few years before getting an offer I couldn't refuse (in-house work! guaranteed hours!! benefits!!!) from a major player in the translation industry. It was mostly project management, but I did an occasional translation or edit whenever I could get my hands on one.

Eventually downsized last August (I'd been working from home, hundreds of miles from the office, for several years by then, making the decision a no-brainer for the company), I decided to jump back into the wild and wacky world of freelance translation. And here I am.

It's not a typical story. The point is, though, that there are no typical stories in this business. And that's what could turn this column into a shining star in the *SlavFile* firmament.

So here's the deal: this is your column. It will continue as long as you want it to, or until I get tired of talking about myself because I don't have anything else to talk about. Whichever comes first. You have been warned.

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ARE YOU PREPARED?

by Alex Lane, SLD Assistant Administrator

Few things are able to distract your attention from the dreary humdrum of daily routine as well as having local law enforcement tell you and everyone else in your area to pack medicines, valuables, and other items, and keep them handy in case a mass evacuation is ordered.

You see, I live in Colorado, and despite the fact that there are several rather large forest fires in the state making the nightly news right now (fires that one hopes will be ancient history by the time you read this), local conditions are exceptionally dry, and the smoke in the air from the Missionary Ridge fire (some 30 miles away) reminds everyone in my neck of the woods that It Could Happen Here.

Although our sheriff did not use the words "disaster recovery planning" in his announcement, that's the phrase that went through my mind as I started to look around the homestead and the office. The phrase refers to the often elaborate plans made by large corporations to enable fast recovery from all sorts of nastiness. After all, an outfit such as American Express (to pick an example) could not simply hang out a sign somewhere saying "Back in a week" while it addressed a major problem caused by, say, the flooding of a major computer center.

So what about us freelancers?

Assuming no other overriding concerns, could you continue to function if you had to evacuate your home? How long would it take to recover from a fire or flood? How badly would you be affected if the hard drive on your computer gave up the ghost *right now*?

I regret to say that, despite my linguistic, marketing, and technical experience, my overall preparedness to face unexpected challenges of the Truly Nasty Kind (e.g., fire, flood, evacuation) probably rates about a "C" grade. Although my computer data are backed up, for example, there are some application CD-ROMs whose whereabouts (if I had to be more specific than "in my office") remain a mystery. There are other issues, too, upon which I shall not dwell here.

In the end, being prepared for emergencies is an extension of the planning process, and you get out of it what you put into it. It took a sheriff's announcement and smoke in the air to make me aware of the need to plan better for contingencies in my professional life. If you've long been aware of this and have planned accordingly, my hat's off to you; if not, then I hope this column may nudge you in the right direction.

P.S. Don't forget to plan **now** for the ATA Conference in Atlanta!

Special offer for translators

The Smartlink Corp. (1-800-256-4814) offers a 50% discount for ATA members. The discount applies to the purchase of *ParaWin*, *Context* and *Orfo* software. Upgrade versions are not discounted.

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**SLD MATTERS:
FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR**

Nora Seligman Favorov

Whenever I sit down to write my quarterly column for the *SlavFile* I have a hard time getting started. There's a basic contradiction that knocks me sideways every time I begin to write: as administrator I am supposed to be writing about administrative matters, which means most of my *SlavFile* scribbles relate to the ATA annual conference, and yet no more than 15 percent of potential *SlavFile* readers attend any given conference. So is my column relevant to the other 85 percent? Do 765 eyes glaze over (450 members—do the math) when they see that "From the Administrator" heading? Well, I hope that more than 67.5 SLDers will read about what's coming up in Atlanta, look at the plane fares (still very good!), look at the calendar and give some serious thought to joining us this year. We sure had a great time last year, and I, for one, continue to accrue real professional benefit from every conference I attend.

Hats off to Laura Wolfson, our Annual Susana Greiss Distinguished Guest Lecture impresario, who continues to bring prestige to our division by finding great speakers. This year Michael Henry Heim, prolific literary translator and scholar, will be our Greiss lecturer. Dr. Heim is a professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at UCLA with wide-ranging academic interests. He teaches language courses in both Russian and Czech as well as the literatures of many Slavic cultures. He has translated works by Chekhov, Grass, Kundera, Hrabal, Aksyonov, Agayev, Ki, Capek and many others, covering a total of seven languages (qualifying him as one of the rare peers of our lecture series' namesake). His talk, which is scheduled for Friday, November 8th, is entitled "Thirty Years before the Slavic Mast: The Personal Narrative of a Literary Translator."

The rest of the SLD's program is not yet "engraved in stone," but you should be receiving a Preliminary Program by the end of July, which represents almost chiseled immutability. Suffice it to say for now that our lineup appears to be rich in education and entertainment and touches on the linguistic, literary and business aspects of our craft and trade. There are also agents of the SLD working hard scouring the city of Atlanta for a suitable venue for the annual division dinner. After last year's feast cum rotating disco ball, they, of course, have a hard act to follow.

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**ATA Annual Conference
November 6-9, 2002
Atlanta, Georgia**

**The Slavic Languages Division Presents
Our 5th Annual Susana Greiss
Distinguished Guest Lecture**

**Thirty Years Before the Slavic Mast:
The Personal Narrative of a Literary Translator**

Michael Henry Heim

1:45 pm, Friday, November 8th
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia

UCLA Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Michael Henry Heim has published numerous translations from Russian, Czech, Serbian, Croatian, German, Hungarian and French, including works by Chekhov, Kundera, Hrabal, Aksyonov, Grass, Brecht and Sokolov.

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You can e-mail me about anything that's on your mind (bliss@wmonline.com) and who knows? You could find fame, if not fortune, in this very column. If you have a question that I can't answer (and there should be plenty of those), I'll probably throw it out to your colleagues in the next issue. If you want to remain anonymous, just let me know and your privacy will be respected. (I'll need to know who you are, though, or I won't be able to print your contribution.) On the other hand, if you'd rather be contacted directly by other readers of this column, tell me so, and I'll print whatever contact information you give me.

There are any number of places on the Web where you can air your opinions and ask your questions. (We'll probably be getting to that later.) And if you did it that way, chances are you wouldn't have to wait months for a reply. So what's the advantage of using a forum which is, in essence, as old as the first cave paintings? Quite simply—the audience. You'll be talking mostly to ATA members who also belong to the Slavic Languages Division. A pretty elite and famously friendly group, right? I rest my case.

What unites us is our love of translation and/or interpretation and an insatiable passion for language. But there's another thing that I dare say applies to all of us. I heard it in a television news report the other day and it struck a chord in me that may also resonate in you.

Where is your mission?

The place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger.

And, as language professionals, that's right where we are. Yes, we're the lucky ones.

Liv can be reached at bliss@wmonline.com.

NEW TERMINOLOGY IN POLISH

EXCERPTS FROM PRESENTATION AT THE 42ND ATA CONFERENCE IN LOS ANGELES

Urszula Klingenberg, Saint Paul Minnesota
Contributing Editor (Polish)

This presentation could not have been written had I not recently been able to spend two years in my native Poland. I had been away from the country for almost a decade. When I returned, I was particularly sensitive to what changes had occurred, precisely because I had been gone for so long. When you reside permanently in a language community, your sensitivity threshold to linguistic novelty is somewhat lower: new phenomena come and go, they blend with the linguistic status quo, one day they sound quirky, the next you experiment with them yourself, and before long they are part and parcel of your vocabulary. But when you have been gone for a prolonged interval, then you are bombarded with accumulated changes that stand out from what you remember from earlier years. Such linguistic surprises awaited me on my arrival in Poland.

[For examples from Polish sources—journalistic articles, advertising copy, political speeches, colloquial exchanges—of the changes to be discussed— see pages 1-2 of the supplement to this article in the *SlavFile* area of the SLD website: <http://www.americantranslators.org/divisions/SLD/slavfile.html>.]

Many changes to the Polish lexical system can be traced to English: as a source of new terms or new usage of old terms. While the English factor is important, and very conspicuous, other innovations are based on native resources. Whatever the source, the new vocabulary introduced during the last decade can be attributed to changes that took place in the reality external to the language itself. New terms were needed to name the phenomena of the new political system, new organization of the economy, new relations with the external world, and the reevaluation of many preexisting notions. The pace forced by those changes and the range of concepts and objects in need of new names made it necessary to employ a variety of linguistic devices to supplement the old lexical system.

1. A very conspicuous process is internationalization of Polish lexical stock, with English being the main source or an intermediary through which lexical novelties enter Polish (e.g. *audyt, serwisant, dyskont, bonus, wertykale, logo, biper, stringi, grant*— see website for more examples). Most of these terms fill terminological gaps in various fields of science, technology, economy and political and social life while others are motivated by the linguistic snobbery that goes hand in hand with the widespread acceptance of the western cultural model. Later, the press, radio and television help spread new words, and they remain in, at least, the passive lexical repertoire of Polish speakers. They also undergo rapid assimilation and sprout their own series of derivatives, even those that are seemingly alien to the Polish lexical system: *lobbying*, gave rise to *lobbowy, lobbować, lobbowanie, lobbowany, lobbysta; leasing to leasingowy, leasingować, leasingodawca, -biorca; happen* from *happening; rockmanka, rockman*.

Brand names, such as *Nokia, Snickersy, Sony, Nike, martensy* (Martens shoes and boots; a British brand name popular among teenagers), *pampersy, adidasy* have advanced to the level of household names thanks to commercials and advertising. They are used as common nouns so you can go to a shoe store and ask for “*adidasz Pumy*.”

2. Another process at work is that the erudite, once strictly technical and specialized terminologies and elements of professional jargon, previously limited in their application, have now become part of the popular domain and are known by a wider population. So we tend to say *Mam dziś depresję*, instead of *Smutno mi*, or *Wszczepili mi bypass*, and not *Miał operację serca*. It seems that there are few tasks and fields of activity that can be talked about without resorting to very specific, non-generic terminology. Computer and audio/video equipment terms are a case in point as are elements of political and economic terminology that have long been recorded in dictionaries but only recently became known to popular audiences as the phenomena they refer to are widely discussed in the media and in private (*interwencjonizm, recesja, indeksacja*). See hand-out, pp 3-4.

3. Elements of colloquial language have broadened their application and frequency. Previously, colloquialisms were occasionally used as a diversion in more formal registers. Nowadays, they are a natural element of public occasions, both spoken and written. In the early '90s president Wałęsa, with his folksy, idiosyncratic use of language, was the harbinger of a broader tendency to return to colloquial language in reaction to the newspeak of earlier decades. This may also be seen as a way of luxuriating in regained freedom of speech, where everybody has the right to use his own voice. Politicians take advantage of the new linguistic spontaneity to effectively degrade their opponents and win popular audiences. Further down the continuum of language styles, as we move towards colloquial usage, this tendency is manifested by a new invasion of vulgarisms.

Newspapers indulge in colloquialisms with gusto, most prominently in headlines: *Microsoft znowu mięknie* [*Microsoft softening again*], *Sejmowa bitwa o stolki* [*Jockeying for positions in the Sejm*], or *Posłowie czepiają się ustawy* [*LPs nitpicking at the bill*]. Journalists make ample use of puns, proverbs, colorful phraseology, and alliteration. Newspapers vying for readership try to strike the middle ground between originality and popular appeal. The effect that this has on the language can be described as a reevaluation of the Polish lexical repertoire.

The influence of English also played a prominent role in the increasing *colloquialization* of the language. Here, Polish is appropriating not particular words but the spirit of English—and American English at that—with its tolerance for informal style in official language situations.

4. English influence is unmistakable in semantic shifts in a number of Polish words, mainly recent or earlier borrowings, or internationalisms. For example, owing to the corresponding English term, *opcja* [option], which used to mean an official permit for performing some kind of economic activity, is now used—or rather overused in anything from politics to computers—to mean one of the possibilities one chooses from, as in *opowiedzieć się za jakąś opcją* [declare oneself in favor of an option] or *wybrać opcję z menu* [select an option from the menu]; it also means the ability to choose and the act of choosing as in *dokonał opcji na rzecz demokracji* [he opted for democracy], and a position on an issue, political orientation, or a group espousing that orientation *przywódcy lewicowej opcji* [leaders of the leftist faction], or *opcja prezydencka* [presidential camp].

The word *edycja*, once used for written publications, now can denote the latest in a series of events *nowa edycja festiwalu, targów*.

In addition to advancement, *promocja* now means *advertising, publicity*.

The adjective *medialny* does not conjure up images of psychic mediums spinning tables but is used in contexts such as *patron medialny*, i.e. a media company underwriting a project, or *osobowość medialna*, a media friendly personality. Incidentally, *środki masowego przekazu* or *publikatory* are hardly used any more. It is universally *mass media*.

5. Words may change their meaning in more subtle ways associated with their emotive value. Some neutral words have acquired an expressive coloration. They are now positively or negatively charged, depending on who is using them.

Europejczyk, besides its basic neutral meaning of “someone who lives in Europe,” also means “someone well grounded in the European culture and values” and as such it has a positive connotation. If you are in favor of Poland’s accession to the European Union, for you to call someone an *Europejczyk* is to pay him a compliment, but it becomes an insult if used by one who believes in protecting the Polish national character from foreign influence. *Patriota* or *katolik* are similar examples.

On the other hand, *prominent* (a person from the ruling establishment) and *nomenklatura* (a group of people occupying high positions thanks to their affiliation with a ruling party) have neutral connotations now. These were highly stigmatizing terms only 15 years ago, to the point that they were banned from official currency. Now, when erstwhile oppositionists are themselves prominent politicians, *prominent* has lost its communist connotation, while *nomenklatura* in the age of shifting political elites denotes people from ruling establishments regardless of whether they were nominated or elected (c.f. *stara i nowa nomenklatura*). Yet *burżuazja* still sounds suspect; the fifty years of anti-capitalist propaganda has left its mark on this term. *Klasa średnia* or *drobni przedsiębiorcy* is used instead. For the same reason *kapitalista* is recast as *przedsiębiorca*, or *biznesmen*. For the first years after the transformation, even the political right was uneasy calling itself *prawica*. *Obóz reform* was used in its place.

Aborcja is another interesting example of how language keeps pace with new perceptions. In 1991 a major medical dictionary provided as the Polish equivalent of abortion only *poronienie*. Other terms used earlier for induced abortion were *przerwanie ciąży, spędzenie płodu*, a euphemistic *zabieg*, or colloquial *skrobanka*. Nowadays, the *aborcja* is the main term used in social dialogue by both sides of the issue. It has the advantage of being short and not overly explicit.

Other words that have come into use prompted by new, more politically correct sensitivities: *Romowie*, instead of *Cyganie*; *Afrykańczyk* or *Afroamerykanin*, in translations of English texts; *Murzyn* (Negro) is still used with a neutral connotation in standard Polish; *kaleka* and *inwalida* are replaced by *niepełnosprawny*, and a hyper correct *sprawny inaczej* (a literal translation of *differently abled*); *chory psychicznie* has replaced a nominal *chory umysłowo*, with which it was once interchangeable; *rak* is more often *choroba nowotworowa*; also used in a collocation *mieć nowotwór*; and *konkubinat* has made room for *związek nieformalny*;

6. New lexical items in Polish have always been generated by a wealth of morphological processes. New loans, for example, quickly sprout derivatives, as in *uprawnienia dealerskie, płyta kompaktowa, usługi marketingowe*.

The morphological system easily adopts foreign prefixes and puts them to work in generating long lists of compound nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Some of the prefixes functioned in that capacity before but they have gained new productivity now: e.g. *dezideologizacja, reemitować, autokomis, teledyskusja, antyilustracyjny, postzimnowojenny, prorodzinny*, new ones have been added: *euroczeki, ekobomba, superkomfortowy, ekstramocny, hipermarket, megasklep, pseudoreklama, kryptocenzura, narkopieniądze, multikino, neopopiwek* (lexemes *pomo-, sex-, wideo-, punk-* account for over 30 derivatives each). See more examples on pp. 6-7 of handout.

7. To call a shop an *ekosklep* instead of “*sklep z artykułami ekologicznymi*” or to describe someone as *eurosceptyk*, instead of *osoba sceptyczna wobec zrzeszenia z Unią Europejską* might be jarring to the ear of a linguistic purist but it saves time and paper, which is a bonus in a fast paced, economy—driven society where young, restless people are setting trends. Such motivations seem to be behind other types of synthetic constructions that take several-word-long nominal phrases and turn them into single words by means of suffixes, such as *ówka* [see p. 6]. *Budżetówka, porodówka, drogówka, kuroniówka* sound less formal than *sfera budżetowa, izba porodowa, policja drogowa, dodatek dla bezrobotnych wprowadzony przez ministra pracy Jacka Kuronia* [unemployment benefit instituted by labor minister Jacek Kuroń] in accordance with the trend for colloquial language. But if they are used often enough in public situations, they will be perceived as increasingly neutral with time.

8. New expressive, attitude-laden vocabulary once typical of colloquial style, professional jargon, or literary register is moving into the mainstream. To that end, words denoting persons,

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REPORT ON ATA MEDICAL TRANSLATION SEMINAR

Svetlana Ball

On May 18th I had the pleasure of attending ATA's first ever medical translation seminar in Chicago, Illinois. Frankly, I thought I would find, at most, thirty people at this event. I was thus surprised to see more than one hundred at the opening session, *The Language of Medicine*, presented by Davi-Ellen Chabner. This session proved to be extremely informative and educational. Chabner has developed her own method for teaching medical terminology. Instead of stressing memorization, Chabner showed us how to divide complex medical terms into their component parts, explaining the meaning of these terms in the context of how the body works in health and disease. In just a little over two hours we were able to cover a lot of ground. Our discussion started with *laryngitis* in which the suffix *itis* means inflammation and the root *laryng* means *larynx*. From there we moved on to other inflammation terms, such as *pancreatitis* (inflammation of the pancreas), *gastritis* (inflammation of the stomach, *gastr/o* meaning stomach) and *arthritis* (inflammation of the joints, *arthr/o* meaning joint).

Then we learned that the suffix *omy* means incision, as in *lobotomy*, incision of the brain. Similarly, *oma* means tumor, so *hepatoma* is a tumor of the liver, while *adenoma* is a glandular tumor (*aden/o* meaning gland).

The suffix *ology* means "the study of something," from which it follows that *cardiology* is the study of the heart and *pathology* is study of disease. The suffix *opsy* means "the process of viewing" so that *biopsy* means "viewing life." The suffix *ectomy* means excision or removal, so *gastrectomy* is removal of the stomach. The chart below sums up these and other helpful etymological hints.

Overall, I thought this was a great method; it certainly helped me.

Later we had time for a mini-networking session, where representatives from translation agencies had a few minutes to accept resumes and to hand out their business cards.

The choice of which afternoon session to attend presented a dilemma for me. There were two sessions being offered at once, both of great interest to me. In theory, each time slot contained one session primarily related to translation and another primarily related to interpretation. However, this did not make it easier for many of us to choose. All presentations were designed to be applicable to all languages. The first two were *Legal Issues in the Translation of Healthcare Documents* presented by Maria Cornelio and *Ethical Codes and Ethical Dilemmas in Medical Interpreting* presented by Dr. Cornelia Brown and Dr. Bruce T. Downing.

I chose to go to the second one simply because I had met Dr. Brown in the hallway two hours before and was impressed by her impeccable Russian. The speakers talked about a code of ethics, the set of principles that governs the conduct of members of a profession while they are engaged in the enactment of that profession. We discussed a draft presented by the Certification Committee of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care. The topic of confidentiality gave rise to a heated discussion about where to draw the confidentiality line. Do we keep the information the patient confided in us while the doctor was away confidential or do we break trust and tell the doctor all about it? Some of the suggestions were: stay "glued" to the doc-

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-ac	Pertaining to	Cardiac
-algia	Pain	Athralgia
-cyte	Cell	Erythrocyte
-ectomy	Excision or removal	Mastectomy, gastrectomy
-emia	Blood condition	Leukemia
-genic	Pertaining to	Carcinogenic
-gram	Record	Electroencephalogram
-ic, -ical	Pertaining to	Gastric
-ion	Process	Excision
-ist	Specialist	Gynecologist
-itis	Inflammation	Laryngitis, pancreatitis
-ology	The study of something	Cardiology, pathology
-omy	Incision	Lobotomy
-oma	Tumor	Hepatoma, adenoma
-opsy	The process of viewing	Biopsy

tor and never be left alone with the patient; make an effort to draw the patient out, or tell the doctor everything you know since you are, in some sense, responsible for the patient's well being. Some of the participants employed by hospitals had different viewpoints from the interpreters working for translation agencies. Overall, I drew a lot from the discussion.

The last two sessions were *A Crash Course in Experimental Design and Inferential Statistics for Biomedical Translators* presented by Lydia Stone and *Beyond Bilingualism: The Role of Telephonic Interpreting in Facilitating Cultural Competency* presented by Janet Erickson-Johnson. Since Lydia had extensive handouts and intends to speak on this same topic at the ATA conference in Atlanta, I decided to attend the other session. The session for telephonic interpreters was very engaging, and was well attended. We even got to participate in some role playing exercises. The highlight of this session was an opportunity to hear a live over-the-phone interpreter at work.

Overall, I am glad I went to the conference. I would recommend that everyone who can plan to attend either the ATA Business Seminar in August or the ATA Legal Seminar in September, or maybe both. Besides all the useful information you acquire, you will be able to show your clients you are committed to continuing education and you are making every effort to keep in touch with your fields.

Svetlana Ball was born in Crimea, Ukraine. She received a BA in Linguistics from the University of Izmail-Odessa Region. Her practice includes both interpretation and translation assignments. Svetlana specializes in medical and legal subject matter. She currently resides in Ohio.

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concepts or events are twisted and played around with. As far as word formation goes this is nothing new; the new element is that such coinages appear in high-circulation newspapers, or before large audiences. Attitudes about politics and social issues—usually negative ones—inform many such neologisms. Some take proper nouns as their starting point (*lepperowiec* [a follower of Andrzej Lepper of the radical peasant faction], *milerysta* [adherent of Leszek Miller, the post-communist prime minister], *dewałęszycja* [removal of Lech Wałęsa and his camp from the political scene], some contain a humorous allusion (*aferal* fuses the words *afery* [a scandal] and *liberal* [a liberal]; *pampersi* are young executives who have overthrown the old order in the public television, or reveal a disparaging attitude (*oficjalka* of an official ceremony, *generalka*—a general strike). *Oszolom* (from *oszałamić* [to stupefy] plus the suffix used to form agentive nouns) was even named “the #1 word of 1992” so frequently was it used in the media to describe politicians stirring up populist sentiments.

These are forces currently at work in Polish. As translators and interpreters working outside Poland, we should be aware of them and stay attuned to how the linguistic norm changes. But when it comes to deciding whether to actively use the new lexis, I think a sensible thing for us to do is to selectively adopt novelties and at the same time remain true to the language perceptions we have developed over the years. Perhaps through this approach we will remain pure vessels who will carry the Polish language through this unstable time of transition. That is our option and our challenge. And by the way, it is now *opcja* and *wyzwanie* in Polish.

Urszula may be reached at vaukling@msn.com.

SLD Member Ann Macfarlane To Be Executive Director of NAJIT

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators has moved its headquarters to Seattle, Washington, and has retained Ann G. Macfarlane as Executive Director. In a confidential interview, Ann reported to the *SlavFile* that although she loves her work as a Russian-to-English translator and project manager for her small company, Russian Resources International, the translation market has not been strong in Seattle in recent years. After Ann finished her term as President of the ATA last fall, she was hoping to find work managing a professional association. She had completed a certificate in nonprofit management at the University of Washington, and investigated various possibilities this year. Her experience as a job seeker was that many professions are less welcoming—in her words “less civilized”—than our professional community. She is therefore delighted to have the opportunity to work for NAJIT, an organization whose work on behalf of judiciary interpreters and translators she has long admired. She took up her post July 1, and would love to hear from any SLD members working in this field about their experiences, and what services they would like to have from NAJIT. Ann expects to remain involved as a volunteer with the ATA and the SLD, and will continue to accept assignments as a translator when time permits.

Ann can be reached at info@russianresourcesint.com

SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone

Laura Esther Wolfson, who has been *SlavFile's* assistant editor for more than five years, has requested and regretfully been granted an indefinite leave of absence. Wishing to put the stressful and peripatetic life of a freelance interpreter behind her, Laura has been cutting down on her assignments for approximately the last year and a half in order to concentrate on her own writing and work on improving her command of French (in Paris and Montreal). In August she moves to New York to enter a training program at the UN whose purpose is to qualify participants to work as UN staff interpreters. Her working languages in that program will be Russian and French to English.

I am not sure that all readers are aware how much Laura contributed to this publication. Everyone will have noticed her frequent articles—among some of the most interesting and delightfully written material we have published. She was also the chief engineer of our (largely successful) campaign to provide enhanced coverage in SF of Slavic languages other than Russian (SLOTR, or more euphoniously, SLORT). In addition, Laura is one of the best editors I have ever encountered, not restricting herself to correcting errors and awkward phrasing but wading in to clarify and sharpen the author's language and thoughts. This column in particular has greatly benefited from her interventionist style; if you notice a sharp downturn in its quality, direct all complaints to her rather than to me.

I am happy to tell you Laura intends to remain an active SLD member and I have not given up hope of persuading her to rejoin the SF staff in the future. As a kind of tribute and farewell to Laura, we are including in this *SlavFile* issue as a special feature some language-related excerpts from a booklength work that she has been working on. She also hopes to present a reading from this work at the next ATA conference in Atlanta. In addition, Laura is running for ATA Board of Directors this year. Those of you who appreciate her talents and professionalism and would like to see SLD interests well represented on the Board are encouraged to vote for her.

I continue to comb the U.S. media for references to Russian literature. One conclusion is indisputable: the single quality Americans universally attribute to Russian literature is heaviness—both metaphysical and physical. Thus, in a *Peanuts* comic published the other day one of the characters wants to drop a book to awaken another character, and bemoans the fact that all she has is a slim book of verse, when what she really requires for the purpose is a copy of *War and Peace*.

I reprint the following, also from the *Washington Post*, with no comment, because I can think of nothing to add: "Answer: *Crime & Punishment*. Question: Name the title of the new ...series on NBC—and two things that television has enough of already. Oh, and a novel by Dostoevsky, except Dosty didn't use ampersands in his titles."

Again in my local paper, we find a discription of an incident in Moscow in which "dozens of burly security agents burst into the offices of a Russian oil company ...in the climax of a power struggle that showed just how far removed from the West the country remains." Later, in the same article: Slafneft vice president, Andrei Shtorkh, is quoted as saying, "It's a situation from a Leo Tolstoy novel." Now, like many of you, I have read all of Tolstoy's novels, most of them multiple times, and can think of absolutely nothing in any of them remotely resembling the scene described above." I guess by now I am used to the fact that Americans consider Russian novels mutually indistinguishable, tempestuous, indigestible and unreadable (not to mention heavy) works that they may refer to freely, even without having read them, in order to add intellectual weight to their remarks while meaning nothing in particular. They are counting on the fact that no one else has read these works either and thus no one will be able to question the appropriateness of any reference. It does surprise me, however, to hear of a *Russian* referring to Lev Nikolayevich's works in this fashion. Perhaps, Russia is moving quite close to the West after all.

More on the same general subject. From a *New Yorker* review of Turgenev's *Fortune's Fool*, which I assume is *Нахлебник* when it is at home: "The mystery of the exact nature of his connection to Olga Petrovna deepens when shegreeted Kutuzov as Vassily Petrovich, even though his name is Vassily Semyonovich. He [says] the mixup means nothing, but we can't help noticing that Petrovich and Petrovna are intriguingly similar." Intriguingly similar, my foot! This is a *New Yorker* theatre review, not the *Post's* TV column. Is it really too much to expect someone at that highbrow publication to know the exact function of the patronymic or at least trouble to find out?

On a happier note, Laura W. sent me for my birthday what, I guess, can be described as a box for hiding valuables disguised as a volume of *War and Peace*. While this wonderful gift was evidently purchased at the somewhat prosaic *Marshall's*, it is quite an astonishing artifact. It is exactly the color of the Soviet books of the mid-20th century, with that period's pock-marked cardboard texture—an attempt at leather simulation not really intended to fool anyone. It sports the identical sort of gold-colored embellishments, apparently meant to evoke past elegance without actually reproducing it, that already characterize at least a third of the books on my shelves. Even the print is like Soviet English print. One thing bothered me, though—the translator's name is absent from the cover. I considered a little homemade improvement, which would consist of adding "Translator: L.E. Wolfson," or "L.R. Stone" below the name 'Tolstoy,' in similar print. However, I realized that if I did that, I would never be able to use the box to hide valuables. Any burglar with half a brain, would, upon seeing a classic work with the translator's name prominently displayed on the cover, know at a glance that it was a fake!

Stray words:

Has anyone else ever wondered if дерзкий and dare are etymologically related? Or whether kluge (a computer geek term meaning an inelegant and ad hoc but workable repair) comes from неуклюжий?

I know many of our readers abhor Russlish, but I cannot help but share a prime example with those who enjoy it, as I do. The daughter of a friend complains frequently of having to learn things *by изусть*. Apparently this kind of bent for linguistic innovation runs in families. The same day I heard this example I was telling this little girl's grandmother about my trip to Patagonia. She told me that the name of this geographical area had stuck in her mind as a child—she imagined Patagonia as a place of terrible hardship and slavery, a veritable Hell on Earth—since she associated the first part of the name with the Russian word *ном* (sweat) and she took the second part as a derivative of *звать* (to drive, as an animal or worker with a whip). It occurs to me now that I really ought to have asked her what her childhood image of the Pentagon had been.

One of my Russian ESOL students told me that while visiting New York she saw a license plate reading: HE ТРЕЗВ!

I cannot let two whole issues go by without a poem. Now that a truly whimper-inducing (but purely fictional with no resemblance to any persons living or dead) experience I had trying to get a book published has ended, quite literally with a bang (of the automotive not ballistic variety), I offer the following.

Our Jason finds the best excuses
For why we face one more delay.
While antics such as this amuse us,
We long for publication day.
His son and daughter are not speaking;
The car won't start, the roof is leaking;
The fonts we sent him can't be read;
He has to help his uncle wed;
A trip abroad is in the offing;
He can't recoup his last book's cost;
The box with all our drafts got lost;
He cannot pee, he can't stop coughing;
He's reading at a world-famed venue;
Our book keeps shifting down the menu.

It really starts to try our patience
To hear his latest alibi:
Disasters, illness, celebrations—
Meanwhile the weeks and months fly by.
He never got our latest faxes;
He had to do his income taxes;
George Bush's win has him undone;
His new computer doesn't run;
What else can he dream up to plague us?
His cousin's wife has left him flat;
He's worried sick about his cat;
He must go gambling in Los Vegas.
We nod and sigh, but want to shout,
"When will our —ing book come out?"

The Slovist

Raphy Alden

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**.

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 попадетсЯ. **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.**

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 king?

Раскомандовался, понимаешь.

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

Any port in a storm.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

It's my way or the highway.

Sincerely,

RA

P.S. My email address is: raffialden@aol.com

AN INTERPRETED LIFE: Excerpts from a Booklength Memoir by Laura Esther Wolfson

According to an urban legend current in the late Soviet period, a schoolteacher with a freshly-minted teaching degree was hired to teach English in a school in the tundra, attended mainly by children of a native, caribou-tending people. The teacher came from a subtropical stretch of Georgian Black Sea coast called variously, Mingrelia or Megrelia. He taught; the children worked assiduously. At the end of the year, an examining commission from the Ministry of Education journeyed out from Moscow to observe. Prompted to demonstrate their knowledge, the pupils chattered fluently. The examiners listened, exchanged glances, took notes. What the children were speaking was not English or any other language the examiners recognized. Far from outside influences, the children—and their parents—believed that what they were learning was English. It did not take much detective work to discover that the teacher, a Mingrelian patriot, had taken the opportunity to increase significantly the number of speakers of his native tongue.

In some way, every decision to study a foreign language is like this. We think we know what language we are studying, but in fact, how can we? All we know is its name. Sometimes, we hear distant, distorted reports of the culture the language carries. What we learn turns out to be far different from what we thought we were learning; no way can we know in advance; that would be a paradox, more so than with other disciplines, for a language is both container and content.

* * *

When I was a small girl, I once stood on a stool next to my mother as she was making a salad. I picked up a reddish fruit from a pile on the cutting board and asked, “Is this a tomato?” The knife stopped moving. My mother looked at me in astonishment. She knew that I knew that it was a tomato. To answer such a silly question, intended apparently to bother and distract, would be to encourage more of the same. “What kind of a question is that?” she said, and returned to her chopping.

It was no trick question. I meant: I know that this is *called* a tomato, but does that mean that it *is* a tomato, or is that an arbitrary designation? Could it be called something else? *Pomidor*, for example, or *tomate*, or something else invented on the spot unrelated to the words convention applies to this object in any of the world’s languages? Maybe it comes into the world with its own name, which no one knows because it cannot speak? Maybe we are forcing a name on it that does not belong, as immigration officials at Ellis Island changed the names of foreigners coming through the gates?

I was trying to pry apart the word tomato from the thing tomato, to see if they inevitably belonged together. For my mother, the two were so closely bound that she quite reasonably thought that I was trying to tease her in some obscure way. Having been in the world and using language a comparatively short time, I didn’t see the word and the thing as tightly linked.

I wanted to see what peeped through when I tried to pull them apart, the name and the thing. But I could not explain why I asked.

I was doing a reverse Helen Keller. In the children’s biographies of her, there is usually a chapter entitled, “W-A-T-E-R!!!” This is the part where, after some weeks during which her teacher, Annie Sullivan, has been living with her, struggling to teach her to stay seated at mealtimes and eat from her own plate, and ceaselessly signing into her palm the words for everyday objects, it dawns on the deaf, mute, blind girl that these movements in her hand have meaning: they have something to do with the world. Each spelled gesture refers to a thing. She feels the water gushing from the pump and connects it with the symbol Annie makes in her palm. She becomes ecstatic and races around the yard, touching things and wanting to know what they are called, while Annie spells furiously into her hand the names of everything she touches. After this breakthrough, Helen becomes a diligent and loving student and begins to eat with fork, knife and spoon. In the beginning was the word.

And here I was, trying to do the opposite, to wrest the word and the thing apart. I was too much with words, I always had been. They got between me and the world. In a Jewish family where God is dead and has been for some three generations, since the Haskalah opened the gates of the European ghettos and Jews received access to secular education, it seems that there is nothing left but the word, without the presence of the divine spirit to leaven and animate. You do not cease to be the people of the Book because you no longer believe in God. The university becomes your shul. Instead of becoming a rabbi, you become a teacher. A newly-admitted citizen of Western civilization, you take its canon, its “Great Books,” as your *s’forim*, your holy texts. Science and scholarship are the altars where you lay your sacrificial offerings. Excluded from the wider world for so long, both by the prejudices of that world and the restrictive tenets of your own tradition, you plunge in when you get the chance to make up for lost time and scrape the mud of the shtetl from your shoes. But you do it in such a way that the stamp of your culture remains unmistakable.

This is how it always was in our house. Everywhere you turned, you stubbed your toe on the greatness of mainstream European culture. There was the grand piano by the living room windows, with stacks of Beethoven Sonatas and Bach Partitas next to the keyboard, shelves full of classical recordings, Oriental carpets everywhere, which although Oriental, were always synonymous, for me, with European-influenced good breeding and education. On the stairs up to the second floor, Freud (not Jung—too mystical and irrational, perhaps), a book on the psychology of concentration camp inmates, Icelandic sagas, books about Cycladic sculpture, picture books of Prague and Amsterdam, the memoirs of Isadora Duncan, something called How to Read a Book, which, I knew vaguely from my parents,

had heralded a new way of teaching humanities to undergraduates at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, a battered paperback King James Bible. This is just a sampling; each book noted here stands in for an entire collection on the same subject, in a form of bibliographic synecdoche. Often, as I was going up or downstairs, a word on a spine would catch my eye and whatever mission I was on would be forgotten, as I plopped down in the middle of the stairs with a book open on my lap. .

The house seemed to be constructed of books. They held up the walls. I was sure that if they were taken away, the edifice would crumble.

At some point in language learning comes the dangerous stage, when you speak quickly and well, but lack the awareness that what you say has meaning and impact. Merely speaking the language is a source of near-kinesthetic pleasure, like carving shapes on the frozen surface of a pond with a new pair of skates and watching the bits of shaved ice fly up from the blades as you execute a sharp turn. It is new knowledge; you realize that it is new, but it is not so new that you cannot perform all sorts of nifty tricks with it. You speak not in order to mean, but for the pleasure of enunciating sounds and letting them hang in the air. You seek out opportunities to get angry and vent; throwing tantrums has a new kick because it is an opportunity to perform. You can wound severely without meaning to, out of a naive and ethnocentric assumption that no language has the meaning for its speakers that your native language does, that your native language is somehow the only real one. May heaven help you if you already have even a modest arsenal of swear words at the stage when you hold this notion. Your interlocutors will quickly see to it that you learn more.

Every week, it seems, I am asked how and where I learned Russian. It is a question I can never answer to my own satisfaction or anyone else's. The questioners want to think I grew up speaking Russian with my parents, because that would be easy to grasp..

Each time I say no, I did not speak it at home, I feel I'm having an unsettling effect on my listeners which nothing I can say will lay to rest. Because I cannot say how I learned it. Yes, I studied it in college. Yes, I spent many months in the former Soviet Union. Yes, I was even married to a native Russian speaker for some years. But none of these are the answer. There are people who do all of these things and never learn a language. My questioners conclude that I have a mysterious talent. This is not the answer either.

What, then? When I think of the way Russian has become a part of me, in spite of the fact that I didn't start learning it until my late teens, I imagine a mixing bowl full of yellow cake batter. Then a swirl of brown appears in the bowl; someone is pouring melted chocolate into the mix. First there is the yellow batter, then the yellow batter with the brown swirl, then the combination is beaten together and the result is a mixture significantly darker than before. The added ingredient has changed

the color of every particle of the batter by blending with it. The batter goes into a pan in the oven, and the ingredients set, bonded together into something new.

That is how it has been with Russian and me. It has been mixed, then baked into me through the intense heat of varied and memorable experience. All this requires is a willingness to be not only immersed in a language but to have it poured inside you and to let it change you. There are theories which divide all language-learners into those who absorb language best in classrooms and those who learn best through immersion, but I think that either of these is simply the beginning. Without a subsequent stage of experience, a new language remains a collection of words, Scrabble tiles which can be arranged and rearranged to say in translation the same things you would say in your native language. When the new language becomes attached to experiences and things, and to the world, it ceases to piggyback on top of the language you already know. *Tomato* slides over to make room for *pomidor*, and they occupy equal places in the mind next to the red fruit instead of only one of the words being tightly bonded to the thing, to the exclusion of all other words which could serve as no less effective identifiers.

During my first sojourn in the Republic of Georgia, in 1987-88, when it still seemed that the Soviet Union would last another thousand years, I had an experience which shook me preparing my psyche to receive the clear, unblurred imprint of the Russian language.

During that time, in that part of the world, such few Americans as were to be found there were often asked their opinion of Stalin. Sometimes the question was put this way: why was it, we were asked, that Stalin is less highly regarded in the West than in the Soviet Union? In my case, the situation which usually served as the backdrop for this question was the following: I was standing on a small platform, in front of a display of American technology: a car, a computer, some sort of computerized medical instrument. What was I doing here? The platform, the technology, the microphone and I, along with twenty-four other young Russian-speaking Americans, were all components of an exhibit put together by a propaganda wing of the U.S. government, since disbanded and folded into another, larger, propaganda wing of the U.S. government. (And here, note that I am using the word 'propaganda' here in the Russian, not the English sense, to mean 'publicity.')

There were many such exhibits over the years, the most famous one being organized around the theme of home design and containing the model kitchen which served as the setting for Nixon and Krushchev's famous debate. The exhibit I worked on was about personal computers and their role in daily life in America.

These exhibits had many interlocking goals. Their stated purpose was to give Soviet people the opportunity to see examples of American material culture and to learn about how we lived. The hidden purposes were to bring Soviets and Americans into contact so they could have ordinary, human conversations, which, according to the thinking somewhere in the U.S. government, would be almost all it took to subvert the system there,

also, to show that our standard of living was higher than in the USSR, another way of subverting the system, to sow the seeds of Western ideas in a wide arc throughout the Soviet Union, to gather information about social trends and public opinion in the Soviet Union among the 98% of the population who had no contact with foreigners and who, did not express their opinions in any observable way. Finally, the exhibit had been designed in order to develop a cadre of young American Soviet experts who, thanks to months spent outside the capitals, among ordinary people, would have a solid grasp of the way the mass of people lived and thought all over the country. This knowledge would serve as a basis for whatever direction their future work might take, either as academics, language experts, diplomats or journalists. All of these goals were met, I believe, to varying degrees.

I had graduated from college a few months before landing this unusual job, and one of my last classes in the Russian literature department my senior year had consisted of readings in émigré and dissident literature, the syllabus containing works by the major gulag diarists of the Stalin period. I had ammunition both plentiful and convincing, or so I thought, to cite in response to any challenging questions which might arise.

The question about Stalin came up almost every day, sometimes more than once a day, and almost every day, my unconsidered, frank response, that Stalin was a feared and hated figure in the West, responsible for the death and unjust imprisonment of millions, evoked first agitation, then anger, denial and accusations of anti-Sovietism from the little crowd of a dozen or two dozen generally grouped around me. With time, I changed my response without being consciously aware that I was doing so. Now, before answering, I would gauge my strength at that moment, gauge my ability to withstand the firestorm that truth-telling caused to erupt. I began to husband my strength, muting my answer, making it less controversial when I didn't have the energy to cope with what I knew would follow. My answer varied according to the day, my mood, whether I had just had a break and was feeling feisty or whether I had been working a long time and was starting to flag. Dissembling took more linguistic skill than a direct, simple answer more congruent with my true thoughts, but the former resulted in a more acquiescent and friendly crowd. I was learning one of the important lessons of existence in a totalitarian state, albeit a very temporary, very sheltered existence, that if you are told often and forcefully enough that black is white and white is black, first you cease insisting on the truth, because it no longer seems worth the trouble, and then you stop believing it, in part to justify your silence.

One afternoon when I judged myself in good form and capable of responding to whatever the truth might bring out in people, I was asked the Stalin question. "Stalin is seen in the West as very cruel," I said in my simple Russian, "responsible for the needless deaths of millions and the unjust imprisonment of even more." I braced myself for what I had heard so many times before: the claims that, yes, he had made some mistakes and committed excesses, (I came to think of this as the 'oshibki' response) but that he had been a strong leader, that he was what

the Soviet Union had needed at the time, that the numbers of gulag inmates were inflated, and anyway, if they were in there it meant that they deserved to be, that he had stiffened the spine of the people and won the war against the fascists.

I saw the syllabus from the course on emigre and dissident literature before me, and I began citing names: Solzhenitsyn, his books based on the testimony of thousands of inmates and his own experience, Varlam Shalamov, with his short stories, the fruit of eighteen years of internment, Mandelstam, who disappeared into the camps after he recited a poem about Stalin at a tiny social gathering, Yevgeniya Ginzburg the author of two volumes of gripping prison diaries

The hubbub around me grew and grew until I could not hear coherently what any one person was saying. Only isolated phrases reached me. Then a tall man with pomaded gray hair loomed up in front of me. He looked kind, wise. He took a breath; I waited, sure that he would provide some support for my statements, as solitary, brave souls there occasionally did. Perhaps he had even been an inmate himself, he looked just old enough.

"Young lady," he began, "you look well-educated and intelligent, but you don't know what you're talking about. None of what you're describing actually happened. It's all pure propaganda. I was alive during that time. Take my word for it; everything you're saying is false."

His condescension and his air of finality shocked me. I had expected the opposite. I had thought he would speak the truth. I never knew whether he believed his own words, was in fact innocent of any knowledge of Soviet history's darker chapters, or whether his remarks were motivated by loyalty or a need to deny the horrors which had taken place in his country. I never knew. That day I aged more than the usual twenty-four hours. It came to stand out in my memory, distinct from dozens of other similar days: it was the day when I learned how hard it is for most of us, everywhere, to know and to speak the truth. The realization was uniquely bound to the circumstances in which it came to me. The setting remains vivid before my eyes. The event marked me. It tenderized me like as if I were a piece of raw meat, breaking down my structure and making me more receptive to the juices of the Russian language seeping in, deep into me, over many months, closer and closer to my native, inner places, until I was not simply immersed, but thoroughly marinated.

Recently, after a hiatus of some months spent traveling, studying and writing, with money running low, I returned to interpreting. The meetings at which I would be interpreting, for a federal agency, were to take place just outside Our Nation's Capital, in a hotel surrounded by shopping malls and office parks. My work has taken me many places: to secret military research sites in Kazakhstan, into courtrooms, backstage at the ballet, up in a helicopter over Alaska, to a wheat storage silo in Iowa, to the shop floors of locomotive manufacturers in Pennsylvania and Idaho. But this assignment boils the work down to its essential elements. The meeting will take place only in this

room, with the Russians and the Americans, embodying my two working languages, facing each other across the table.. There will be no need for any of us to go anywhere else. Everything which has to be said can be said here. The conference table contains the interpreter's essential tools: pads of paper and pens, all bearing the hotel logo, and sweating pitchers of ice water, the former to preserve the spoken messages as they go back and forth and the latter to preserve the voice. These are all the interpreter has to work with, meaning and voice.

In the past, this kind of assignment, the kind where a bunch of people close themselves up in a featureless room in a featureless landscape for a week, barely emerging until they have achieved some kind of agreement, the kind of assignment where words like 'deliverable' and 'task order' fly back and forth in both languages and the meeting participants' labor is divided between those who carry out the negotiations and others who sit silently throughout the week, taking everything down on a laptop, occasionally running outside when their cell phones ring, time was, this kind of assignment drove me nuts with its monotony. But now I have a new appreciation for its stripped-down essential quality. Perhaps it is just me, or maybe it's due to the fact that the subject being discussed at this meeting seems particularly arcane (as is often the case, it has something to do with arms control; the arms control guys are the best clients and have been for years, all Russian interpreters agree) but the sentences uttered here seem to have very little meaning in them. The challenge is to heave them across the language barrier without losing an iota of their slippery, empty, ambiguous, saying-one-thing-and-then-backtracking-without-abandoning-the-position-entirely quality. It is such an engrossing exercise that at times I forget that we interpreters (there are three of us) serve simply an auxiliary function. The purpose of these meetings is not to see how successful we are in getting the negotiators' hemming and hawing, their diplomatic stalling tactics and hints and pretend fits of anger across the language barrier, but something else, which, as non-specialists in the area being discussed, we are not fully privy to.

One of the Americans gives the opening remarks. "Our joint work has been going well over the past eighteen months," he is saying as my colleague Sergei* translates into Russian. "We have nearly finished with the preliminaries and the first stage. The first two contracts have been satisfactorily fulfilled." Andre* and I are listening to Sergei work, as interpreters do, imagining how we would handle the same utterances, congratulating him silently when he turns a lovely phrase, prepared to look away blankly if we differ with him over a rendering. . "And now," says the speaker with a flourish, "we are, you could say, at the edge of the precipice."

Andre and I turn slightly toward each other and furrow our brows, then lean in to hear what Sergei will do with the garbled and misleading sentence. The three of us exchange imperceptible smiles. We are all thinking the same thing. If Sergei translates "precipice" literally, the Russians, who are mostly over

fifty, and therefore Soviet to the core, will all remember, as one, the hoary old joke: Question: "What is the difference between capitalism and communism?" Answer: "They are both at the edge of a precipice, but we communists have taken a great step forward!" and they will be unable to keep a straight face.

Threshold, I think, clenching my fists under the table where they will remain invisible, and sending silent messages to Sergei, who is a magnificent interpreter and does not need my help, even in a subtle, telepathic form. Threshold. Don't say precipice, Sergei! Say threshold. "Now," says Sergei in Russian, "we are on the threshold of a new phase." I think I see him wink at Andre and me.

I release my breath and unclench my fists. "That's exactly what I would have said," Andre whispers. I can barely hear him. His chin is nearly against his chest; he is playing tic-tac-toe on a pad in his lap.

I have been asked if I am a Russophile. Believe me, if 'phile' is Greek for 'lover of,' I am no Russophile. No one says that auto mechanics must love cars. They spend their waking hours elbow deep in engines, and eventually they get marks under their fingernails which resist all efforts at removal. Something has rubbed indelibly off on me, too, so that I take off my shoes and wear slippers when at home, eat raspberry jam with a spoon when drinking tea and always carry a book in case I have to wait in line. It is a bond more intimate than love.

In the old days I did fancy that I loved Russians or Soviets collectively, that whole vast country or empire or whatever it was. I doubt now that it could really have been a country, for what country collapses into fifteen separate countries? It seems without historical precedent, but in fact this was an empire masquerading as a country, masquerading in a way that, say, the British Empire could not, since its possessions were far away, uncontiguous with it. The world was fooled by the fact that all of Russia's possessions were joined in one mass, not scattered overseas.

And so, in the days when all of the empire's components seemed still to be adhering pretty well, I did think I was a Russophile. They loved us so much, you see. How they loved the West. It was downright embarrassing. We were always trying to tell them that, shucks, Reagan was not the wonderful leader they thought he was, that there was, in fact, a grain of truth in *Pravda's* rantings about racism and unemployment, that our popular culture was more than a bit inane more than some of the time. But most of them would have none of it. And they treated us, they treated all Westerners, like visiting royalty—the invitations, the meals, the gifts! At times when I worked on that traveling computer show, my hotel room was full of flowers as if I was some celebrated actress on tour, and all for no particular reason, except that I was Western, and the regime had inadvertently taught its subjects to fetishize all things Western. Embarrassing the situation may have been, but it was hard to dislike thoroughly.

*Names have been changed.

For the last ten years, of course, all has been different; they don't love us any more. They have gotten to know us, our consultants teaching them how to live, our humanitarian aid which often arrives rotten or broken or requiring bribes or fees from the recipients to get it through customs. They are angry because they feel we could have done more to help them out of the economic troubles they have found themselves in, cranky with a post-imperial crankiness.

* * *

"On such days the sky is incredibly high, and through the transparent pillar of air between it and the earth there moves an icy, dark-blue radiance coming from the north. Everything in the world becomes more visible and more audible. Distant sounds reach us in a state of frozen resonance, separately and clearly. The horizons open, as if to show the whole of life for years ahead. This rarefied light would be unbearable if it were not so short-lived." (from *Doctor Zhivago*)

The moment when I loved Russia most was when I was in Irkutsk. Spring was coming to Siberia, breaking up the ice on the broad Angara River outside my hotel room window, where ice fisherman had been out on their stools just a few days earlier. The sky was suffused with light, the land was flat and stretched in all directions seemingly without end. The streets of Irkutsk were muddy and lined with gingerbreadly dark blue and red cottages leaning this way and that. I had been in the Soviet Union for six months or more. The shock of newness had passed, and the homesick slump which came, as old Soviet hands had told me it would, at the two-month mark, was long past. Homecoming was approaching, but was not yet too close. I felt the kind of mildly insane exaltation which must overtake marathon runners as they do the last leg, a sense that the experience had enriched me immeasurably, and that though I would be sorry to go home, I would always carry Russia inside me, like Hemingway's moveable feast. And I had just fallen in love. I imagined that I would return home, edit my travel notes lightly and publish them to general acclaim, marry, then live happily ever after, having fulfilled Freud's dictum that success equals happiness in love and work. I was twenty-two years old. Like Lensky in *Evgeniy Onegin*, I suspected miracles.

Most of all I loved Russia then because I was so deep in the middle of it, geographically, culturally, personally, that I felt almost as if nothing outside it existed. During those months, the rest of the world seemed so far away, it was as if Russia, her people, her history, her suffering (they all ran together in my mind) populated my life completely. And in Irkutsk I felt I had returned to some sort of source. It was the heart of the heart of a country which was not simply Russia, but some deep, still, inner place, where messages from the outside arrived rarely and after a great delay, like light from distant stars.

* * *

"You are welcome, most noble Sorceress, to the land of the Munchkins. We are so grateful to you for having killed the wicked Witch of the East, and for setting our people free from bondage.'

What could the little woman possibly mean by calling her a sorceress, and saying she had killed the wicked Witch of the East? Dorothy was an innocent, harmless little girl, who had been carried by a cyclone many miles from home; and she had never killed anything in all her life."

Was it precisely Russia I loved then? Maybe it was the heady combination of being young and very, very far away from home, and being swept up in history, and even, as a representative of the American people, being thanked for those historical changes by people who believed that the Soviet Union was shifting in response to American words and actions. I felt like Dorothy after her house lands on the Wicked Witch. The Munchkins hail her for liberating them from tyranny. They point to the witch's legs protruding from under her house. She turns just in time to see the feet in the red and white striped socks roll up and disappear under the house.

* * *

Occasionally, during an interpreting assignment to some republic, I find myself walking down the corridor of a government building. It is dark; they are keeping the lights off to conserve energy because they can't pay their gas bills to Russia, or because private individuals have been dipping into a pipeline and diverting fuel. The odor in that corridor is familiar, a combination of dust and a certain cleaning agent I've never caught the scent of in the capitalist world. I think of it as the smell of the Soviet Union, even though the Soviet Union is gone. Remembering that some famous poet remarked that a person can truly claim to know a country when he knows that country's smell, I think back on all the times and situations in which I have picked up that odor, and I think, these fifteen countries will not be truly independent and sovereign until they all stop smelling alike.

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RECAP OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION SESSIONS AT THE LAST ATA CONFERENCE IN LA

Boris Silversteyn

This article previously appeared in the CHICATA newsletter. It has been slightly modified.

Have you ever attended an ATA Conference? If you haven't, you should think about going to the next one; that is, if you are serious about constantly improving in your profession as a translator and/or interpreter. Granted, the cost of attendance is not cheap (what with the registration fee, transportation, hotel and meals, let alone after-hours activities). But the benefit, in my opinion, far outweighs the cost — so in the end you will come out ahead. You will meet and network with your colleagues from all over the country and from abroad. You will hear presentations by experienced practitioners of our profession, as well as by customers of TI services. You will find out what is new in the field of translation and interpretation, and what future trends might be. You will have an opportunity to introduce yourself to representatives of a number of translation companies (a.k.a. agencies). You will visit booksellers' exhibits, and be able to update your dictionary library. In a word, at the end of the Conference you'll be tired, but reinvigorated. And you are even likely to learn something useful in the process.

Well, at least this has been my experience over the years. And the ATA 42nd Annual Conference, which took place in Los Angeles October 31 to November 3, 2001, was no exception. Slavic Languages Division (SLD) had a full program. There were seven sessions.

Igor Vesler's presentation, "Audience-Oriented Translation for the General Public," related the experience in translating publicly available information materials (booklets, flyers, posters, announcements, etc.) for Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking New York residents. Igor offered guidelines for translators/interpreters working with general public materials for such segments of the society as elders, hospital patients, commuters, and recipients of public assistance.

Although Alex Lane's presentation was titled "Recent Issues in Russian and English Translation," the ideas and suggestions he shared with us would, in my opinion, be helpful to translators working in any language. According to Alex, the challenges include: keeping up the ever expanding telecommunications; terminology; establishing a rational policy regarding acronyms, abbreviations, trademarks and part designations; using the Internet for research, working with various file formats and other materials, and delivering bilingual documents.

Steve Shabad talked about and encouraged audience discussion of "Russian-English Cognates That Go Their Own Way". He provided examples of words that look alike, sound alike, have the same roots, and may even have the same dictionary definition, but that in many cases are not interchangeable.

Bob Taylor, a former CHICATA'n, spoke about "Challenges in Translating Russian Financial Statements". This was a repeat of his presentation at the ATA Financial Translation Conference in New York in May 2001. Of specific interest was Bob's advice to use specialized financial dictionaries with the proper amount

of skepticism, and suggestions on finding financial translation resources on the Internet and forming equivalents of entries that are unique under Russian accounting practices. Here again, I find Bob's ideas helpful for translators of financial documents not only from Russia, but also from other countries that do not use generally accepted accounting principles.

The subject of Urszula Klingenberg presentation was "New Terminology in Polish". Her goal was to help translators who are faced with the daunting task of keeping their heads above water in a sea of new terminology, brought up due to changes that have taken place in the Polish language within the last decade.

We also had some fun, playing "Double Jeopardy: A Bilingual game Show for Russian<>English Translators and Interpreters" presented by Vadim Khazin (incidentally, he is my schoolmate, going back to 1947 — YES, you've read this right, 1947!) and Lydia Razran Stone. This session continued the SLD tradition of holding a workshop on idioms, neologisms, and other challenging terms — but this time in game show format.

And the highlight of the program was the Annual Susana Greiss Lecture. This lecture series was established several years ago in honor of the SLD founder, a great lady whose relentless effort brought to life the Russian Language Special Interest Group of the ATA, which later grew to an ATA Division. The theme of this lecture was "The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful", presented by Pat Newman, a past ATA President, and co-author of the *Callaham's Russian-English Dictionary of Science and Technology*. As Pat quipped, the lecture, like some marriages, comprised two incompatible parts. The first described the Callaham behind *Callaham's Russian-English Dictionary of Science and Technology*, and the incredibly tedious process called lexicography. And Pat promised that anyone awake for the second part would hear a long-time user of translation and interpretation services talking about the good, the bad and the incredibly beautiful from the customer's perspective. The scope of this article does not make it possible to elaborate on the lecture in more detail. Suffice it to say that we got from the lecture everything Pat had promised, and then some.

And other Divisions had interesting programs too!

Still not convinced about going to the next Conference (November 6-9 in Atlanta)? The weather probably will be better than in Chicago. And by the way, you don't have to be an ATA member to attend (although the conference fee is lower for members).

See you in Atlanta!

Editor's note: Boris doesn't even mention the best ever SLD dinner and disco dance held at the Black Sea restaurant in LA, possibly he doesn't want to make nonattendees feel too bad.

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Newsletter of the Slavic Languages Division
of the American Translators Association
225 Reinke's Lane
Alexandria, VA 22314

Attention:

Serbo-Croat, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian < > English translators and interpreters

An effort is underway to investigate the possibility of establishing accreditation for these language pairs. I would like to hear from anyone who would pursue such certification if it were available and especially anyone interested in participating in this (long and arduous and in our case perhaps a little more complicated than usual) process. The first step is to form a "volunteer committee" and then we must demonstrate that there is a desire on the part of membership to establish these language pairs. Please write to me [Paula Gordon, pgordon447@aol.com] if you would be willing to join this initial investigatory committee; and even if you are not, a message simply stating your language pairs and interest in accreditation would be very useful and greatly appreciated.
Hvala i čujemo se!

ATTENTION UKRAINIAN TRANSLATORS! – THIRD CALL

Do you believe the Ukrainian language deserves consideration and respect no less than Russian or Polish, not to mention Hungarian or Finnish? Well, there is one thing our Division can do— set up the ATA accreditation (soon to become certification) for English-Ukrainian and/or Ukrainian-English translators. This idea has been around for several years already, but that is no reason to procrastinate! However, to proclaim is much easier than to accomplish. And the first step should be to make up a list of those wishing to be accredited and those further willing to work to set up a program. We are thus asking all those interested to send an e-mail to Vadim Khazin, our Contributing Editor (Ukrainian), at vadkhazin@cs.com stating your willingness to start the accreditation process. We need 50 people signed up to even start. Please do not forget to mention the accreditation direction (E-U, U-E, or maybe both) that you would like to pursue.