

## WELCOME TO SLAVFILE'S FOCUS ON SOUTH SLAVIC LANGUAGES ISSUE

Guest Issue Editor: Janja Pavetić-Dickey

Here at last is the first South Slavic focus issue of *SlavFile*. We certainly hope it will not be the last. Its aim is to publish articles of particular interest to South Slavic translators and interpreters and encourage them to contribute more to *SlavFile* in the future. Contributions pertaining to South Slavic are welcome in any issue of our publication, as are contributions relating to all Slavic languages. (These days we are especially eager for West Slavic articles.) With that in mind, I am pleased to present to you four articles from old as well as new contributors.

Christina E. Kramer, professor of Slavic and Balkan languages, a first-time contributor to *SlavFile*, shares with us her extensive experience on translating literary works from Macedonian, as well as an overview of reference materials currently available to Macedonian-English translators. Our long-term contributor for Slovenian, Martha Kosir, introduces us to two new contemporary Slovenian poets whose work she has selected and translated for this issue. Stephen M. Dickey, the *SlavFile* co-editor for Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, takes us on an analytical journey through



BCS particles *upravo* and *to*, which are not so easy to translate into English, while Ellen Elias-Bursać, a new contributor to *SlavFile* who works from Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian into English; provides an overview of the structure and functioning of the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia whose work is now slowly coming to a close. Also new in this issue is the news and highlights section, which we hope to be able to update in the future. If you work with South Slavic languages and wish to send us details

of your publications, awards, offices, or other accomplishments, we will be happy to publish them as part of this feature. Finally, as the guest editor of this issue, I hope that these pieces are as interesting and inspiring to you as they were to me. As always, I encourage you to contact me with ideas and offers of possible submissions – I would be delighted to hear from you.

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**2011 SLD Susana Greiss Lecture**  
**Thursday, October 27, 2011**

**Valentina Ruzhanovna**  
**Kolesnichenko**

**Founder and Director of RValent Publishers**

**“RValent: In Russia, Translators Have a  
(Publishing) House to Call Home”**

**52nd ATA Annual Conference**  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Marriott Copley Place  
October 26-29, 2011

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## OUR SOUTH SLAVIC MEMBERS: NEWS AND HIGHLIGHTS

**Paula Gordon's** translation of the play *Otpad* by Ljubomir Đurković was published by the Montenegrin National Theatre, Podgorica. The book contains the play in the original language along with Paula's translation (*Refuse*), translator's notes, a pronunciation guide to proper names, and a short glossary of names and historical events mentioned in the play. The MNT website does not provide ordering information, but anyone interested in the book, the translation, and/or English-language performance rights can contact Paula directly at [paula@dbaPlanB.com](mailto:paula@dbaPlanB.com).

**Janja Pavetić-Dickey's** translation of *Natalija: Life in the Balkan Powder Keg, 1880-1956*, edited by Jill Irvine and Carol Lilly, was published by Central European University Press and nominated for the 2009 AATSEEL best book award in cultural/literary studies. Now also available in paperback, this 500-page biographical novel presents the life story of a Serbian woman that covers more than half a century, five wars (including the two world wars), four ideologies, and numerous governments, all told from the perspective of a private person – a remarkable, well-educated middle-class woman.

**Stephen M. Dickey's** translation of Miljenko Jergović's *Ruta Tannenbaum: A Novel* has been published by Northwestern University Press. Set in the Croatian city of Zagreb, then a part of Yugoslavia, in the period between the world wars, Ruta Tannenbaum's central character is an ingenue inspired by the real-life figure Lea Deutsch, the now-forgotten Shirley Temple of Yugoslavia who was murdered in the Holocaust.

**Svetolik Paul Djordjević's** Serbian and Croatian into English Medical Dictionary, the most extensive of its kind in this language combination, was published in 2009 and is available in hardback. All who order it (at [www.jordanapublishing.com](http://www.jordanapublishing.com)) also receive an addendum containing over 5,900 new entries (131 pp.) as a searchable PDF document. The author is currently working on the companion English into Serbian Medical Dictionary. Current estimates put this dictionary at over 60,000 entries (headwords and subentries combined). To get on a mailing list for publication updates and special offers, use the contact form at the above URL, and include "mailing list" in your message.

**Emilia Balke**, the current administrator of ATA's Literary Division, is a simultaneous and consecutive interpreter and translator from Bulgarian, Russian, Macedonian, and German into English, and from these into Bulgarian.

**David Stephenson**, who is ATA-certified for Croatian, Dutch and German into English, has been the deputy chair of the ATA's Certification Committee since 2009. Together with Paula Gordon and the late Marijan Bošković, David spearheaded the effort to establish certification testing to and from Croatian. David later helped develop and administer an on-line system to facilitate Certification Program communication and grader training. He was a key member of the task force that developed standards for English writing on into-English certification exams and is the past chair of the task force in charge of selecting exam passages.



## ADMINISTRIVIA

Becky Blackley, SLD Administrator

Greetings! In addition to many of our regular features and articles of general interest, this issue is our first ever highlighting contributions from those who work with South Slavic Languages. Special Guest Editor

for this edition was Janja Pavetić-Dickey. We would love to continue having at least one “focus on...” issue per year. West Slavic would be the logical next choice but, of course, could only be accomplished through the work of a volunteer guest editor with the ability to attract and edit contributions. Anyone interested should contact Lydia Stone at [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net).

I hope readers are enjoying their summers and are making plans to attend some of the translation events this fall.

First, there’s **Translation Forum Russia 2011** in Saint Petersburg, September 23–25. As I mentioned in my last column, several SLD members will be attending this conference. Please let me know if you decide to attend. I’d like to have a list of all the SLD members at the conference. For more information on Translation Forum Russia, go to <http://tconf.com/2010/11/translation-forum-russia-2011-announcement/> (English) or <http://tconference.ru/2010/11/translation-forum-russia-2011/> (Russian). To register, go to <http://tconference.ru/kak-zaregistriruyatsya/> (Russian) or <http://tconf.com/registration/> (English).

Then there’s the **ATA Annual Conference** in Boston, October 26-29. One of the major events at this conference will be the announcement of our new division officers at the annual meeting. One highly qualified candidate has come forward as willing to serve for each of the two positions—Lucy Gunderson for Administrator and John Riedl for Assistant Administrator. Their candidacy statements may be read on page 4 of this *SlavFile* issue. Our Greiss lecturer this year will be Valentina Kolesnichenko, who in 1992 founded and currently heads RValent Publishers, a company that serves as Russia’s primary forum for discussion of translation theory and practice. Ms. Kolesnichenko will speak in Russian and audience members will have the additional pleasure of being able to observe the interpretation skills of Lynn Visson, author, retired UN interpreter and member of the Editorial Board of *Mosty* (Bridges), a journal published by RValent. In addition to this lecture and the SLD meeting, five Slavic presentations are slated for Boston: one pertaining to English to Polish translation, one to the effects of virtual networking on Russian freelancers, one on challenges of English to Russian courtroom interpretation, one on translating securities terminology, and one on translating the songs of Bulat Okudzhava.

The other big event, of course, will be our annual division banquet, which is always a great opportunity to socialize with other division members. Thanks to the creative and

diligent efforts of Inna Persits-Gimelberg and Ellen Elias-Bursać in Boston and banquet arranger extraordinaire Elana Pick in New York, we have already found a perfect venue and scheduled our banquet for Thursday, October 27. It will take place at the Vlora Albanian restaurant ([www.vloraboston.com](http://www.vloraboston.com)) across the street from the conference hotel. We will have a private room, and there is even the possibility of bringing in a musician. The cost will be a mere \$45 (not including alcohol). See page 29 for further details.

There is yet one more event to mention, still in the planning stages. Sometime in December, ProZ.com will host the first-ever Slavic languages virtual conference. This exciting event will be conducted entirely online, making it possible for any ProZ.com member to attend for free from anywhere in the world. Others may participate for a fee. Virtual conferences offer attendees access to educational content and networking opportunities, all within a rich and engaging online environment. You can video and voice chat with colleagues from around the world, participate in live Q&A and panel discussions, and more. The exact date and times for this exciting event will be announced at a later date. Meanwhile, if you are interested in making a presentation during the virtual conference (in any Slavic language or in English), please let me know ASAP. The sessions will be pre-recorded, but you will be required to be available online during your presentation to answer questions “live.”

I hope to see many of you at some of these events, either in person or online.

Since summer is traditionally a time to play, here’s something fun to play with: a map of world newspapers. Go to [www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/) and put your pointer on a city anywhere in the world, and newspaper headlines will pop up. Double-click, and the page gets larger. Sometimes there is a link that will allow you to read the entire paper. Of course it doesn’t have every newspaper in the world. You won’t find my local newspaper, *The Intermountain*, which is unfortunate, because it is a great source of (unintended) humor. (One of my favorite photo captions described how our high school graduates “marched down the isle” to get their diplomas... I could go on, but I won’t.) However, you can read newspapers published in Russia, Ukraine, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, and the Czech Republic. You even can read the *Stars and Stripes* by clicking in Germany (European edition) or Japan (Pacific edition). The site changes every day with the publication of new editions and is a great source for keeping up with current events. Whoever came up with this idea is a genius! I love it! Happy reading!

See you in the fall!

Becky

# 2011 SLD CANDIDATES' STATEMENTS

## LUCY GUNDERSON: CANDIDATE FOR ADMINISTRATOR

## JOHN RIEDL: CANDIDATE FOR ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

I joined ATA in 2001 and became certified in the Russian>English language pair later that year. My career changed dramatically when I started attending the annual conference and getting to know people from the Slavic Division. The atmosphere of collegiality, professionalism, and cordiality was striking, and my fellow SLD members continue to be sources of work, advice, and friendship. I am running for Administrator because I am at a point in my career where I am able to give back to this wonderful group of people.

If I am elected, one of my goals will be to make sure that all SLD members are aware of the most recent revision of the Code of Ethics and Professional Practice, which appeared in the May 2011 ATA Newsbriefs. I was very impressed by this Code, and I think it is something all ATA members should be proud of. I would also like to be able to create a discussion forum in *SlavFile* where members can share their ideas and opinions about different aspects of the profession. Finally, I will work closely with ATA headquarters to ensure that all division members are aware of the opportunities that ATA makes available to us.

I have worked as a translator in some capacity for 15 years and I specialize in international relations, journalism, and business. I have a BA in Russian Studies from Connecticut College, an MA in Russian Language and Literature from The University at Albany, and a Certificate in Translation Studies from The University of Chicago. I am currently the Russian tutor in the Introduction to Translation class at the University of Chicago.

I am very excited to have this opportunity to work with all SLD members over the next two years.

Lucy can be reached at [russophile@earthlink.net](mailto:russophile@earthlink.net).

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*The Administrator shall be the principal representative of the Division and shall serve as the communications liaison between the Division, the ATA Board of Directors, and Headquarters. The Administrator may delegate specific duties to members of the Division Leadership Council. In addition, the Administrator shall keep all Division records and shall work to maintain communication of the Leadership Council. The Division Administrator shall be a voting member of the Association.*

(from the policy adopted by the ATA Board,  
October 31, 2010)

At the ATA conference in Orlando, a friend and I were discussing how useful it would be to have a pan-Slavic glossary of pharmaceutical terms. We decided to get input from well-known translators working in this area and realized that many of them were sitting within a few rows of us. This conversation and the ones that followed led to a glossary in seven different Slavic languages.

The above anecdote illustrates the Slavic Languages Division's (SLD) biggest asset: its group of dedicated and talented translators who are willing to share their knowledge and time. ATA conference presentations and *SlavFile* articles are just a few of the ways that SLD members work to improve our profession and the quality of translation from and into the Slavic languages.

As someone who has benefited immensely from the ATA and the work of SLD volunteers, I care very much about SLD's future. I would like to see SLD acquire a reputation for quality and professionalism among Slavic language professionals worldwide. This would make our ATA certifications more valuable and ATA translators more marketable globally. If elected to the position of assistant administrator, I will devote my time and energy to anything that gets us closer to this goal. Specifically, I am interested in creating a mechanism to produce SLD "standard" translations for the names of government organizations and institutions.

My relationship with ATA began in 2004 when I first considered becoming a freelance translator. Through the ATA, I found the Translation Studies Program at the University of Chicago. I received a Certificate in Translation Studies from the University of Chicago in 2006 and started translating full-time. Before becoming a translator, I worked in various capacities for large corporations such as Alcoa, Kimberly-Clark, and General Electric. I have a BS in Electrical Engineering and an MS in Manufacturing Systems Engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MS in Math Education from Brooklyn College.

John can be reached at  
[translatingcultures@gmail.com](mailto:translatingcultures@gmail.com)

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*The Assistant Administrator assists the Administrator and assumes the duties of the Administrator in his or her absence. The Assistant Division Administrator shall be a voting member of the Association.*

(from the policy adopted by the ATA Board,  
October 31, 2010)

# Ten Strategies for Dealing with a “Big Box” Translation Company and Keeping your Sanity

John Riedl

(with significant contributions from Jen Guernsey and Lucy Gunderson)

Happy families are all alike;  
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.  
Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Fortunately for all involved, translation companies are not all alike. In truth, there is more than one way to be a “happy” translation company. The underlying assumption of this article, therefore, is that the savvy freelance translator should have different strategies for dealing with different types of translation companies. Specifically, I will propose ten strategies for dealing with what I call a “big box” translation company.

## What is a “big box” translation company?

For the purposes of this article, the term “big box” is used to indicate a company that leverages its size and purchasing power to gain concessions from its supply chain. Perhaps the best-known user of this strategy is the big box retailer Wal-Mart. Here is a description of some of Wal-Mart’s more notorious actions from a mostly flattering book:

Wal-Mart forces its suppliers to do everything from redesigning packaging to redesigning their computer systems if they want to sell to Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart will, quite straightforwardly, tell those suppliers what it will pay for their goods. (Fishman, 2006)

A book published by the American Enterprise Institute, a well-known conservative think tank, summarizes Wal-Mart’s position as follows:

Wal-Mart deals with literally thousands of suppliers, and, given its sales volume, it is very often the leading customer for many of them. Inevitably, this leads to complaints that Wal-Mart squeezes its suppliers, demanding low and discounted prices from prevailing levels. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence confirming that Wal-Mart is very aggressive in demanding low prices from suppliers. The company also engages in various cooperative strategies... (Vedder and Cox, 2006)

Thus, a big box company might issue the following mandates to its suppliers:

1. give across-the-board price reductions
2. adopt specific technologies to interface with the company
3. accept dictated delivery terms

Sound familiar? I think most of us can point to similar mandates within the translation world.

In terms of translation, the big box agency leverages its purchasing power to gain price and other concessions from

its freelance translators. Combine this with the bureaucracy inherent in large, successful multi-national organizations, and you can see why the freelance translator can sometimes feel like a commodity when working with such companies.

The purpose of this article is not to discuss the desirability of one or another strategy for running a translation business. Indeed, both books quoted above point out that many of Wal-Mart’s suppliers work quite successfully within its system. Instead, this article seeks to help freelance translators prosper within an environment that, for those of us without MBAs, at times can feel disheartening and demeaning.

Some of the strategies I suggest may seem more aggressive than the approach we translators usually take. Indeed, as the three mandates above suggest, the interests of the freelancer and those of the big box company do not always coincide. A textbook on strategic supply management, which is business jargon for actively managing your supply chain, puts it as follows:

It may be counterintuitive to say, but most supplier relationships are not about win-win opportunities, nor should they be. Even true win-win relationships such as those featured in longer-term agreements eventually have a component of win-lose as parties divide the value from the relationship. (Trent, 2007)

## Ten strategies

This article is based on my experience as a translator and my past life as a supply chain manager for an extremely small portion of an extremely large manufacturing company. I have drawn liberally from information presented at ATA conferences and seminars, articles in *The ATA Chronicle*, and, of course, the insights of my fellow translators.

In essence, these ten strategies can be boiled down to advice I was given when I started working at the extremely large company, which is well-known for its aggressive policies toward its employees as well as suppliers:

“This company will willingly take everything you give it, but it has no loyalty. The second it finds someone who can do your job for less, it will replace you. Take advantage of all the opportunities that working for such a large company offers; decide ahead of time how much energy you want to devote to it; and accept the consequences of this choice. You have to take control of your own career.”

*Continued on page 6*



### Strategy #1

#### Never let a single big box company dominate your business

If you can't afford to lose a big box client, stop reading this article and start cultivating new clients. While we are not in an industry where one translation company has a position as dominant as Wal-Mart's, by our definition, the "supplier management" strategy of big box translation companies is based on their leverage as big clients. **All of the strategies below are predicated on your ability to say "no" to these clients. If you are unable or unwilling to lose work from time to time, these strategies are not for you.** On the other hand, if you are willing to absorb some loss of business or "walk away from the table," you take away the biggest negotiating advantage these companies have.

When I tried to raise my rates with one big box company, their purchasing manager sent me an e-mail that provided some insight into how this company views its translators. First, she noted, "We are obviously not your primary source of income with this amount." Thus, the purchasing manager looked at the amount of business I did with the company to determine how important its business was to me. In short, she looked to see how much leverage she had over me. Second, she said, "I would hate to see you walk away from \$\*\*\*\*\* worth of work." In this manner, she suggested that I might lose business because I was pricing myself out of the market and implied that there was a line of people waiting for every translation job. However, if that were true, why wouldn't the purchasing manager, whom I had never heard from before, or since, just let the law of supply and demand take its course? Why send the e-mail? Finally, she notes that "this amount of work does reflect the fact that you offer fairly competitive rates and good quality work." However, the purchasing manager gives no hard information concerning the quality (quality of the translation, timeliness, etc.) of my work. In fact, she only assumes that I meet some level of quality, because I do a certain volume of work. I have no doubt that there are people at that company who are concerned with the quality of work done. This quote only shows that this information is not available, and perhaps is not important, to the person concerned with rate increases.

In the ensuing two years, the rate I charge this company has risen by 60%. Although the company still sends me offers almost every day, I don't receive as many offers as I used to. Correspondingly, my income from this firm has dropped by half. However, it takes me a lot less time to make this amount than it would have at my old rate. (To earn the same amount that I earned in six hours at my old rate, I now work a little less than four hours.) I've filled this time with additional clients and much-valued free time. Each translator, of course, must strike his or her own balance between rates and volume.

### Strategy # 2

#### Keep your relationship with the big box company strictly professional

This is the most difficult strategy of the ten. While you may have a personal relationship with many people in a big box company, you have a business relationship with the company itself. Like all business relationships, it is sometimes adversarial and sometimes cooperative, but it is never a friendship. Each side has to look after its own interests.

The textbook (Trent 2007) for future purchasing managers summarizes this relationship from the big box perspective (emphasis mine):

Suppliers often complain when they find out they are being forced to rebid on business that thought they "owned." What about our relationship? What about all the good times we had together? Didn't we sing "Moon River" together at the annual customer party? Remember: The relationship that covers market-tested items is typically win-lose, which means each party is committed to looking out for its own interests.

Thus, there should be a healthy, respectful tension between project manager (PM) and translator. Treat the PM as the face of the translation company, especially during the negotiating phase of a project. The interests of the translator and translation company do not always coincide, and sometimes it is a zero-sum game (win-lose as in the quotation above). Big box PMs do ask for discounts from your negotiated rates, and some companies ask for discounts on almost every job. It is much easier to say no to discounts as well as other requests when the line between professional relationship and friendship has not been crossed. Furthermore, by keeping the relationship professional, the translator does not have to feel guilty for refusing a request from a friend, and the project manager is not put in the position of abusing a friendship by asking for discounts.

While many people at the big box company care as much about language and the language industry as their counterparts in companies that take a less aggressive sourcing strategy, the bottom line is that the big box company sees its translators as a cost center. The above purchasing manager knew nothing about me besides the dollars I was being paid and, presumably (assuming a rational translation company), the margins on the projects I worked on. She had no idea that I had "saved the bacon" of a careless project manager (now promoted to senior careless project manager) numerous times or exhibited good "corporate citizenship" by answering *pro bono* queries from the staff. These behaviors as well as the quality of my work played no role in determining whether I could raise my rates. In fact, nothing specific to me affected this at all. It wasn't personal.

*Continued on page 7*

### Strategy #3

#### Set your prices up front

It doesn't pay to set a "get-in-the-door" price for the big box translation company, because you will be expected to maintain or reduce this low rate. Your best bet is to make a realistic evaluation of the market value of your translation skills and set your rates based on what you want to earn, your capacity, and the number of hours you work per year. If you wish to charge extra for handwritten files, rush jobs, etc., specify these prices up front.

Some big box companies offer a fixed dollar amount for proofreading or editing a translation. In my experience, these translations are often sub-standard, and in the past I have been forced to choose between submitting a poor end product (at risk to my own reputation) or working many more hours than the fixed dollar amount would justify. I thus end up subsidizing a poor translation. In the spirit of this strategy, I now take edits only at an up-front hourly rate or ask to look at the translation before I commit to a fixed dollar amount.

### Strategy # 4

#### Don't negotiate. Just say no.

My uncle managed a Kroger supermarket in the 1960s, but almost lost his job one day when a lady came up to him and complained that his cucumbers were overpriced. "The supermarket across the street charges 2 cents per cucumber, but they're out." My uncle replied, "When we're out, we charge 1 cent per cucumber."

The point of the story is that if the big box translation company can fill a translation need with someone cheaper than you, it will. If the company, knowing your rate, is coming to you, it means that they need you or someone like you to fill that need. You have the advantage.

Some big box translation companies encourage their PMs to negotiate on every job. For one such company, I was routinely offered 30% less than my negotiated rate. As recently as last month, I spent a week helping a novice PM set up a project. Early in the week we negotiated a rate, but four days later, after I had done a few hours of pro bono work, he tried to drop my rate by 20% just before he issued the PO. Needless to say, I did not negotiate and got my rate.

If you get the reputation as someone who will negotiate, you will lose valuable translation time while PMs continually try to drive your rate lower. Therefore, all my rates for big box companies are nonnegotiable. Yes, I have lost some jobs, but I have gained literally hours per week that, in the past, would have been spent answering e-mail queries and negotiating.

### Strategy #5

#### Account for overhead in your rates

When setting your rates or deciding whether to take on a job, look at the entire life cycle of the job. Although translating or editing accounts for the vast majority of time spent on a project, they are not the only tasks that take the translator's time. Big box project managers have asked me to do word counts, package files, estimate delivery times, and even determine what language a file is written in (really!) before I ever see a PO. Furthermore, some big box companies have such cumbersome business processes that registering with the company, uploading an invoice, or doing post-project paperwork adds measurable time to a job.

In my own practice, for example, an average job with my favorite translation company requires little or no unpaid work (overhead). I receive an offer, look at the file, and say yes or no. At the end of the project, I send an invoice by email. On the other hand, my average job from a big box translation company comes with a large amount of "extra" work. On any given job, on top of performing the translation, I may be required to perform tasks more often associated with a project manager, negotiator, quality manager, banker, manager of PMs, and bookkeeper.

This extra work adds up.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the year, this same big box customer started sending me urgent requests to help finish or edit translations, because "the original translator disappeared." Clearly, they were forced to recruit less-than-reliable translators and had to come back to a more responsible translator to get jobs done.

Given the above, I charge the big box company a higher rate and give my preferred client discounts for making my life easier. It is in my interest that my preferred clients are more competitive in the marketplace.

### Strategy # 6

#### Take advantage of learning opportunities

A friend of mine is an accomplished translator, but wanted to expand her practice by translating certain types of contracts. To get experience, she translated contracts for a big box firm at a reduced rate, and when she felt she was ready, she successfully marketed this skill to her higher-paying clients.

Like comedians who try out their new material in comedy clubs, my friend used her big box clients as a stepping stone into a more lucrative area of the business. She developed her skills in the lower end of the market at no risk to her reputation among high-end clients, and only entered the high end when she was ready. She may have problems getting her normal rate in the future with the big box company, but for her, the opportunity was worth the risk.

*Continued on page 8*

Although a big box firm may wince at the thought that they are not considered high-end clients for their translators, this would seem to be the natural consequence of an aggressive sourcing strategy. In the end, you get what you pay for. However, there are advantages to working for big box companies, among them a steady stream of jobs; reliable paychecks; and interesting work. Furthermore, you are never their only translator, so you never feel obligated to take a job. Sometimes it's nice to be replaceable.

### **Strategy #7**

#### **Charge more for rush jobs or try to extend the deadline**

As I was writing this article I was offered a “rush” (my label) job by a big box company to be finished by 4 am the next morning (it was 3 pm). After I responded that the deadline was too tight, the PM said she really didn't need the translation until four days later. She just figured I could do it in that amount of time. Therefore, because I asked for a later deadline, I was able to spend the evening with my wife and go to bed at a reasonable hour.

All translators should know that the actual translation is just a single step in the life of a project. For the most part, the remaining steps are in-house. Although turn-around time can be valuable to an end customer, it's also in the project manager's interest to have the translation done as soon as possible. This maximizes the time available for the in-house work and makes it more likely that the project will be finished on time. By charging an added rate for rush jobs or asking for an extended deadline (before the PO is issued), the translator can ensure that an emergency is truly an emergency, rather than the creation of an over-cautious project manager (or one who had problems placing a job).

Furthermore, by calling a job a “rush job,” we are implying that this translation must be done in less time than normal or at times of the day normally reserved for sleeping. The translator is therefore paid for this inconvenience. However, although many translators can “up their productivity” or do an “all-nighter” and still produce high-quality translations, others, including myself, know that their translation skills deteriorate after midnight. Given the above, it is in everybody's (translators', translation companies', and end users') interest that only those jobs that truly are emergencies are treated as such. Otherwise, we are unnecessarily sacrificing quality industry-wide to reduce the risk that translations might not be completed on time.

### **Strategy #8**

#### **Manage your brand**

All translators are not created equal. We know that, and the big box translation company knows that. Don't let the big box company pigeon-hole you as a commodity easily re-

placed by computers or non-native speakers. Manage your competitiveness.

Furthermore, all jobs are not created equal. Although most translators have a single per-word rate regardless of the type of job, one hundred words of poetry are much harder to translate well than a one-hundred-word e-mail about where to go for lunch (to use an extreme example). Moreover, big box PMs will often set a similar deadline for translation of a poem as for translation of an e-mail. From their perspective, one hundred words is one hundred words.

Given the above, the non-specialist translator is left with a choice to only take jobs that make economic sense at a given rate (for example, I do not translate handwritten documents for a certain company, because my negotiated rate is too low to justify the added time commitment), or to take the interesting job (such as a poetry translation) at a loss.

Yes, you've heard that before, but here is what you haven't heard. When dealing with a big box company, look for opportunities to become a monopoly supplier, and then, charge more.

For example, if you see that a certain type of document is hard to place because no linguist wants it, try to figure out why and then develop the skill to fill this need: reading a doctor's handwriting, learning how to make forms for Word or Acrobat, understanding the National Electrical Code, or efficiently editing poorly translated files.

If you become the “go-to” person, charge more. Of course, the big box company will develop other linguists with the same skills as soon as it can. The entrance barriers to our market are too low to expect to hold a monopoly position for long. In the meantime, if you have the advantage, use it.

Despite the fact that the above strategy encourages aggressive pricing, it could be that your skills are such that it might make sense to redefine your relationship with the big box company into something beyond that of freelancer/company to more like a partnership or a consultancy. However, this is outside of the scope of this article.

### **Strategy #9**

#### **Keep your interests and the interests of the big box translation company separate**

The competitive pressures felt by the translation company are not necessarily the same as those faced by translators. Freelance translators face competition from other translators, non-native translators, and computers. Translation companies face competition from companies that can provide “acceptable” translations faster and for less money. These competitive pressures are related, but the translation company can respond to its competition without helping translators respond to their competition and vice versa.

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At a recent conference of the Association of Machine Translation in the Americas, a young CEO of a small Texas translation company sat next to me during one of the sessions. She proudly told the room that, as a result of customer demand, she was instrumental in changing the array of products offered by her company (i.e. offering computer and non-native translations, rather than native-speaking human translations).

Again, this is a perfectly sound business strategy, but from the anecdote above, it is clear that the translation company does not “have the back” of the translator. We have to watch our own back, for example, by charging fair rates for editing non-native and computer-translated text.

Furthermore, this concept expands to a more general principle not specifically related to the big box company, namely, that it is up to translators, our professional organizations, and our educational institutions to help develop our professional response to competitive pressures.

## **Strategy #10**

### **Question the big box company’s assumptions**

My experience as a supply chain manager has shown me that it is a lot easier to save money by cutting the rates of a supplier than by cutting the budget for bagels at meetings. The supplier is a long way away; the person you’re depriving of bagels has the cubicle next to you. You have to hear his stomach rumbling all morning long.

When a translation company tells you it is cutting your rates due to changes in the marketplace, the company is sending the message that the translator is the uncompetitive part of the business model. This is not necessarily true. Remember, we work by the job, that is, we are a variable cost. If business drops, we simply don’t get the work. The big box translation company, on the other hand, has huge amounts of fixed and semi-fixed costs (those that must be paid for regardless of volume). It has permanent offices in some of the most prestigious and expensive cities in the world. It gives its numerous employees benefits, vacations, lunch breaks, weekends off, and retirement programs. Do you offer these benefits to your employee? Before you take a pay cut to be a “team player,” ask how the rest of the team is contributing! For every 5% across-the-board reduction, there’s a good bet that someone in the home office got a raise or promotion.

Healthy markets, including those for translation, are always changing. In a competitive environment, translators should continually look for ways to market their skills outside of the translation company model, just as the translation company is open to other ways of acquiring translations.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the frustrations inherent in working with big box translation companies, a quality translator can indeed have a successful business relationship with such companies. Perhaps the dominant theme of this article is that, to keep these relationships healthy and profitable, freelance translators must continually look after their own interests as they create value for their clients.

In addition, although this article begins by comparing big box translation companies to Wal-Mart, in truth they exist in very different markets. The entry barriers for a new translation company are nowhere near as high as those for a Wal-Mart clone. Furthermore, as new companies enter the market, they must recruit from the same pool of established freelance translators. Thus, translation companies compete in two markets. The first is the market for customers. The second is the market for quality translators.

I hope that this article has also shown that translators do have a say in which companies succeed in the marketplace. We are neither victims nor commodities; we are rational players in a competitive market. If a company cannot recruit competent, conscientious translators, it can’t compete in the long run. Your rates and terms help determine which companies, and therefore sourcing strategies, succeed in this marketplace.

Although many of us became freelancers to avoid the corporate world, translation is a business, and freelancers are first and foremost business people. Free markets exist only when all players are engaged and act rationally. Therefore we do ourselves, our clients, and our industry a disservice by not giving our business relationships the respect they deserve.

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# Powerful Drama Misses A Critical Dimension

## The Last Station

Directed by Michael Hoffman, Sony Pictures 2009

Reviewed by Lydia Stone

I know exactly when I became mesmerized by the works of Tolstoy and fascinated by the story of his marriage: Fall, 1962, my first Tolstoy seminar. I can picture the three of us, the college's two advanced Russian students and our remarkable teacher, Olga Lang, who had participated in cataclysmic events on three continents, and, among other books, written the definitive work on the Chinese family. There we are, for at least four hours every week in our professor's attic apartment overlooking a remarkably picturesque college town, eating rice pudding – her signature and possibly only dish – and talking about Kitty, Levin, and Natasha as if they were real and Lev Nikolayevich and Sofya Andreyevna as if we knew them personally.

Since that time, I have read virtually every piece of literature Tolstoy wrote, and some of his other works, as well as a number of biographies, although I have stopped short of obsessively plowing through the numerous diaries produced by all the actors in the drama of his last years. Thus, when I heard that a movie had been made about the last year of Tolstoy's marriage, I knew I would certainly see it. And I have done so, even though our local paper gave it only two and a half stars, one and a half less than *Toy Story 3*. For the record, I myself would give it at least 3 stars out of a possible 4. Furthermore, critics of some highly reputable publications, *The New Yorker* for example, agree with me.

The film, *The Last Station*, was written and directed by Michael Hoffman based on a novel of the same name by Jay Parini (Henry Holt and Company, 1990). It stars Helen Mirren as Countess Tolstaya, and Christopher Plummer as Tolstoy. The plot hinges on the conflict between the Countess and Chertkov, Tolstoy's disciple and the head of the Tolstoyan organization, for the love and allegiance of the great man and, on a more concrete level, for the copyrights to his work. The Countess insists that they need to be left to the family to keep her surviving children (8 of 13) and grandchildren from destitution, and Chertkov and Tolstoy argue that Tolstoy's own philosophy dictates that all rights be left to the Russian people. As most *SlavFile* readers know, this conflict ended with the 83-year old Tolstoy running away from home and dying at a railroad station, where his wife was prevented from visiting him until he was unconscious.

Perhaps, before I get started with what I liked about the film, I should list some of its drawbacks. First of all, there is nothing in it that reveals Tolstoy to be the great artist of his major novels– the ideas and works discussed are those



of the post-conversion period, and even these are oversimplified. Second, while some details are rendered with high accuracy, others are distorted, and some pronunciations and orthography are incorrect.

What was so good about the film then? To start off with a somewhat minor point, I don't know if they give an Oscar for makeup or perhaps makeup combined with casting, but if they do, this movie deserves to win it. Judging from the photographs of the Tolstoy household and entourage that I have been able to find, the resemblances are astonishing. The one exception to this is Helen Mirren as Sofya Andreyevna. Except for the period clothing and hairstyle, the slender bordering on haggard character she plays bears little physical resemblance to the solid and redoubtable-looking Sofya of the period. I think this was probably a very good decision, since the impact of the film is to a large extent based on sustaining in the audience a delicate balance between sympathy and disgust for the histrionic behavior (some might say antics) of Mirren's character. The physically fragile-seeming actress is undoubtedly better able to achieve this goal than one with a more accurate physical resemblance to the actual Countess.

The second and much more important good thing about the film was the acting. Mirren does an incredible job. Though some U.S. reviews have accused her and other cast members of overacting, anyone who has read the Tolstoy family diaries or reports of others who witnessed the events depicted might suspect that her performance could well have been toned down from the real thing. I did some research on some of Sofya Andreyevna's more over-the-top speeches and scenes – her eavesdropping on a meeting between Chertkov and her husband, becoming tangled in a curtain and falling headlong into the room through the window; her accusing the notoriously heterosexual Tolstoy of having a homosexual affair with Chertkov; her shouting at her Tolstoyan youngest daughter, Sasha, "I lost five children, why could one of them not be you?"; her suicide attempts, etc. All of them evidently were based on actual events or quoted words. Throughout the hysteria and histrionics, Mirren makes it clear that Sofya Andreyevna is not merely on a power trip, but is very much in love with her husband.

Christopher Plummer does a convincing job of portraying the external behavior of one of the most complex and contradictory characters in history. The way the part is

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written, he must alternate between anger, sorrow at his wife's suffering, humane and humble treatment of outsiders, and mischievous, almost coy, gaiety, this last frequently in the context of his continuing lively interest in sex. These last moments are the weakest in my opinion – more I suspect through the fault of the script than Plummer's acting. There is one explicit but not graphic scene of geriatric sex, complete with barnyard allusions and noises that I found borderline embarrassing but other Slavists found hilarious. On the other hand one British critic called it "cringe-making." I would not argue, however, that it should have been omitted, not after having read Sofya's and Lev's diaries.

During this period, Tolstoy was a failing elderly man torn (to the point of desperation) between wanting to be true to the philosophy he himself had professed and that was then embodied (in an oversimplified and rigid form) in Chertkov and his Tolstoyan minions, and his real attachment to and pity for his wife. (His possible concern with the future of the other members of his family, with the exception of his disciple daughter, Sasha, is not touched upon at all in the film.) On the screen, this conflict is externalized in the stand-off between the characters of Chertkov and Sofya, both of whom are portrayed as having far stronger wills and tolerance for histrionics than the great man himself. This certainly pays off in dramatic effect and furthermore captures the atmosphere in Yasnaya Polyana during that time rather accurately, or at least the way I imagine it.

However, this external conflict in the film completely overshadows the internal conflict between Tolstoy's desire to embrace a single all-encompassing solution to life's damnable problems (not to mention his own depressive fears) and his humanistic love of life, which had always been one of his defining features. To me this is a serious failing of the film. Another one, of equal gravity, is the failure to attempt to portray even a glimmer of Tolstoy the artist. This omission will surely disappoint many Tolstoy lovers, but this is a movie more about a marriage and a conflict than about the great man at its center. While I liked it on the whole, I would not say there is any strong evidence that any of the actors or other principals ever actually read and appreciated any of Tolstoy's great works (Jay Parini excepted, of course). In an interview with Plummer and Mirren, they both opine that *War and Peace* is "ponderous," but do not actually say they have read it.

If the part of Sofya is written and acted as a character of some complexity, her opponent in the tug-of-war for Lev Nikolayevich is not. Chertkov, portrayed by Paul Giamatti, is effective, if two-dimensional. Again I have the impression that this is the fault of writing and direction rather than his acting ability. He is portrayed as a man who is conniving to achieve his own self-interests at the expense of the best interests of the man to whom he professes to be selflessly devoted. What his own interests are, though, is left unclear: money, power, or realization of his own version of an idealistic dream. At any rate, he signals clearly when he

is hatching yet one more step of his plot, by fingering his moustache like the villains of melodrama. By the way, the moustache is historically accurate and can be seen in photographs of the real Chertkov.

The fourth major role in the film is that of Tolstoy's young secretary, Valentin Bulgakov, a budding Tolstoyan, originally hired by Chertkov to act as a spy, but who becomes more and more sympathetic to Sofya Andreyevna. In the structure of the film, he plays the role of the audience's representative, both worshipful of Tolstoy and appalled by the goings-on in the household. He is at first unwilling to take sides, but gradually, on the basis of emotion more than self-interest, he chooses Sofya. As his part is written, the character is almost unbelievably and laughably idealistic, self-effacing, and innocent. The part is played by James McAvoy about as appealingly as I can imagine anyone doing it.

Bulgakov has another function in the script as the male ingenue in a subplot of seduction (of, not by, him) and love with a character named Masha (Kerry Condon). The moderately explicit sex scenes and romance *per se* are easy on the eyes and quite well done on the level of, say, a middle-brow chick flick. However, unlike the rest of the story, this strand in the movie was made up out of whole cloth, evidently on the insistence of the publisher of the original novel that some romance more conventional than the Tolstoys' be included. This gross divergence from the historic situation being depicted is bad enough. It is compounded by the romantic aggression, sexual expertise and 20th-century-like feminism of Masha, which, I am told by my Russian friends, is totally unbelievable on the part of even a tentative female Tolstoyan. The worst thing is that this pretty romance and seduction cannot help but be perceived in juxtaposition to the love and sexual attraction, portrayed accurately, that still exists between the Tolstoys. In the tradition of the theater, this gives Lev and Sofya the role of the parodied or even buffoon pair, and makes their love scene analogous to those between servants in Shakespeare. Surely, this is unnecessary, especially since there is absolutely no evidence that Bulgakov was involved romantically with anyone during this period. The happy ending of this young romance subplot after Tolstoy has died, to my mind, strongly undercuts the mood of the end of the film, in which Russians of all stripes follow the train carrying Tolstoy's coffin.

The sets, furnishing, costumes, and especially outdoor scenes of birches and grain fields are beautiful, and I enjoyed looking at them, even though I knew the film was shot in Germany. A friend of mine who had spent some time at Yasnaya Polyana says she found the film estate disturbingly elegant and unlike the slightly shabby real thing.

I am glad I saw this film, but would hesitate to recommend it to anyone who has taken strong sides on the Chertkov vs. Sofya Andreyevna conflict or to any expert likely to be outraged by strange stress in Russian names or historically inaccurate details.

## Christina E. Kramer, Literary Translator of Macedonian and Bulgarian

Reflecting on my first translation experiences and the projects that have ensued over the past thirty years, in particular several recent book translations, I have been continually struck by how a translator does not work alone, but is connected to a wide network of scholars, authors, publishers, and editors.

I always assumed I was going to study American literature. At Beloit College in the early 1970s I majored in Russian and Comparative Literature. In addition to Russian and Spanish, I also took courses in Bulgarian and Modern Greek for reading knowledge, a semester of Czech, and two years of Serbo-Croatian (as it was then taught). My interest in the Balkans had begun in my teens when I read almost the complete works of Nikos Kazantzakis, but it was folk dancing and learning folk songs at Beloit that pushed me to study South Slavic and Balkan languages in more detail. I went to The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to study Russian literature, but once I met Victor Friedman, my focus shifted back to Slavic and Balkan linguistics. In graduate school, in addition to Russian I studied Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, and Albanian. I also studied at summer seminars in Sofia, Bulgaria and in Ohrid, Macedonia. My M.A. thesis centered on Turkisms and dialectisms in a volume of unpublished erotic folk stories compiled by Kiril Penušliski.

As part of the thesis, I translated the stories from Macedonian into English. When I began translating them, I had very little formal knowledge of Macedonian; my knowledge of other South Slavic languages was better. At that time there were few reference materials for English speakers learning Macedonian, and the dictionaries available were extremely limited. The only Macedonian-English dictionary was a small volume published in Macedonia; though filled with typographical errors, it was useful in its capacity as the only thing available. My main reference work for the translations was a three-volume Macedonian dictionary published between 1961 and 1966, with glosses in Serbo-Croatian (as it was then called) and Macedonian. I translated the folk stories by moving from the three-volume dictionary to Benson's Serbo-Croatian – English dictionary, with help from Božo Vidoeski's dialect descriptions and overview published in *Makedonski jazik* and consultations with my advisor, Victor Friedman. The process was so difficult that it is no surprise that little had been translated from Macedonian into English at that time.

Thirty years later, it is a very different universe. There are some excellent reference materials for Macedonian. However, these are either very expensive or not widely available outside of Macedonia. The three-volume dictionary mentioned above was updated and glossed in English by Reginald de Bray, Todor Dimitrovski, Blagoja Korubin, and Trajko Stamatovski. After de Bray's death in

1993, the dictionary was edited by a group headed by Peter Hill at the Australian National University and published by Routledge in 1998. The dictionary has been updated somewhat with some new words and new meanings since its original publication in Yugoslavia. The cost is prohibitive, however, and the dictionary will be bought by few individuals. The best dictionaries are difficult to obtain without going to Macedonia. Zoze Mugorski has become well-known for his relentless commitment to producing and publishing reference materials for Macedonian. He has published – at least – a Macedonian-English dictionary and an English-Macedonian dictionary, a Macedonian dictionary with glosses in Macedonian, and a dictionary of idioms. There are additional dictionaries that are useful for translation: Usikova's three-volume Macedonian-Russian dictionary; the 1983 *Rečnik na narodna poezija* (Dictionary of Folk Poetry,) and the Macedonian dictionary currently being published by the Institute for the Macedonian Language (four volumes of the projected six have been published). In addition, there are several on-line dictionaries. The publication of these materials has opened the door for increased translation of Macedonian works that would have been very difficult to translate previously.

It was not through Macedonian, however, that my translation career began again, but through Bulgarian. For many years, I had hoped to pull together a team of translators to tackle an English translation of Aleko Konstantinov's *Bai Ganyo*. In 2002, Victor Friedman was able to assemble a team of translators: Victor, Grace Fielder, Catherine Rudin, and I. We divided up sections and completed our own first versions. We then met for two two-day conferences in Chicago where we read the entire work out loud. Wayles Browne of Cornell and Bill Darden and Daniela Hristova from Chicago also attended the sessions. Victor Friedman then edited the entire volume for flow and wrote the introduction and glossaries. The whole process was difficult and exacting, but enjoyable, collegial, and creative. More details about the translation and the teamwork can be found in Friedman's introduction to Aleko Konstantinov's *Bai Ganyo: Tales of a Modern Bulgarian* published by University of Wisconsin Press.

Prior to *Bai Ganyo*, I had in mind a particular Macedonian project. In 2000, the works of Luan Starova had been recommended to me. As I sat in a restaurant in Vienna en route home from Skopje, I began to read the first volume of his multi-volume *Balkanska saga*, and I decided that if I were ever to translate something from Macedonian into English, this is where I would want to begin. The idea was

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put aside as various professional obligations and administrative tasks took over. Working with the *Bai Ganyo* translation team, I thought again of my desire to tackle Starova's works.

Luan Starova is an Albanian who writes in Macedonian. He was born in the town of Pogradec, on the Albanian shores of Lake Ohrid. Two years later, the family left Albania for Macedonia. His works hold a special fascination for me because they cross many boundaries, seeking to universalize rather than particularize twentieth-century Balkan history. As he writes in the second volume, *The Time of the Goats*:

But the waves of the war had tossed up on to the shores of the river Noah's arks filled with the many families rescued from all parts of the Balkans, and beyond. There were even some Sephardic Jewish families; there was an Armenian family of musicians; there was even a Russian family, rescued from the October Revolution; there were several Turkish families; there were several families from Aegean Macedonia; and here was our Albanian family, amidst the large Macedonian population that had landed in this small Goatherd Quarter. But there were also other unknown families that came and left the Goatherd Quarter. Here were intermingled nationalities, faiths, and customs; people lived in trust, understanding; together they more easily countered the blows of fate in these uncertain times.

One of the themes of *My Father's Books* is the complexity of establishing linguistic identity in a multi-lingual society. A couple of sample excerpts from *My Father's Books* demonstrate this:

- a. While still an untaught child I could easily "read" various scripts. Even at that time, I "read" that my father had books written in Arabic, Cyrillic, and Latin letters. At that time, all books were the same at first glance, but when I opened them up, they immediately showed themselves to be different from one another. But these "differences," texts in different alphabets, began to have significance for me, to have specificity, before I had yet entered the world of interpretable signs.
- b. My dear son, there's no big secret, study any language at all, but study one rather than several, just learn it as it needs to be learned. Enter into the depths of any language, and eventually you will learn that, at heart, all languages touch one another, they stem from the same human root...

After saying this, my father once again immersed himself in his old texts, the judicial records from Bitola, written in the old official language of the sixteenth century. I thought then about the languages my father knew, how he had acquired that knowledge that, in the end, he bequeathed to me, like something found after long searching through linguistic labyrinths.

In what language does one write, cry, dream, suffer?

In fact, part of the difficulty in translating Starova is his multilingual identity. He writes his books in Macedonian, the language he learned in school and the language he writes most comfortably, but he then translates the works himself into Albanian, his mother tongue and the language he speaks at home. The two editions are not identical and, therefore, I had to make a choice. I committed to the Macedonian edition, rather than attempting to produce a hybrid of his two different originals. To add to the complexity, Starova had worked in close collaboration with the translator of the French edition. Starova was a professor of French and comparative literature, and all of his works contain many references to French literature. Whenever I ran into a problem with my translation, Starova suggested I consult the French, since he had worked intimately with the translator. The French edition is, however, not the same as either the Macedonian or the Albanian. The French translator used both works to produce his own. Some sections from the Macedonian edition were omitted and the order of the vignettes was changed. At times, the authority of the French translation, as reinforced by Starova in conversations with me, proved to be extremely beneficial. Here is an example. I was having great difficulty with a particular sentence. My first tentative translation was:

Here, in the scorched heart of Constantinople, here where Atatürk would wage his final battle for Turkey after the abolishment of the rule of the sultans and the caliphate, *in the conversation in the battle* for the survival of all its subject citizens, all the peoples of the former empire, at that moment when the Turks, in the ruins of their empire, sought to rescue what they could of their core essence, my father was overcome as never before by a deep existential disquiet. At the end of the empire, Constantinople ended in flames.

I could not figure out what to do with the phrase "in the conversation in the battle". I consulted the French only to discover that there was a typographical error in the Macedonian edition. Instead of *razgovor* 'conversation' the word should be *razgori* 'ignite, flame'. Here is a much more satisfying translation:

There, in the scorched heart of Constantinople, there where Atatürk would wage his final battle for Turkey after the abrogation of the sultan's rule and then the caliphate, *there in the flaming battle* for the survival of all the subject citizens – all the peoples that had just recently belonged to the empire – while the Turks sought to salvage what they could of their core essence from the ruins of their empire, my father was overcome, as never before, by a deep existential disquiet. At the end of the empire, Constantinople ended in flames.

There are now ten volumes in Starova's *Balkan Saga*, all of which have been published in Macedonian, and a number of which have been translated into more than a dozen languages. Surprisingly, none of his works have appeared

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# Translation at the War-Crimes Tribunal in The Hague

Ellen Elias-Bursac

When people hear that I have worked at the Conference Language Services Section (CLSS) at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (often referred to as the ICTY) in The Hague, they immediately assume I was an interpreter in the courtroom booth. This is the first thing that comes to mind when people try to imagine what language services at the Tribunal would involve. However, within the language services section, which at the height of the Tribunal numbered some 150 staff members, there is a unit of interpreters who work in the booth during the trials; the English Translation Unit (ETU), which works on translating evidentiary documents originally in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Albanian, Macedonian, and other languages so that they can be tendered in court in English; as well as several other units. English and French are the official languages of the Tribunal. Some of the chambers are conducted in English and others in French. Soon after the Tribunal began in the 1990s, it became apparent that the amount of evidence that needed to be translated from Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian would be staggering. For the sake of efficiency, the Chambers and Registry agreed that evidence should be submitted chiefly in English translation. The French Translation Unit, therefore, does not work on evidence, but only translates into French those legal documents that were produced by the Tribunal in English, such as indictments and judgments. There is also a group of translators with a similar mandate for translation of these same Tribunal documents into Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, the languages of the victims and defendants. Two smaller teams of translators were added later to work between Albanian and English and Macedonian and English for those trials that included Albanian- and Macedonian-speaking witnesses or defendants.

Some staff members whose work entails regular translation duties work within the Tribunal but outside of CLSS. The staff members of the Victims and Witnesses Section often translate and interpret while making arrangements for the victims and witnesses who testify before the Tribunal. The Office of the Prosecutor employs a staff of support translators whose job is to provide draft translations of documents the prosecution is considering tendering into evidence, interpret consecutively during telephone conversations, interpret for the proofing (see box on this page) of witnesses, and handle other language-related jobs. The Defense teams have their own language assistants and outside translators who translate some evidentiary material for them, though they also rely on the services of CLSS for translating the bulk of their evidence to be tendered in court.

The work of the courtroom is a complex ongoing exercise in translation. The proceedings are interpreted



simultaneously as the participants discuss documents in a number of different languages, and nearly all the documents they discuss are themselves translations. Furthermore, all official Tribunal documents, such as the *Statute (Charter)* and the *Rules of Procedure and Evidence*, are in both English and French. The differences between the Continental and Anglo-Saxon legal systems have led to much discussion of translation issues. In fact, translation and interpreting disputes arise on a daily basis in the proceedings, often springing from misunderstandings, corrections, complaints about the translation of documents, or questions regarding courtroom interpreting.

These language-based controversies are so germane at times to the trial that they merit inclusion in trial judgments. Take, for instance, the many discussions of how to translate the Yugoslav military term *asanacija*, defined in the terminological data base as “restoration of the terrain” or “sanitary and hygiene measures” and referring to the job of cleaning an area up, removing animal carcasses, and even the bodies of people killed, after battles have been fought there. The term *asanacija* proved to be important to a number of the Srebrenica trials, for when combat orders call for *asanacija* teams to come in to “restore the terrain to normal” the trial judgments ascertained that, in fact, the order was calling for the clandestine burial of the victims of massacres. To give another instance, the Kvočka trial judgment raises the discussion of the term “commander,” the English translation of both *komandant* and *komandir*, though *komandant* refers to the commander of a battalion, brigade strength or higher, while *komandir* is a leader of a small group of soldiers, perhaps a squad or a battery. After much discussion the courtroom settled on “guard shift leader” in the Kvočka trial as the appropriate translation for *komandir*, and this was essential to their understanding of Kvočka’s role in the war. Anyone interested in learning more about the role translation has played in the trials can go to the list of judgments available on the ICTY website ([www.icty.org/sections/TheCases/JudgementList](http://www.icty.org/sections/TheCases/JudgementList)) and search each judgment for the word “translation.”

The proofing of a witness is described as follows: “... generally, it refers to ‘a meeting held between a party to the proceedings and a witness, usually shortly before the witness is to testify in court, the purpose of which is to prepare and familiarize the witness with courtroom procedures and to review the witness’ evidence.’” (in: *ICTY Manual on Developed Practices*. ICTY, UNICRI, 2009, p. 83)

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I began working for the Tribunal in 1998, just as they were expanding their professional language services. I was asked to join a small team of five people who, like myself, were native speakers of English with years of experience in the former Yugoslavia, immersed in the languages and cultures of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. The five of us were tasked with revising the translations of some twenty translators in the English Translation Unit, checking through each document to make sure that when the translations went into the courtroom they conveyed the form and substance of the original documents. The group of revisers was also consulted on language issues related to Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian that came up in the proceedings and over time, working closely with the translators, we put together a database of terms and abbreviations, numbering 8,000 entries.

I found that most of the translations in that early stage were of documents that Prosecution investigations needed to be able to read in English so that they could decide whom to indict and how to build their cases. In response to instances of international pressure, the countries involved in the conflict would occasionally release whole truckloads of documents, which would be delivered to the Tribunal for analysis. Once the selection had been made among these documents to ascertain what the Investigations Unit needed in order to pursue an indictment and build a case, hundreds, sometimes thousands, of pages would be sent on to the English Translation Unit for translation and revision to prepare the documents to be tendered in court. There were between 20 and 30 translators in the English Translation Unit during the years I worked there who produced a total of tens of thousands of pages of English translations yearly, which our group of revisers revised. The documents translated in the English Translation Unit at the earlier stages of the Tribunal included witness statements, forensic reports, annotated lists of victims, combat reports, laws from various *Official Gazettes*, medical or autopsy reports, newspaper articles, transcripts of meetings and conversations, and handwritten diaries. The wide range of subject matter has always been one of the most challenging aspects of translation at the Tribunal.

As of December 2004, all investigations had ended, and by the fall of 2005, many trials were in full swing, with five to ten going on concurrently at any given moment. At that point, the English Translation Unit was focusing largely on translations of evidentiary material for the Defense; the Prosecution had had to disclose at the outset of the trial most of the documents they would be tendering, so their documents had largely been translated before this stage. The Defense counsel in the military trials tendered thousands upon thousands of pages of combat reports describing the day-to-day activities of individual military units.

The terminological issues were many. For instance there were the words to watch out for which could be very tricky to translate, such as *narod* (“nation” or “people”),

*jedinstven*, which might mean, depending on the context, “unique,” “single,” “unified,” or “joint,” or *rukovođenje*, which in a non-military context means “management” but in a military context invariably means “control,” and is key to questions of wartime responsibility in phrases such as *komanda i rukovođenje* – “command and control.” The term *predsednik* or *predsjednik vlade* is generally translated as “prime minister.” When Bosnia and Herzegovina fractured into smaller entities during the war, some of them were hardly larger than a municipality, yet the head of such an entity usually signed off on documents as the *predsjednik/predsednik vlade*. There were suggestions to translate this as “president of the government” in order to distinguish such a person from someone who was actually a “prime minister,” but the ETU finally settled on “prime minister” for every instance of this title, as it wasn’t up to the translation unit to decide whether the person was or was not a prime minister.

Of the tricky military terms, the word *dejstvo* in the context of a combat report almost always referred to “fire,” as in the firing of weapons, rather than “action” or “operation.” The word *objekat* or *objekt* referred not only to buildings, but to all sorts of targets, many of them natural, rather than manmade. Hence the ETU settled on “feature” as the preferred translation, with secondary suggestions of “facility,” “installation,” or “building,” applicable only in certain contexts. The words *ustroj* and *formacija* frequently referred to a document that set out the ideal size, personnel, and equipment for any military unit, and was translated as “establishment.” In documents about the staffing of a unit, there would often be passages stipulating what the unit should have “per establishment” in the way of troops and equipment. These are just a few of the examples of terms that required research, experience, and often discussion in the courtroom before the translation unit could figure out how best to translate them.

I had certain expectations of what the work at the Tribunal would be like, some of which were borne out, while others proved to be entirely wrong. Of the misgivings that proved to be unfounded, for instance, one was the worry that the translators, most of whom were from the former Yugoslavia, might have loyalty issues binding them to one side of the conflict or other. Such issues might cloud their judgment when translating and then I would be expected to call them on this. What I found instead was a crew of ambitious, talented translators whose principal concern was to master the skill of translating from their native language into English. I found they welcomed the feedback we revisers gave them and progressed rapidly. Never did I have to edit a translation for bias.

I feared that I would be traumatized by work on such disturbing material. It turned out that my work as a reviser exposed me to no firsthand traumatic experiences such as interpreting in the field for investigative interviews with victims of the conflict, though revising written translations

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## WAR-CRIMES TRIBUNAL *Continued from page 15*

of evidence was often disturbing enough. I was surprised at what it was that particularly upset me. Identification is a strange and unpredictable business, as anyone who deals professionally with disturbing documents or testimonies will know. I would be working on a text, able to keep the substance of the story at arm's length, until one of the people mentioned in the text had the birthday of someone I know, or a friend's first name, or a profession like my own – teacher or translator – and suddenly what was happening to them felt as if it were happening to me.

A surprising way I found to deal with the long-term effects of the work we did was to immerse myself in my own translation projects in my spare time, most of them, oddly enough, translations of writings about war.

The first of these projects was a book of war testimonies, which resembled in many ways the witness statements we worked on daily at the Tribunal. Svetlana Broz, the late President Josip Broz Tito's granddaughter, a cardiologist, had collected 90 testimonies – 30 from Bosnian Serbs, 30 from Bosnian Croats, 30 from Bosniaks – in order to provide examples of moments during the war when someone crossed ethnic lines to save the life of or help someone from a different ethnic group. Knowing what I knew from my work on witness statements at the Tribunal, I could see that the material Dr. Broz had collected provided an authentic picture of what the war was like. Since I wasn't allowed to discuss the evidence I had revised, I could direct those who wanted to know more about what Tribunal work was like to Svetlana Broz's book, *Good People in an Evil Time*. [Editors' note: The English version of this book, translated by Ellen Elias-Bursac, is available on Amazon and from the publisher Other Press. Now, of course, anyone who is interested in the work of the Tribunal can watch the proceedings

live in real time or read transcripts of every session of open court on the ICTY website ([www.icty.org/](http://www.icty.org/)), but when I first began to work there, such resources were not available.

The Tribunal has embarked on a downsizing project as the trials are coming to a close. Many of my colleagues are leaving, as I did last year, to move on to other translating and interpreting jobs. All but one of the 161 people (160 men and one woman) initially indicted have now been brought in and processed as this article goes to press. Thirty-seven accused are currently on trial, or awaiting sentencing, or in the process of appeal, while proceedings have been completed for 124 accused. Of these: 12 were acquitted; 63 were sentenced (and are now serving their sentences in many different countries); 13 were referred to a national jurisdiction; and 36 had their indictments withdrawn or are deceased. While 2014 had been set as the end date for all trials and appeals before Ratko Mladić was brought in, the expectation now is that this deadline will be extended. The work of CLSS, however, will continue even beyond the end of the last trials. Once the trials have been completed, the interpreters will leave, but there will still be work to be done translating the trial judgments into English, French, and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, so small teams of translators will remain after many of the other staff members have left.

Ellen Elias-Bursac has been translating Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian novels and non-fiction for more than 20 years. Two of these translations received awards for the year's best translation from AATSEEL (1998) and ALTA (2006). She has also co-authored a textbook for the study of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. In addition to working with the War Crimes Tribunal, she has taught in the Slavic Department at Harvard and is currently a visiting scholar with the Translation Center at UMass Amherst. Ellen can be reached at [eliasbursac@gmail.com](mailto:eliasbursac@gmail.com).

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## LITERARY TRANSLATOR *Continued from page 13*

in English. My current project is the translation of the first two volumes into English. Both *My Father's Books* and *The Time of the Goats* will be published by the University of Wisconsin Press. As translators know, however, finding a work that one wishes to translate is only the start of the process. Securing rights and finding a publisher are problems not often easily resolved. Both tasks took patience and perseverance.

I sent the manuscript first to several small presses, those that published memoir series or books from Central and Southeastern Europe. I published a small excerpt from *My Father's Books* in the on-line journal of translation *Words without Borders*. I then submitted the manuscript to the University of Wisconsin. I felt that Starova, with his attention to language and his Albanian and Macedonian roots, would fit nicely with their growing collection of southeastern European language textbooks and works in translation. I have been extremely fortunate to work with them. They helped me navigate the complex problem of negotiating the international rights, which were held by Fayard in France.

As I translate, I find that I most enjoy the process of translation when I work with others. The *Bai Ganyo* project was satisfying because we all knew the work very well and took pleasure in solving the linguistic difficulties of Konstantinov's language. Working with Starova has been a special pleasure because he has waited a long time for an English version to come out, and he has been extremely supportive of my work and willing to answer questions. I also work with an editor, and this is, perhaps, the most enjoyable collaboration of all. I have an editor who is careful and critical. I am forced to defend choices and to rethink many phrases. Having others to consult with leaves the door open for multiple solutions and provides the chance to weigh the benefits of these different solutions. The careful handling of each word and the consideration of tone and balance – things that come out in discussions with my editor concerning the technical matters of translation – keep translation stimulating and collaborative.

Christina E. Kramer is a professor of Slavic and Balkan languages and linguistics at the University of Toronto. She particularly enjoys teaching courses that focus on language, identity, and the politics of language. She can be reached at [ce.kramer@utoronto.ca](mailto:ce.kramer@utoronto.ca).



# Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Translation Miscellanea 1

Stephen M. Dickey

In my work with Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, I occasionally notice phenomena that no dictionaries or grammars explain adequately, but that demand the attention of the translator. This column is the first that will discuss such material, in the hopes of making the lives of BCS translators just a little easier.

This piece consists of two parts. The first takes up the BCS adverb *upravo*, which is rendered in dictionaries as ‘just, exactly’. The second takes up rhetorical questions marked with the particle *to*.

You are all undoubtedly well aware that dictionaries go only so far in aiding a translator; unfortunately, we have to spend a fair amount of time figuring out how to translate words when the ready suggestions of the dictionary fail us. One word that can be frustrating to translate is the BCS adverb *upravo* ‘exactly, precisely, just,’ a focal particle used to clarify and emphasize reference, usually with regard to nouns but also various adverbs.

There are many uses of the focal particle *upravo* that can be handled by the suggestions in the dictionaries, for example:

**Upravo** to bi gazda rekao, ili bi mu na um palo nešto još puno gore, tako da je Moni pokupio svaki papirić prije nego što je otišao kući.

His boss would say *just* that, or something much worse would occur to him, and so Moni collected every bit of paper before he went home.

Ali **upravo** zato njegovu pljačkaški planovi bili su smjeliji, a priče o osvetti krvoločnije.

But precisely for this reason his robber’s plans were bolder, and his tales of revenge more bloodthirsty.

But *upravo* also occurs in noun phrases where ‘exactly,’ ‘precisely’ or ‘just’ simply do not work. Such cases usually involve an emphatic sense beyond the clarifying sense of *upravo*.

Komunikolozi novih medija i online novinari smatraju da je **upravo** ova mogućnost weba, dakle konvergencija, označila kraj tradicionalnim medijima masovnih komunikacija.

Communications specialists on the new media and online journalists are of the view that *it was* this possibility of the web, i.e., convergence, *that* signaled the end of traditional mass media.

Here the emphasis of *upravo* can be successfully reproduced by translating the sentence with a cleft sentence. English uses cleft sentences much more frequently than other European languages to indicate focus on a sentential constituent (cf. Miller 1996), and it thus makes sense that a



focal particle in BCS should be occasionally translated with a cleft sentence in English.

In other cases switching to a negative phrase works quite well:

Zašto mnogi žele *upravo* francuskog buldoga? Why do many want nothing but a French bulldog?

Another, slightly more idiomatic negative phrasing is ‘Why is it that many won’t have anything but a French bulldog?’ Similarly, the negative phrase *and no one else* sounds very natural in

the following two cases:

Stavove o spolnosti djeca uče **upravo** od roditelja.

Children learn their positions on sexuality from their parents *and no one else*.

Zašto naručiti web stranicu **upravo** od nas ?

Why order a web page from us *and no one else*?

To my mind, the possibility of translating an affirmative particle such as BCS *upravo* with negative phrases in English is rather unexpected, in that there is a strong default in the translation process to use affirmatives in the target language where the source language has affirmatives, and negatives where the source language has negatives. However, translations using negative phrases may be considered similar to those using cleft sentences inasmuch as both involve various kinds of paraphrases and are thus part of a single overall strategy in translating from BCS into English.

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Another challenge for translators are units and constructions of a source language that are difficult, if not impossible, to reflect in the target language. The example to be considered here concerns rhetorical, disapproving questions in BCS such as the movie-title line *Ko to tamo peva?* lit., ‘Who’s that singing over there?’ which resemble purely informational questions except that they contain the untranslatable particle *to*, lit. ‘that’.

Here I should point out that the semantic nature of the BCS tripartite system of demonstrative pronouns, *ovaj* ‘this’—*taj* ‘that [medial]’—*onaj* ‘that [distal]’, is regularly subject to gross oversimplification not only in language textbooks, but even in BCS and English language reference grammars. Raecke (1999, 2001) has the distinction of elaborating a more sophisticated theory of BCS demonstrative pronouns, including their “particled” forms *ovo*, *to* and *ono*. Though these particled forms look like neuter singular forms of the corresponding pronouns, they have in fact become grammaticalized as discourse particles and are no longer pronouns (for details, cf. Raecke 2001). The rhetorical questions under consideration here contain the particle form *to*.

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Grammatically, these questions have considerable illocutionary force of a particular type, which should be reflected in a translation, if possible.

The first example comes from the movie mentioned above; indeed, it is the line that gives the movie its title. In the scene the bus owner and conductor, Mr. Krstić, is trying to collect money for the tickets inside the bus, and is already fairly irritated when one of the passengers, a singer, starts singing, adding to his irritation. The exchange is given below:

- Krstić: **Ko to tamo peva?**  
 Pevač: [peva]  
 Krstić: Čuješ li ti mene, bre? Jesam rekao da ne pevaš?  
 Krstić: Who's singing there?  
 Singer: [sings]  
 Krstić: Do you hear me, [particle]? Didn't I say not to sing?

This exchange is a great example of the illocutionary force of such questions with *to*; confirmation of the fact that the question is only rhetorical and in fact an expression of disapproval is evident in the fact that when Krstić addresses the singer for the second time moments later, he refers to his first question as *telling him not to sing*.

In light of this, the translation of the movie title *Ko to tamo peva?* as 'Who's That Singing Over There?' is simply wrong; including 'that' in the translation reduces it to word-for-word mimicry.

How should the question be translated then? (I limit myself here to written translation, as oral interpreting could take advantage of emphatic stress or a particular tone to create the same effect.) Given Krstić's overall demeanor and his irritation in this particular instance, I think the illocutionary force of the question could be rendered by 'Who the hell is singing here?' or 'Who's singing here, for Christ's sake?' Other translators will surely come up with other possibilities.

Another, subtler example of such disapproving questions occurs in the movie *Grbavica* (known in English as *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*). The scene is where two bodyguards for a bar owner are sitting in a car and one of them, Pelda, asks the other, Čenga, about a woman who has recently started working at the bar. Čenga signals his disapproval at Pelda taking an interest in her, and Pelda backs off.

- Pelda: Ko je ona Esma što je počela raditi kod nas?  
 Čenga: Šta znam ja?... Al' čini mi se da neće još dugo....  
 Pelda: A što?  
 Čenga: Ma, smlata je... **A što to pitaš?**  
 Pelda: Onako, bez veze.  
 Pelda: Who's that Esma that started working with us?  
 Čenga: How should I know?... But I don't think she'll be there for long...  
 Pelda: Why's that?  
 Čenga: Ugh, she's clumsy... And why are you asking?  
 Pelda: Just like that, no reason.

In this case, one cannot resort to easy, hyperbolic phrases that indicate irritation, because the question is part of a relaxed exchange spoken entirely in calm tones. However, some more explicit questions seem suitable in that they are more characteristic of English discourse where a speaker makes a listener justify himself/herself: 'Why do you ask?', 'Why the sudden interest?', or even 'What's it to you?'. The latter two require a reworking of Pelda's response, thus affecting the overall translation of the exchange.

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Stephen M. Dickey is an associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures at the University of Kansas. He has translated extensively from BCS and German, and his latest published translation is Miljenko Jergović's *Ruta Tannenbaum* (Northwestern University Press, 2011).

# CONTEMPORARY SLOVENIAN POETRY IN TRANSLATION

Translated and introduced by Martha Kosir ([kosir001@gannon.edu](mailto:kosir001@gannon.edu))

## GREGOR PODLOGAR

**Gregor Podlogar** was born in 1974 in Ljubljana, where he graduated from the University of Ljubljana with a degree in philosophy. He has published his poems in various literary magazines in Slovenia and abroad. His first collection *Naselitve (States)* was published in 1997, followed by *Vrtoglavica zanosa (Joy in Vertigo)* in 2002. In 2003, he co-authored an experimental book on New York City called *Oda na manhatenski aveniji (Ode on Manhattan Avenue)* with the poet Primož Čučnik and the painter Žiga Kariž. His next collection *Milijon sekund bliže (A Million Seconds Closer)* was published in 2006, and his latest collection *Vesela nova ušesa (Happy New Ears)* in 2010. A selection of his work also appears in *Six Slovenian Poets* published by Arc Publications in 2006. He works as a radio host of cultural programs on Slovenian National Radio (*Radio Slovenija*), translates contemporary American poetry (C. Hawkey, L. Solomon, P. Killebrew, and A. Berrigan, among others), edits the Slovenian page of the poetry website *lyrikline* ([www.lyrikline.org](http://www.lyrikline.org)), occasionally performs as a DJ, and drinks green tea in Ljubljana.

*This article focuses on two Slovenian poets of the younger generation, Gregor Podlogar and Stanka Hrastelj. Their poetry is captivating for the virtuosity of their expression and the profundity of their thought. Not only does it inspire, but it also creates an inexorable need for further contemplation and search for answers on this intense journey of life.*



### Na jeziku bleščečega dneva

Napisati pesem, da bo dan daljši.  
Misliti na bližnje in pozabiti  
na predvolilni čas. Brskati za novim.  
Vse delati počasi. Vse delati tiho.  
Ljubezen je. Širi se v krogih.  
Eni so pogoreli in avantgarda ima lovke.  
Nova vrečka, stara vrečka, nova vrečka.  
Odit ven, da veter zareže.  
Odit ven, da se svet postavi na noge.  
Odit ven, prave stvari na pravih mestih.  
Kaj še?

### In the Language of a Shiny Day

To write a poem in order to make the day longer.  
To think of your close ones and forget  
that it is the pre-election period. To search for something new.  
To do everything slowly. To do it quietly.  
This is love. Love that extends in circles.  
Some have set fires, and the avant-garde shows off its tentacles.  
A new shopping bag, an old bag, and a new bag again.  
To go out so that the wind can cut deeply.  
To go out so that the world can stand on its feet.  
To go out, with the right things in the right places.  
What else is there?

### Nevidna okna

Nenadejana milost.  
Neznana razporeditev.  
Pozabljene stvari.  
Igrače kot svetišče.  
Pričakovana toplina.  
V času skriti žep odhoda.

### Invisible Windows

Unexpected grace.  
Unknown allocation.  
Forgotten things.  
Toys that are like sanctuaries.  
Anticipated warmth.  
A pocket of departure hidden in time.

### 100

Musaši ali, Musaši,  
Mu – sa – ši se rad bojuje že vrsto let.  
Njegova borba je njegova umetnost.  
In umetnost je življenje.  
Zdaj je heroj. Premagal je 100 bojevnikov.  
Jaz pa sem to zgodnjo jesen napisal 99  
drobnih, zagorelih verzov. In tegale:  
ogenj sveče jemlje daljavo poletja.

### 100

Musashi or, as correctly stressed,  
Mu-sa-shi has loved to fight for many years.  
His skill at fighting is his art.  
And art is life.  
Now he is a hero. A hero who defeated 100 opponents.  
And I this fall have written 99  
tiny verses, caught on fire. And then I wrote one more:  
the flaming candle carries off the distance of the summer.

### Šepetajoče

Nikoli ni dobro  
preveč omenjati  
večnosti.  
  
Še posebej,  
ko se govori  
o ljubezni.

### In a Whisper

It is never wise  
to speak of eternity  
incessantly.  
  
Particularly  
when one  
speaks of love.  
  
The cry is deep.  
It is the woods.  
The child knows.

Klic je globok.  
Gozdovi so.  
Otrok ve.

### Neznani fragment

Je tam nebo še vedno modro?  
Trava še vedno diši kot trava?  
Se lahko česa veselimo?  
Je kaj možnosti za upanje?

### The Unknown Fragment

Is the sky over there still blue?  
Does the grass still smell of grass?  
Is there anything to rejoice at?  
Is there any chance for hope?

*Continued on page 20*

**STANKA HRASTELJ**

**Stanka Hrastelj** was born in 1975 in Brežice, Slovenia. She studied theology at the University of Ljubljana. In 2001 she was named The Best Young Poet at the young Slovenian authors' festival *Urška*. She published her first collection of poems *Nizki toni (Low Tones)* in 2005, for which she won an award for best first book. In 2007 she also won the title of Knight of Poetry. Her second collection, titled *Gospod, nekaj imamo za vas (Sir, We Have Something for You)*, was published in 2009. For this she was short-listed for the

prestigious Jenko Award for the best poetry collection. Her poems have been translated into numerous languages and published in many anthologies in Slovenia and abroad. In addition to poetry, she writes critical introductions to literary works, translates poetry from Croatian and Serbian into Slovenian, and organizes and moderates literary talk shows. She lives and works in Krško.

Stanka Hrastelj's website is [www.stankahrastelj.si](http://www.stankahrastelj.si) and she can be reached at [stanka.hrastelj@gmail.com](mailto:stanka.hrastelj@gmail.com).

**Družinski grobovi**

moja družina ni nikoli imela grobnice  
še tisti grobovi, ki so kdaj obstajali  
so se krušili in ugrezali  
in napis na nagrobniku  
ki se je teti odlomil od srca  
ko je izvedela za bratovo smrt  
so še vedno krvaveč  
prepisali na druge nagrobnike  
ker je bil ganljiv in lep  
in naši družini ni ostala nobena bolečina  
ki bi jo spravili v družinski album  
kot nekaj samo našega  
naša žalost se je zdela lepa in so jo posnemali  
(dečki so se utapljali, moški obešali  
starci umirali brez morfija)

na pogrebih mojih sorodnikov  
je bilo zmeraj mrzlo  
in ko so kopali jamo  
so grobarji preklinjali mraz in pljuvali na trdo zemljo  
kadar je ob odprtem grobu zbor pel žalostinke  
jim jih je burja zabijala nazaj v grla

spominjam se, kako smo na pogrebih  
s suhimi očmi drug drugemu  
ukazovali, da morata biti krik in jok  
prihranjena za doma

naša družina ima grobove  
v kuhinjah in spalnicah in kletih in podstrešjih  
tu nas obiskujejo naši pokojniki  
naše hiše dišijo po krizantemah

**Family Graves**

my family never had a tomb  
even the graves that once existed  
would crumble down and sink  
and the inscription on the grave stone  
torn from my aunt's heart  
when she learned of her brother's death  
was copied, still bleeding,  
onto other grave stones  
because it was touching and beautiful  
and our family was left with no pain  
to put away in a family album  
as something belonging only to us  
our anguish seemed beautiful and much emulated  
(little boys would drown, young men would hang themselves and  
the elders kept dying without morphine)

at the funerals of my relatives  
it was always cold  
and while digging the hole  
the undertakers would curse the cold and spit on the hard soil  
when a choir sang songs of sorrow at the open grave  
the bora winds would beat them back into their throats

I remember how at the funerals  
we would tell each other with our eyes dry  
that screaming and crying  
was reserved for the sanctity of our home

our family has graves  
in our kitchens and bedrooms and basements and attics  
here we are visited by our deceased  
and our houses smell of chrysanthemums

*Continued on page 21*

**Potem smo skupaj sedli za mizo**

*Ante, spoštljiv poklon!*

Spominjam se človeka,  
ki je imel goste obrvi  
pod njimi živahne oči  
in strašno zguban obraz  
od cigaret in stalnega preklinjanja  
in neverjetno gibčno telo  
(lahko je dal obe nogi za vrat).

Včasih je prišel in nam prebelil kuhinjo,  
jedilnico in hodnik  
in je vedno sam počistil za sabo.  
Potem smo skupaj sedli za mizo  
in smo ga poslušali,  
kako je preklel prometno policijo,  
predsednika in škofa  
in svojo mladost.

Potem je govoril o ženskah,  
o njihovih mehkih rokah in  
polnih dojkah  
in da bo umrl na lestvi, sredi dela  
s čopičem v roki  
(čeprav je umrl za rakom  
precej na hitro in v hudih bolečinah).

Imel je veliko žalost,  
ki jo je prinesel s sabo v Slovenijo,  
nikamor ni šel brez nje,  
in ni si je upal odložiti,  
ker so mu vsi govorili, da je srečen človek.

Zaradi te žalosti si ni nikdar umazal srca  
ampak ga je brusil kot drag kamen,  
in je svoje zadnje moči porabil za to,  
da je poljubljal roke in govoril  
*Kako te imam rad, kako te volim, dušo.*

**And Then We All Sat Down at the Table Together**

*Ante, I bow to you!*

I remember a man  
with bushy eyebrows  
lively eyes beneath them  
and a face terribly wrinkled  
from cigarettes and relentless cursing  
and an incredibly limber body  
(he could put both his legs behind his neck).

Sometimes he came by and repainted our kitchen,  
our dining room and hallway  
and always cleaned up after himself.  
And then we all sat down at the table together  
and listened to him  
curse the traffic police,  
the president and the bishop  
and his own youth.

Then he spoke of women,  
of their soft hands and  
full breasts  
and how he would die on a ladder, when working  
with a paintbrush in his hand  
(but he died of cancer  
rather quickly and in terrible pain).

He carried with him a great sorrow,  
a sorrow he brought with him to Slovenia,  
he went nowhere without it,  
and never dared to unburden himself  
since everybody would tell him he was a happy man.

He never disgraced his heart because of this sorrow  
but polished it instead like a precious stone,  
and used up his last strength to  
kiss people's hands and repeatedly proclaim  
*Kako te imam rad, kako te volim, dušo.\**

*\*I love you so much (Slovenian), I love you so much, dear.  
(Croatian)*

**SLAVFILE'S NEW POETRY FEATURE:  
SUBMISSIONS SOUGHT**

Given the wealth of poetic talent represented within the Slavic Languages Division, it only makes sense for *SlavFile* to include a regular poetry feature to showcase and share this abundance. We are seeking submissions of poetry translations from **any of the Slavic languages** into English. Submissions should include the poem in its original language, at least minimal biographical information about the poet, and anything else the translator considers of interest, especially discussion of translation challenges. Submissions generally should not total more than 1000 words, although we will consider requests to publish longer contributions. We welcome all translations by SLD members, whether previously published or not (if previously published, please note original source with submission), and translations by others that have never been published previously. In the future, we may also publish translations into Slavic languages. All submissions and inquiries should be sent to Martha Kosir at [kosir001@gannon.edu](mailto:kosir001@gannon.edu). We would like to thank our *SlavFile* readers in advance for their interest in this exciting new feature!



## WORDBUZZ: What's playing at the movies?

Yuliya Baldwin

Russia is most likely one of the few countries with a very special holiday to honor the movies— “**День кино**” (the Day of Cinema). As is often the case in Russian history and politics, the name of the holiday has undergone multiple decreed transformations, from “**День**

**советского кино**” (the Day of Soviet Cinema) to “**День кино**” (the Day of Cinema) to “**День кино России**” (the Day of Cinema of Russia) to the final (as of today) “**День российского кино**” (the Day of the Russian Cinema). The annual holiday falls on August 27<sup>th</sup> and is celebrated by both film professionals and movie enthusiasts. Movie-going has been a popular pastime for generations of Russians, from the times of the bleak censored offerings of the Soviet era to today’s mix of glitzy Hollywoodesque cinema, art house gems that make it to very few screens, and productions that are just plain dull. The movie-going experience itself has changed dramatically – from enormous movie houses for 2000–4000 people to commercially successful cutting-edge multiplexes with a cozy 200–300 seating capacity, concession stands, upscale cafes and restaurants, VIP seating, etc. At the same time, the burgeoning terminology surrounding this enterprise has adjusted to the new reality by directly borrowing or calquing (translating word-for-word) American movie terms.

### ДИЗАЙН КИНОТЕАТРА И ПР./MOVIE THEATER DESIGN, ETC.

**кинотеатр** cinema, movie theater, movie house

**кинотеатр «первого экрана»/премьерный кинотеатр** first-run theater

**кинотеатр «второго экрана»** second-run theater

**мегаплекс** (*кинотеатр с количеством экранов более чем 15*) megaplex

**моноэкранный** (*однозальный кинотеатр*) single-screen theater, uniplex

**мультиплекс** (*многозальный кинотеатр*) multiplex, multi-screen theater

**однозальный кинотеатр/моноэкранный** single-screen theater, uniplex

**трёхзальный, пятизальный, восьмизальный зал** three-screen, five-screen, eight-screen theater

**кинозал** cinema, theater

**зрительный зал** theater, cinema

**цифровой кинозал** digital theater

**IMAX кинозал** IMAX theater

**посадочное место** seat, seating

**место/кресло** seat

**место для размещения инвалидных колясок** wheelchair space

**стадионное расположение кресел** stadium seating

**сектор общественного питания** food court

**кинобары** (*работающие по принципу фаст-фуд*) fast-food establishments, concession stands

**кинокафе** cinema café, movie theater cafe

**снэк-бар/снэк-бар** snack-bar

**сеть кинотеатров/кинотеатральная сеть** movie theater chain

**фойе** lobby

### КИНОТЕАТР И ПР./MOVIE THEATER, ETC.

**киноклуб** film club, film society

**кинопоказ** showing, theatrical exhibition

**кинопрокат** movie/film/theatrical distribution

**киноролик** movie trailer

**кинорынок** cinema market

**киностудия** movie studio

**компания-прокатчик** theatrical distribution company, film distributor, motion picture distributor

**премьеры** opening day

**расписание/репертуар** showtimes

**рекламный ролик** commercial advertising short

### ПОКАЗ ФИЛЬМА И ПР./FILM SCREENING, ETC.

**кинофильм/кинокартина/фильм** motion picture/movie/film

**Долби Диджитал** Dolby Digital

**объёмный звук/пространственное звуковоспроизведение** surround sound

**очки с поляризационным эффектом/специальные очки со стереоскопическим эффектом** polarized/3D glasses

**стереозвук/стереофонический звук** stereo sound/stereophonic sound

**формат 3D** 3D format

**формат IMAX** IMAX

**формат IMAX 3D** IMAX 3D

**цифровое кино** digital cinema

**цифровые технологии** digital technology

Continued on page 23

## ЖАНРЫ КИНО И ПР./FILM GENRES, ETC.

**жанр** genre

**авторское кино/арт-хаус** art film, art house films, art cinema

**боевик** action

**вестерн** western

**драма** drama

**комедия** comedy

**мелодрама** melodrama

**нуар** film noir

**приключения** adventure

**триллер** thriller

**фантастика** science fiction

**фильм ужасов/ужастик** horror movie

**фэнтези** fantasy

**чикфлик** chick flick

**блокбастер** blockbuster

**лидер кинопроката** box office number-one film, top box office hit, box office leader

## БИЛЕТЫ И ВХОД/PRICING AND ADMISSION

**билет** ticket

**обычный/экономный тариф** standard/regular pricing, standard/regular ticket

**групповая скидка** group discount, group sales

**детский тариф** children's pricing/discount

**пенсионный тариф** senior pricing/discount

**студенческий тариф** student pricing/discount

**тариф для военнослужащих** military pricing/discount

**билетная касса** box office, ticketing kiosk/booth

**бронирование билетов** ticket reservation

**online бронирование** online ticketing

**время показа/сеанс** showtime

**в прокате** now showing

**скоро в прокате** coming soon

**вечерний сеанс** night show

**утренний/дневной сеанс** matinée

**дисконтная карта** membership card

**карта зрителя** membership card

## VIP СЕКТОР/VIP SECTION

**VIP-билет** VIP-ticket

**VIP-зал** VIP theater, luxury screen

**VIP-карта** VIP membership status, VIP membership card

**VIP-место** VIP-seating, luxury seating

Today, for many Russians a night at the movies has become a major splurge. Going to the movies, eating some popcorn and pizza, playing videogames in the lobby, drinking a cola, beer, or glass of wine or even a vodka shot for mama and papa could bring the tab to \$100 for a family of four. For this reason, many prefer to watch пиратские/контрафактные копии (pirate copies), which are available for viewing in the comfort of one's own home almost as soon as films are released to the big screen. However, in these times of financial crisis, with ticket prices relatively high in the USA (\$8-15) as well as in Russia (\$3-12), Russian movie theaters are actually experiencing a resurgence in viewership. Hollywood films are definitely among the most popular on the big screen today: **Пираты Карибского моря: На странных берегах** (Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides), **Древо жизни** (The Tree of Life), **Король говорит!** (The King's Speech), **Люди Икс: Первый класс** (X-Men: First Class).

I'd like to conclude this article with an anecdote about well-known Hollywood stars (**голивудские звёзды**):

**Вопрос. Почему на главную роль в фильме "Титаник" выбрали Ди Каприо?**

**Ответ. Потому что если бы выбрали Стивена Сигала или Брюса Уиллиса, они бы всех спасли.**

Q: Why did they choose Leonardo DiCaprio for the male lead in *Titanic*?

A: Because if the director had cast Steven Seagal or Bruce Willis, they would have saved all the passengers.

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**THERE WILL BE SPACE  
FOR ONLY 48  
AT THE 2011 SLD BANQUET  
TO BE HELD THURSDAY  
OCTOBER 27  
RESERVE A PLACE NOW  
SEE DETAILS ON PAGE 29**

# SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone



Tortoise



Translator

First, a riddle, inspired by our recent once-in-a-lifetime (in both the actual and the metaphorical senses) trip to the Galapagos: *In what way are translators and interpreters, on one hand, and turtles and tortoises, on the other, alike?* The answer and names of those who guess it correctly (as well as any alternative creative solutions) will be published in the next issue of *SlavFile* and a suitable prize will be awarded.

The rest of this column I will devote to reviews of two books, one which is very, very good and the other, at least in my humble opinion, very bad. The first review is a reprint of a review of Michele Berdy's *The Russian Word's Worth: A Humorous and Informative Guide to the Russian Language, Culture and Translation*, originally published in *Russian Life* (May-June 2011). Many SLD members look back with pleasure at the time we spent with "Mickey" when she attended the 2006 ATA conference in New Orleans as our Greiss speaker. Currently this book is available from Amazon.com for \$11.96 (List price, \$15.95). The book is also available from russianlife.com at list, but still well worth it.

## THE RUSSIAN WORD'S WORTH

Michele A. Berdy (*Glas Books, Available on Amazon*)

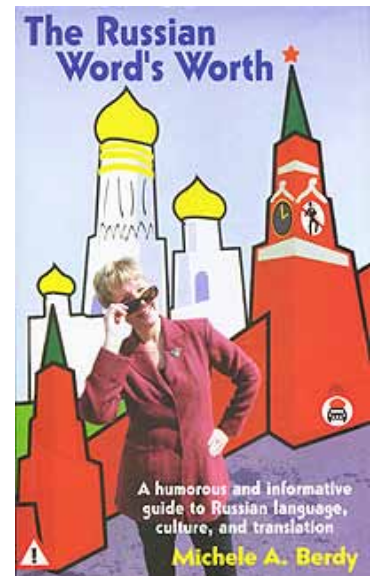
This volume represents a collection of 230 columns on Russian language and culture published in the English-language newspaper *The Moscow Times*. Its author describes herself as: "...an American who learned Russian as a second language, who has lived mainly in Moscow since Brezhnev was in his dotage... For nearly all of these years I have been translating and interpreting in various contexts and for even longer I have been pondering, discovering, contemplating, positing, theorizing, and occasionally arguing about what make Russians so, well, Russian and how that [compares with] what makes Americans so American."

Many Russophiles have already discovered Berdy and wait eagerly for her column to become available each week on *The Moscow Times* website. This book is suitable for any English speaker professionally involved with Russian and/or living in Russia, learners of the language of virtually any level, and general Russophiles (garden variety or exotic).

Topics Berdy covers in these volumes include the political (linguistic quirks of Russian leaders), the personally serious (expressing condolences in Russian), the etymological (why the Russian equivalents of complain, pathetic, welcome, and salary have the same root), the annoying (especially Moscow traffic and drivers), the just plain essential (calling and dealing with a plumber in Russia, or excusing oneself to visit the facilities), and 21<sup>st</sup>-century language slang, as well as Soviet-speak remnants. All of these are treated in an entertaining and ironic style, suffused with the author's deep knowledge of both languages and cultures.

Berdy's book fills this reviewer, who has been working professionally as a translator of Russian since Brezhnev, with what the Russians call "white envy." This term describes the type of envy that is 90% admiration and inspires rather than embitters. What is there about this volume to give rise to such feelings? Well, there is the delightful writing style and sense of humor on every page, the perfect idiomatic translations of impossible-to-translate Russian words and phrases, the profound understanding of Russian language and culture, and the experiences the author most certainly must have had to develop said understanding.

This book contains a Russian term index of more than 50 pages, making it usable as a reference. It also should be noted that it is a perfect length for reading on a flight between the U.S. and Russia (counting Frankfurt layovers for slower readers) and would make the perfect gift for anyone (oneself included) about to embark on such a trip.



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I have long suspected that a huge number of otherwise reasonably intelligent and educated native speakers of English (I won't generalize about others) are shockingly ignorant of the true nature of language. A sure sign of membership in this group is the belief that translation is a mechanical skill requiring only adequate knowledge of two languages and/or that a bilingual dictionary is all you need in order to be able to translate text. As virtually all our readers know, such people can be extremely harmful if they have anything at all to do with translations, especially commissioning them.

Now, there is another group of native English speakers, possibly almost as large as the first, who define themselves

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## SLAVFILE LITE

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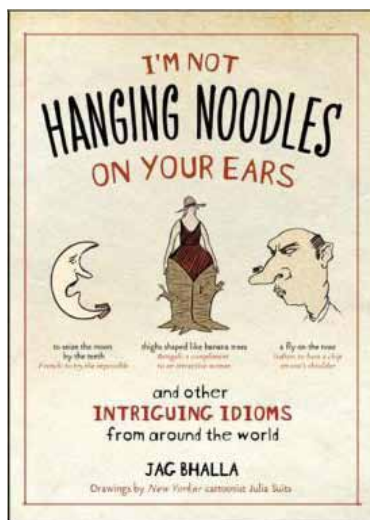
as “word” or “language” people. Such folk may or may not be professionally involved in language manipulation, but many of them can be found doing crossword and allied puzzles, playing Scrabble, and reading books, articles, and websites dealing with words and language, especially amusing ones. Unlike the people in the first group, such folk as a class are generally harmless, albeit somewhat boring to those who do not share their interests.

The danger comes when a person belongs to both of these groups – for then he or she may decide to write a book, perpetrating errors about specific languages and their features as well as about the nature of language in general. Even more dangerous and certainly more surprising, such a book may be published by a perfectly reputable and even well-known publisher.

This seems to be what occurred in the case of the book I have on my desk – Jag Bhalla’s *I’m Not Hanging Noodles on Your Ears: And Other Intriguing Idioms from Around the World* (National Geographic Books: 2009). Mr. Bhalla, by his own description, is a lover of language and fluent only in English, though evidently somewhat familiar with Hindi. He is especially enamored of idioms whose whimsical and humorous qualities he seems to take (I am not quite sure I follow his argument) as demonstrating the fact that language does not obey the “hegemony of reason” after all. Driven by this interest, he hit upon the idea of compiling, from published sources, literally translated idioms in a variety of languages, matching them to their equivalent English idiom or defining their meaning and grouping them across languages by topic (e.g., those pertaining to marriage), with, I gather, the primary purpose of entertaining and amusing and the secondary purpose of supporting some of his ideas about language. Not a bad idea, at all! Evidently National Geographic agreed, and published this book.

Mr. Bhalla selected idioms in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish from books that list them with their English equivalents mostly, I gather, for the use of language learners. For each idiom, Bhalla gives a supposed literal meaning, generally with either an equivalent English idiom or a simple explanation, e.g., *seven Fridays in one week, keep changing one’s mind* (Russian). No attempt is made to explain the sense or origin of any idiom, so that the general effect is: “Isn’t it weird and funny that, e.g., *to flap the wings of the nose incessantly* means to swell with pride in Japanese?!”

In no case is any explanation given as to why a particular idiom means what it does, for example, with reference



to its origin. Mr. Bhalla cheerfully explains that this would have taken far too long and involved a daunting amount of research. In addition, clearly the book would either have covered many fewer idioms or been much, much longer. Nevertheless, I think this was the wrong choice. Rather than having readers come away feeling, “Wow, how many inexplicably weird and wacky idioms there are in the world,” they might well have finished the book thinking, “Wow, how creative is the human mind and how rich and diverse is human experience to have led to the creation of these seemingly off-the-wall expressions, all of which, when explained, make sense in context.” I have looked up several of the Russian ones included on the Internet and found fascinating origin information (although, perhaps, of dubious accuracy) providing real insights into Russian culture of the past. However, although I disagree vehemently with the author’s choice here, certainly I do not dispute his right as the author to make it, and I do not necessarily believe that it casts doubts on his general understanding of the nature of language.

I began to have suspicions when I realized that, by all appearances, he never asked any group of native speakers of the languages in question to check his selections to affirm that they were indeed idioms of the language to which they were attributed and that their literal meaning was rendered coherently and correctly. I can really only judge the Russian and a few idioms from other languages in which I have minor competence, but it seems that Bhalla simply accepted and reused whatever was in the books he perused without any kind of linguistic reality check. This is clear from the strange phrasing of some idioms (a watered poodle, instead of a wet one, for example). A reviewer of the book on Amazon.com claims that he queried some friends who were native speakers of represented languages, and all of them found in the book at least some idioms that were attributed to their native tongues but that they had never encountered.

The situation with Russian is even worse than that with many of the other languages and this, I believe, is what puts Mr. Bhalla in the class of those who both love language and completely misunderstand it. He is one of those who thinks a translation is a translation is a translation and looking things up word by word in a dictionary allows even a novice to produce perfectly good publishable renderings, renderings that furthermore need not be checked.

The sources of idioms used in this book are scrupulously noted. Agnes Arany-Makkai’s *2001 Russian and English Idioms* (Barron’s, 1997) was the source of virtually all the Russian idioms included. This book is a fine resource for those who read both Russian and English, but because of the intended audience of language learners, it does not include literal translations of Russian idioms, simply citing them in the original Russian and giving an English explanation or equivalent and example sentences. In such cases, as

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## SLAVFILE LITE

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the author of *Noodles* freely acknowledges, he hired translators to provide literal renderings.

However, judging from the Russian entries, the Russian translator was shockingly unequal to his or her task. Generally, the understanding and familiarity with the originals demonstrated leads me to believe that the one responsible for translating them had perhaps as much as two years of college Russian, but at times the English used makes me think that perhaps his or her English was not native either.

Here are some examples (in all cases I have added the original Russian):

1. Only part of the idiom is cited, so that the literal translation makes even less sense than usual (omitted portion in bold): a) There's Grandma for you (a fine kettle of fish). *Вот тебе, бабушка, и Юрьев день.* b) *Not a potato* (no joking matter). **Любовь** – не картошка. (*Love is not a joking matter.*) Не картошка is not used with this meaning in other contexts. c) Grandmother was ambiguous (it remains to be seen). Бабушка надвое сказала, **либо будет, либо нет**. Although the second part of the phrase is typically omitted in Russian, it makes no sense to leave it out when writing for people unfamiliar with it. Evidently the word translated as grandmother has (or had) the secondary meaning of fortuneteller. A much clearer but still literal translation would be: *the fortuneteller predicted that either it would happen or it wouldn't.*
2. Mistranslation leading to strange rendering of a virtually obvious idiom (mistranslated word in bold in both English and Russian): a) Led to a **white knee** (rouse to fury). *Довести до белого каления.* Literally: to rouse to white heat. Mistranslation of the word meaning *incandescence* as *knee*. b) **Seven inches** in a forehead (intelligent). *Семь пядей во лбу.* Mistranslation of a word meaning hand's breadth as inches; compounded by inappropriate preposition and wrong article. (*He or she*) has (must have) a forehead seven handbreadths wide. c) **To notch in the forehead** (to commit to memory). *Зарубить себе на лбу.* Accurate translation: To pound or etch into one's forehead. Or: *to pound something into someone's head.* d) **To pat over** the wool (flatter, praise). *Гладить по шерсти.* Mistranslation of both the verb and the preposition. Literal translation: *to stroke in the direction that the fur (grows) or to rub someone the right way.*
3. Mistranslation through failure to find the appropriate older or secondary meaning of a word, which would transform the idiom from weird to understandable (mistranslated word in bold). a) To be born in a **shirt** (to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth). *Родиться в сорочке.* The word translated as shirt has the much more obscure meaning of caul. Many

European cultures have the superstition that being born still draped in the caul brings good luck.

b) Not one of the timid **ten** (not shy). *Не из робкого десятка.* The last word means a group of ten, probably in a military context. Better translation: *Not a member of the coward's squad.*

4. Mistranslation through failure to consider the meaning of a two-word phrase included in an idiom (phrase in bold). Love **without memory** (to be madly in love). *Любить без памяти.* Virtually any dictionary will tell you that the Russian phrase *without memory* is used to mean madly.
5. Failure to consider even the simplest variations to make the intended meaning clear. a) Get with one's hump (by the sweat of one's brow). *Добывать горбом.* More appropriate translation: *To attain (some result or objective) through bending one's back, i.e., backbreaking labor.* b) Be on a short leg (on friendly terms). *На дружеской ноге.* Better translation not really diverging from the literal: *Be on an intimate footing.*

I could go on to cite more and more examples, but you get the idea. Other issues I detected include citing Russian idioms that no one I have queried has ever heard of (Has anyone out there encountered a Russian equivalent of: *Don't stir the tea with your penis?*), translating nouns as verbs, infinitives as past tense verbs, etc., and elementary mistakes in English that obfuscate the meaning (e.g., Roll as a sausage).

Why have I spent all this time on this work, when I could simply have recommended that serious translators and other Russophiles have nothing to do with it? Well, to be honest, I suppose I am venting. I am simply offended by the presentation of such stuff as a work of even whimsical amateur linguistic scholarship; its publication is a crime, if not a sin, against language and the highly competent Slavists and other language professionals I know who would have been delighted to produce a similar work and have it published by the National Geographic. I suppose that I consider the number of slots in the Universe, and certainly the world of publishing, available for works on such subjects to be limited, and even severely limited, so that the appearance of one like this subtracts from the opportunity for one of our colleagues to find a publisher for a work of true value on a like theme. Furthermore, I have vowed to do everything possible to publicize the pernicious nature of the belief that a translation is a translation is a translation, if only in the *SlavFile*, where, to use an idiom, I am preaching to the choir. Do I think any of this is likely to do any good in the world at large? Probably not, but I have found the writing of this review to be therapeutic and would like to thank all of you who have gotten this far for reading it.

## GRAMMATICA: SOFTWARE FOR STUDENTS OF RUSSIAN

Susan Welsh



Grammatica is a newly released software application for intermediate and advanced students of Russian. Its initial, and primary, function, according to its [website](#), is to display stress patterns for the words in any Russian text. This is the reason I was motivated to take a look at it, since in reading Russian poetry, I sometimes have trouble knowing where to put the stress. But Grammatica, a Danish-owned, Kiev-based company directed by Jacob Joensen, is improving the product beyond that rudimentary—although not simple—function. It analyzes the grammar of a sentence, displays the full inflection or conjugation of a word in a pop-up menu, identifies other words in the passage with the same grammatical properties and related words, and provides a rudimentary translation (**Figure 1**).

patterns change with inflection, sometimes changing the meaning of the word altogether. The reviewers pointed out a few errors of this type (see examples in **Figures 2** and **3**).

Thus **ряду** should be stressed on the second syllable, not the first, in this sentence; **самого** with the stress on the first syllable as shown, means “most” or “uttermost,” whereas the actual meaning here, “himself,” requires the stress on the last syllable. By consulting the pop-up boxes (shown), the reader can see alternate inflections and stress patterns. If Grammatica cannot identify the word, it puts no stress mark.

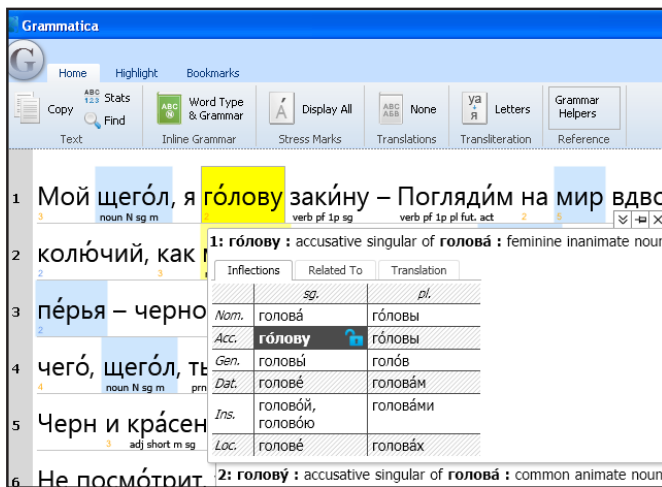


Figure 1. Grammatica has analyzed a sentence for stress and basic grammar. The user has clicked on “голове” for more information, and a pop-up box provides a declension.

How accurate is it? To answer this question, I asked native speakers of Russian to volunteer to review some sample text. Galina Kakhoun, Tatjana Lukinych, and Yulia Novikova-Wythe of the LinkedIn Russian Translators Group were kind enough to read and comment on a PDF I sent them of Grammatica’s analysis of a couple of poems by Osip Mandelstam, and some commentary on them randomly chosen from the Internet.

Grammatica’s “export to PDF” function shows only the basic, “first pass” information: stress marks and grammatical analysis; the reviewers did not see the information provided by pop-up boxes.

Grammatica’s performance turned out to be far from perfect. The stress markings were quite good, so for my purposes of poetry reading, the application is acceptable. But, of course, Russian grammar is very highly nuanced (“maddening,” is the word we foreigners use), and stress

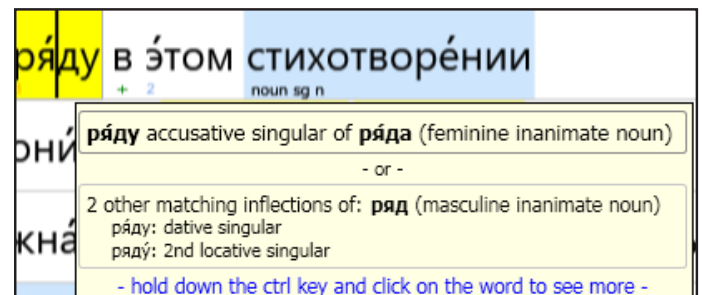


Figure 2

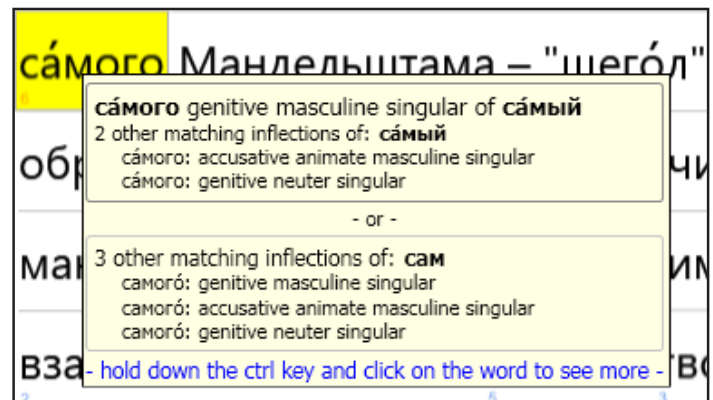


Figure 3

The “first-pass” grammar analysis was not as good as the stress analysis, with nominative and accusative often being confused (**Figure 4**). In this example, *нелогичность* should be designated as nominative. The pop-up boxes provide additional information, helpful for the student who is not a total beginner. It is clear that Grammatica cannot be used by a student to check his or her work.

Director Joensen points out that identifying a Russian noun or adjective as nominative, accusative, or genitive can be quite difficult. Grammatica runs some simple rules to try to find the most likely inflection. (Does it follow a preposition? Is it adjacent to an adjective that does not have the

*Continued on page 28*

## GRAMMATICA

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same inflection?) “This analysis works mostly as a convenience feature,” he wrote to me. “It is still far from perfect, but we will improve on it in the future.”

The translation feature, he said, “is quite basic; it is still in an experimental state.” Unlike Google Translate, for example, it is not a statistically based machine translation system, with millions of bilingual documents in its database. It translates each word from its base form, providing a hint to the reader of what each word means, but not a correct English sentence. “Grammatica will never be able to automatically do a 100% correct grammatical sentence analysis or translation,” Joensen said. “This is not the purpose of the software. The purpose is to be able to copy-paste any text into Grammatica and have all the information about each word instantly available. From there it’s still the user’s own headache to make sense of it by studying the language!” Fair enough.

Joensen has hired eight more people for the summer months to work on improving data quality and adding information about morphology. “I’m especially excited about the morphological information,” he wrote. “This will allow Grammatica to connect words to their roots, prefixes, suffixes, etc., and provide analysis of the parts of a word. We have done some testing with this, and I think it will work out quite well. My hope for this, as was the idea with Grammatica from the beginning, is that learners will be able to understand a text with many fewer dictionary lookups. It is of course a lot more useful to be able to understand a word from its context and morphology, than just to see the same word in English.”

As someone who not infrequently finds herself looking up the same word many times, I will be very interested to see how that works!

Who will use this product? It would certainly be useful for teachers and students. I think its benefit to translators

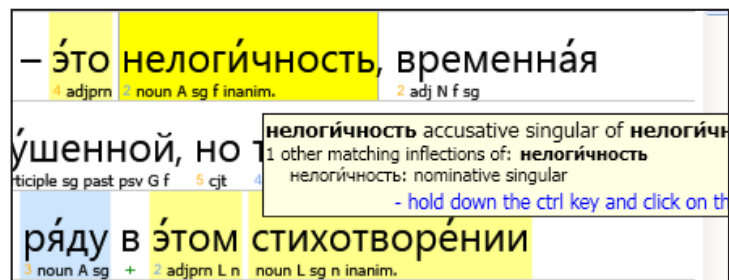


Figure 4

is minimal, except for language study (and for fun). It will probably not solve the thornier problems of grammar – e.g., in one of Mandelstam’s “goldfinch” poems, he writes: “В обе стороны он в оба смотрит – в обе!” Grammatica and I were both stumped as to why в обе appears in two places, and в оба in one. The program’s initial analysis is quite slow: You are not going to run a 10 K word financial report through this thing – nor would there be any reason to do so, unless you intended to recite it at the next meeting of your local Poetry Reading Group.

For those of us who are far to the north side of our 40th birthday, there is an awful lot of mousing and clicking. Since we still own our college grammar books, we do have another recourse, after all. The text-message and iPhone generation may view the matter differently.

On the technical side, Grammatica runs on Windows XP, Vista, and 7, which is an unfortunate limitation for MAC and Linux users. The installation was easy (I had it installed on Windows XP). I have experienced quite a few crashes of the program, but that may be a problem involving my Virtual Box setup of Windows within a Linux shell.

Grammatica can be downloaded from [www.grammatica.eu](http://www.grammatica.eu) for \$69, and there is a 20-day free trial. Readers of *SlavFile* may receive a 15% discount for a single license, up to the end of 2011 (1,000 users maximum), by entering the following promo code when purchasing the software: 0260-47FD-8F8F-B2BA.

Susan can be reached at [welsh\\_business@verizon.net](mailto:welsh_business@verizon.net).

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**2011 SLD Banquet**  
**Thursday, October 27, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Vlora Albanian Restaurant (vloraboston.com)**  
**Copley Square, Boston**

**About Vlora** (from the restaurant's website): In the heart of Boston lives the soul of Mediterranean cuisine. Vlora, named after Chef/Owner Aldo Velaj's hometown in Albania, represents more than authentic Mediterranean cuisine – it embraces the true Mediterranean lifestyle.

The dishes reflect the age-old adage of “eat better and live better.” With an emphasis on freshness and a minimalist cooking style, the naturally healthy menu covers tastes from the Northern Mediterranean region encompassing Albania, Greece, and Southern Italy. The menu and wine list are an extension of the flavors and dishes served in Aldo's own home. Believing that food should taste like food, the natural tastes and flavors of the freshest ingredients are enhanced primarily with olive oil and fresh herbs.

**About the banquet:**  
**MENU**

**Tasting Platter consisting of:**

**Arancini Siciliani – Italian rice balls, mushroom & feta filling, tomato & mint sauce**

**Watermelon & Feta tidbit – olive oil, balsamic vinegar**

**Yogurt Pie – phyllo, Greek yogurt**

**Mediterranean Kebabs with Choice of Chicken, Beef or Shrimp**  
**Served with Italian rice pilaf, grilled vegetables, and mixed greens**  
**(Vegetarian option provided on request)**

**Baklava or gelato**

**Coffee or tea**

**Private room holding 48 people, music a possibility**

*Price: \$45/person*

*covering meals, service, and gratuity*

*Drinks, including exotic organic vodkas, to be purchased from a cash bar.*

*Send reservations and choice of kebab to Elana Pick at [pick.ep@gmail.com](mailto:pick.ep@gmail.com).*

*Please stipulate if you require a vegetarian entrée.*

*Send checks made out to P. Elana Pick by October 14 to*

*P. Elana Pick*

*125 Oceana Drive East, apt. 3D*

*Brooklyn, NY 11235*