

Madeleine G. Levine To Be SLD's 2016 Greiss Lecturer

SlavFile is pleased to announce that the Susana Greiss Lecture at the ATA 57th Annual Conference in San Francisco (November 2-5) will be delivered by Madeleine G. Levine, Kenan Professor of Slavic Literatures Emerita at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and translator of numerous works from Polish by authors including Czesław Miłosz, Ida Fink, and Miron Białoszewski.

Her talk in San Francisco, yet to be scheduled, is titled, "In the Shadow of Russian: Forty Years of Translating Polish Literature."

MY YEARS OF THE BOOK

Vladimir Kovner

Somehow, to my own surprise, in the past 10 years I have ended up producing and publishing, or being on the point of publishing, five books of translation. I would like to tell you how it happened.

I was an engineer for the majority of my life, first in the Soviet Union and then working for the Ford Motor Company until my retirement on 1/1/2001. I had never considered a career as a journalist or a writer. It is true that, due to my obsession, which began in the late 1950s, with so-called "guitar" (or bard) songs, I had taken part in compiling and editing the first fundamental 4-volume and 40-tape cassette edition of *Песни Русских Бардов* (*Songs of the Russian Bards*), published by YMCA Press in 1976. Later, between 2004 and 2010, my long essay, again about this movement, *Золотой век магнитуздата* (*The Golden Age of Magnitizdat*) was published four times in the USA and Russia, including in an almanac of memoirs entitled, somewhat pretentiously, *Жизни жгучие печали* (*Poignant Afflictions of Life*) by M-Graphics Publishing, Boston, 2009.

In 2005, I made my first poetic translation into Russian, a short poem from *Mother Goose*, and showed it to my longtime friend Tanya Gesse. Tanya liked it and decided that it was absolutely necessary to immediately introduce me to Lydia Stone, who just at that time was working on an ATA presentation on translating children's poetry. Lida in her turn immediately proposed that I participate with her in this presentation, and we started working together intensively. Lida, with her passion for translating poetry, turned my life upside down in virtually no time. By November of the same year we had prepared a 36-page handout called "An Alphabestiary, the ABC's of Russian<>English Translation of Children's Poetry," and presented it at the ATA Conference in Seattle.

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**WHAT ARE PUSHKIN AND STALIN
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By that time, I'd translated a number of poems by the English children's poets A.A. Milne, Robert Louis Stevenson, and John Ciardi, and even one book by Dr. Seuss. I developed a hunger to do more and more translations. In 2006, some of my translations of poems by A.A. Milne and Jack Prelutsky were included in an anthology of the Russian poets of New England, a book, again very modestly titled *Заполнение Пустоты (Filling the Void)*, (Boston: M-Graphics Publishing, 2006). Thanks to the alphabetical position of my name in this anthology, I was placed in immediate proximity to such prominent émigré poets as Naum Korzhavin and Lev Losev. How's that for beginner's luck?!

But my luck then seemed to turn. I experienced a spectacular failure when I tried to acquire the translation rights for seven poems by A.A. Milne from his book *When We Were Very Young (Когда мы были совсем маленькими)*. After half a year of playing games with me, the agent for Milne's estate demanded for the translation rights to these seven short works as much money as if I had asked to buy the whole estate, including development rights to the Hundred-Acre Wood. So I mentally sent a farewell message to Alan Milne and his adorable son Christopher Robin. To read more about my copyright ordeals see www.scribd.com/doc/38277909/Fall-2010-SlavFile.

However, aside from Milne, by that time I had translated more than a hundred poems by John Ciardi, Robert Louis Stevenson, Ogden Nash, Jack Prelutsky, Bruce Lansky, and Edward Lear, and some poems from *Mother Goose*. In 2010, my book of translations for children *Приласкайте льва (Pet the Lion)*, beautifully illustrated by my friend, the very talented artist Felix Braslavsky, was published by M-Graphics.

At about the same time, I encountered another piece of bad luck. At the start of 2010, I needed an operation, which was a success but had a painful period of recovery. For about a month, I virtually couldn't sleep and actually couldn't even be on my back. Being an optimist, I turned my troubles into some great opportunities. Every day and night, I would sit on the couch and place a pile of pillows on both sides so I would not fall over if I happened to doze off. Then I'd put one of the *Books of Nonsense* by Edward Lear and a big piece of paper on the coffee table in front of me. I would read one of its limericks two or three times and memorize it. Then if it was night, I turned off the light hoping to sleep, but meanwhile playing with words, lines, and rhymes. As soon as a rendering of that limerick was ready, I would write it down (in big letters if it was dark) and again try to doze. As a rule, I had no luck. In that case, I would learn another limerick and the next inning of the game would begin. Such an exciting game! By the end of the month, I had almost a hundred limericks translated to my satisfaction. Sometimes I tried my hand at more sophisticated English adult-rated limericks, which are readily available. I also searched the Internet and supplied Lida with a number of very funny contemporary adult Russian limericks. By the time of the ATA conference in Denver in 2010, we had enough material for an "X-rated" presentation. Lydia, who has given at least one

presentation every year since 1991, claims that this one enjoyed by far the greatest audience success of any. And I had built the foundation for my next book. I kept searching for more Lear limericks in his early publications, diaries, letters to his friends and so on, eventually translating 267 limericks — all the limericks, I presume, that he ever wrote. On top of that, I contacted some libraries of rare books in the USA and in London, UK, and accumulated copies of about 300 drawings by Edward Lear and also several photographs and portraits of Lear. As a result of five years of work, in 2015 a bilingual book entitled *Едвард Лир. Полное собрание абсурдных стишков-лимериков с рисунками* (*Edward Lear. The Complete Limericks with Drawings*) was published by the same publishing house I had been dealing with for many years. The book has been sold on Amazon since July 2015 (Note from the editors: Where it has received nothing but five-star reviews), in two bookstores in Boston and New York, and of course right from the shelves of my private home bookstore. I am especially pleased that Brooklyn and Queens libraries have bought 25 copies of this book.

This was not the only gratifying literary event of 2015 for me. As I said before, I had been personally involved as a chronicler and recorder of the Russian bard movement in the 20th century. My special favorite of all the bards was Bulat Okudzhava. Lydia and I started collaborating on translating some of his outstanding poems and songs, just to see if we could do it. We decided we could and proposed an ATA presentation on these works for 2011, which was accepted. Our presentation was greatly enhanced by a guest artist, my relative Daniel Veksler, who sang our translations (proving beyond a doubt they are singable) and the originals to the accompaniment of his guitar. Later we published a detailed article about the methods and problems of translating Okudzhava's songs into English in a volume devoted mainly to Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotsky *Голоса* (*The Voices*) (Moscow: Bulat, 2015).

However, our hopes of producing a bilingual volume of Okudzhava did not materialize until last year. For several years, Lydia has been translating poetry for *Chtenia/Readings*, an English thematic journal devoted to Russian literature, and she even translated for and curated an annual bilingual issue devoted to Tolstoy. While talking to the publisher last spring she mentioned that, since our Okudzhava translations had been accepted for various thematic issues, he might consider devoting a bilingual issue to the famous bard. It turned out there was a hole in the publication schedule and he agreed, giving us, however, a very

short deadline of two weeks, which we negotiated up to a month. Was it possible to complete such a complex project in that time? We grabbed the opportunity to publish a book of Bulat's poems in English and began our race against time. Luckily, we had enough poetry already translated and practically ready for publication. I had the idea of translating a dozen of Okudzhava's humorous, witty *Autobiographical Anecdotes*, which were written and published at the end of his life. While Lida was translating them with my minimal, mostly consultative, participation, I was taking care of mainly organizational stuff: writing the Introduction, finding Bulat's own comments on his poems, searching for photographs of Bulat to illustrate our book and so on. And sure enough, Lida and I found some time to argue, especially when she was sorting Bulat's poems thematically — love, life, war, art, irony... But, as we know, truth is born of arguments, and we won the race by putting the book together in a phenomenally short time, ending up not only as translators of Bulat's works but as curators of the whole volume! That's what the book says! The name of the book is *Okudzhava Bilingual*, and it can be found on Amazon.com, as well as on the website for Russian Life Books www.russianlife.com/books.

The year 2016 has begun equally well for me. I had spent several years working on a translation from Russian of an extremely powerful book, *Сны золотые. Исповеди наркоманов* (translated as *Magic Dreams. Confessions of Drug Addicts*) by Moscow journalist and writer Sergey Baimukhametov. This book presents many horrifying descriptions of the lives of Russian junkies in their own words with commentary by the author, medical personnel, educators and police officers. Included in the book is an article I wrote about the situation with narcotics in the USA. I am grateful to everyone who helped me to bring the mentally exhausting process of this book translation to a successful conclusion. After I translated the first chapter and Lydia Stone edited it, I asked Daniel Veksler to do the first (very important) stage of translation of the rest of the book. Meanwhile I looked for and found two dictionaries of drug addict jargon published in Moscow and Washington DC, visited two psychiatric hospitals in Manhattan and Staten Island, and talked to doctors and addicts. Then after extensively studying details of junkies' lives and their language, I did my best to bring the first rendering more in line with the jargon, the street terms, and the generally rough language that describes the horrific details of drug addicts' lives in the Russian original of *Magic Dreams*. I was lucky that Nora Favorov agreed to edit our translation. Her invaluable editorial work,

which included some re-translation, greatly enhanced the quality of the English edition. On March 15, 2016, this book was made available on Amazon.

Last but not least is the story of a book *English-Russian and Russian-English Dictionary of Sports Idioms*. Lydia and I had begun our work on this book with a presentation at the 2006 ATA conference "The Name of the Game: Russian Translation of English Expressions Drawn from Sports." The main part of the book, containing over 1000 English idioms defined and with examples in both English and Russian, was virtually completed by 2009, but the publisher we

found made no significant progress toward actually publishing it. Impatient, I took it back, to work on it myself. Eventually I found a very good editor, Marina Eskin (Boston), and I can say that we are now in the home stretch. I hope that when the ATA conference in San Francisco rolls around, this book will have been published.

We do not have immediate plans for another book at the moment but have proposed a collaborative presentation for ATA 2016. And all this started when I translated a tiny Mother Goose poem!

BED IN SUMMER

By Robert Louis Stevenson

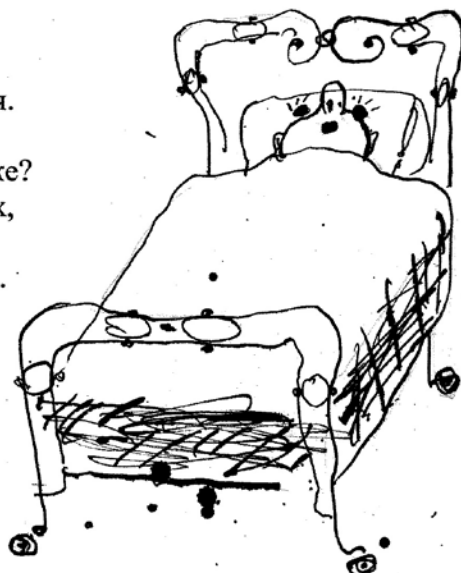
In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.
I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.
And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

КАК МЕНЯ УКЛАДЫВАЮТ ЛЕТОМ СПАТЬ

Зимой встаю во тьме ночи
При жёлтом огоньке свечи,
А летом мучают меня:
Кладут в постель при свете дня.

В постель кладут меня, и что же?
Я слышу гулкий шаг прохожих,
И вижу небо и нередко
В окошко вижу птиц на ветках.

Не кажется ли Вам ужасным,
Когда вокруг светло и ясно,
И мне так хочется играть,
Меня укладывать в кровать.



Translation of very famous English children's poem from Vladimir's book *Приласкайте льва (Pet the Lion)* with English original. Illustration by Felix Braslavsky.

Lydia insists that if she were to have a tombstone she would want the last four (English) lines inscribed on it.

SlavFile Wish List: Wanted

TRANSLATION TOOLS COLUMNIST(S)

Technically savvy Slavic translator to write and/or curate a (semi-)regular column on tools for translators working into and out of Slavic languages. Increase your name recognition to our hordes of readers and enhance your reputation for expertise.

Contact Lydia lydiastone@verizon.net.

BOOK TRANSLATED BY NORA S. FAVOROV AWARDED 2016 PUSHKIN HOUSE PRIZE

SlavFile is delighted to announce that *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* (Yale University Press; 2015), written by Oleg Khlevniuk and translated by Nora Seligman Favorov, has been awarded Pushkin House of London's Prize for best translated book about Russia. This is the first time in the four years of the award that a translated work has been so singled out. As most readers know, Nora is *SlavFile*'s Associate Editor, a past two-term SLD administrator and the past and present performer of a staggering number of other roles for ATA and SLD. Among the six books short-listed for this honor, *Stalin*, is the only one that is a translation. The winner was announced at a ceremony in London on April 25th.

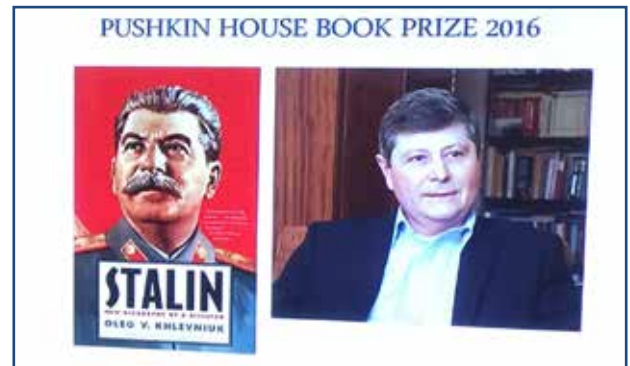
This is what author, Oleg Khlevniuk, has to say about Nora in an interview published on the Pushkin House website.

"She is absolutely brilliant. This is not our first book together. She knows and understands history very well; she is very experienced and attentive. I have to say that she corrected a lot in my manuscript – sometimes she understands what I want to say better than I do. It was very important to cooperate with Nora. It's possible that the English version is better than the original Russian. I try to use her corrections in the Russian version too. Sometimes it was very difficult to express how Stalin made mistakes in his written Russian. Nora was very effective in suggesting ways to do so."

In the righthand column we publish Pushkin House's interview with Nora and include some information about Pushkin House and the prize.



Nora Favorov at Pushkin House holding the award for Oleg Khlevniuk's *Stalin* biography.



The cover and author of Oleg Khlevniuk's biography of Stalin (Yale, 2015)

Q&A With Nora Seligman Favorov — translator of Oleg Khlevniuk's "*Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*", awarded 2016 Pushkin House Prize

*Interview by Andrew Jack
(reprinted from the Pushkin House website)*

What made you interested in Russia?

I grew up in New York City with a father who went to New York University in the 1940s when many students were arguing the case for Trotskyism versus Stalinism versus anti-communism. Soviet history was a topic that came up around my parents' dinner table, and I was fascinated by Stalin from an early age. I studied Russian history in college, so when I got bumped from a literature course and saw only two people had signed up for first-year Russian language, I decided, on a whim, to sign up. It was a very intensive year followed by two summer programs and then I went to Russia for a semester in Moscow. I wound up meeting my husband there, stayed longer than planned, and I brought him back to the US. My obsession with the Russian language, history, and culture grew over the years. I'm thrilled to be able to make a living translating fascinating texts about a fascinating country.

How did you come to translate Oleg Khlevniuk's work?

Thankfully, I have been able to translate Russian history almost exclusively in recent years. This is the fourth book I have done for Yale University Press and the second for Oleg after "*Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*". This biography is going to be interesting to a broader audience. I'm not sure whether Oleg saw this as the biography's organizing

principle, but to me the value of this book is how well it illustrates the damage Stalin did to what is now the former Soviet Union. I only fully appreciated this when I went to Russia immediately after completing the translation and looked at everything I saw around me through the lens of the biography.

How easy was it to translate this book?

Translating from Russian is always a challenge, but this book was such a pleasure. Oleg is so generous with his time. If something came out sounding confusing in English, I could grill him, ask a million questions. Through the examples he provided of terms like “administrative pressure” (which turns out to be a euphemism for something much more violent than the English term suggests) or “administrative exile” (basically violent relocation in this case), I was able to come up with wording that conjured a more vivid and accurate image for readers of the English translation.

What about Stalin’s own Russian language?

Although it may sound a bit perverse, I love translating Stalin. His writing is quite colourful, but the transcripts of some of his speeches that I’ve had the privilege of translating (mostly not for Khlevniuk’s biography) are even more so. He uses very idiomatic Russian but mangles idioms so they have to be translated creatively. If he seems to have in mind the standard idiom “прижать к стене” (to press to a wall, usually used when someone is offering irrefutable proof of something leaving no room for argument) but butchers the idiom and actually says that history “как к стене пригнала вас” (drove you into a wall), the context suggesting that he means that history is compelling you to deal with a problem, should I translate that by finding an analogous way to butcher an English idiom? I find such problems delightful. While translating Stalin in his own words I always keep my beloved idioms dictionary, Sophia Lubensky’s “Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms” right at the foot of my chair and am constantly peering into it. Most of what I see written about Stalin as rhetorician

is about his written works, but his speeches, the unedited transcripts of which have only recently become available, would make for a fascinating study of political and linguistic manipulation.

Can you describe the translation process?

Oleg sent me the whole text at once. I would translate a chapter and send queries. I’m a real pest – I ask a million questions. Like any good translator, I wanted to liberate myself from the Russian words and syntax and try to put his thought so as to best convey the meaning to the target audience. You take the meaning of a phrase, try to get rid of the words, and instead ask “how would I really say this?” He very generously answered my questions and clarified things. His passive English is excellent. Working with an author who can critique the translation of his work is a translator’s greatest gift (when the critique is spot on – when it is not, it can be a nightmare). I wanted to keep the flavour of Oleg’s style and perspective. He and I edited the translation multiple times, and then Yale University Press, which recognised the value of this book, was all hands on deck. The executive editor edited my translation himself, and the text was also gone over with fine toothed combs by a copy editor and production editor, after which we all read through the proof. This is just the sort of cooperative effort that is essential to a top-notch final product.

What is your next project?

I’m editing the first literary translation I ever did, in 1997 when just finishing my master’s degree. It is a nineteenth-century novel by an author nobody has ever heard of: Sofia Khvoshchinskaya. Together with her two sisters, including better known Nadezhda, she is sometimes referred to as one of the “Russian Bronte sisters”. It’s a little gem that I’m hoping will be published soon. My original translation now seems terribly flawed. Almost 20 years and millions of translated words later, it’s a great pleasure to bring it up to my current standard.

ABOUT PUSHKIN HOUSE AND ITS BOOK PRIZE

(reprinted from www.pushkinhouse.org)

Pushkin House is the UK’s oldest independent Russian cultural centre. Founded in 1954 in a house in Notting Hill by a group of émigré Russian friends, led by Maria Mikhailovna Kullmann (Zernova), their aim was to create a welcoming meeting-place: ‘for the enjoyment, understanding and promotion of Russian culture in all its forms, and for the exchange of views in a lively, informal atmosphere, with freedom of speech a core principle’.

The **Pushkin House Russian Book Prize**, now in its fourth year, rewards the very best non-fiction writing on Russia. This Prize was created to encourage public understanding and intelligent debate about the Russian-speaking world. The prize is for a book published in English, but translations from other languages, including of course Russian, are eligible and actively sought. This year was the first time an additional prize was awarded for a translation.

THE ADMINISTRATORS' COLUMN

Ekaterina Howard



Dear SLD members,

First of all, I am very glad to announce that our blog is active again and you can see the new posts displayed on the homepage of the website.

SLD posts of note

Among other things, all readers are invited to “Join the A-List” (<http://atasld.org/blog-entry/join-list>) and encouraged to suggest equivalent idioms to several modern English phrases. You have to be a registered user to leave comments to the post — we try to keep the website spam-free. I hope that SLD members will suggest a sufficient number of equivalents in Slavic languages to allow the series to continue.

In case you have missed this announcement in the previous *SlavFile*, Maria Guzenko is looking for practice buddies in preparing for the ATA certification exam (she'll be training for the English>Russian exam, but all language pairs are welcome). You can find additional information on our blog: <http://atasld.org/article/2016/02/18/maria-guzenko-invites-form-ata-certification-exam-practice-group>. **Dear ATA-certified SLD members: Wouldn't you like to share your experiences and give some tips on getting ready to take the exam? (See article on page 23.)**

Other initiatives

The SLD Welcome Letter has been updated and will be sent to new members. We hope that this version will give new members a better overview of division activities and encourage them to become active.

ATA 57th Annual Conference

We are now past the submission deadline for conference proposals. My thanks and wishes of good luck to all of the SLD members who decided to share their knowledge at the next conference!

The banquet format

First of all, a special thank you to Michael Ishenko, who was the first to voice his preference for a reception-style event in response to the last column's question. I would also like to thank all of the SLD members who participated in the SLD banquet survey, providing us with the useful information on potential banquet attendees' preferences.

A very brief summary of the survey results:

- 20 respondents have participated
- 40% (8 respondents) would prefer a sit-down dinner, 35% (7 respondents) are for a reception

We have also asked the respondents for other preferences regarding the venue, such as cost, quality of cuisine, noise level, and opportunity to converse with multiple other attendees. If interested, you can view the survey results here: <http://bit.ly/1UNp0Iz>

More (and better) SLD events?

Other than the banquet, SLD events will, of course, include the Annual Meeting and the Newcomers Lunch, and there will be an SLD table during the Welcome Celebration, but here's another question for SLD members: **Would you like to see more division events? This can be anything from booking a table for a lunch in a restaurant to organizing excursions to setting up a mini-résumé exchange event.** Note that anything involving additional use of hotel facilities would require ATA approval. Please let us know!

You can reach me, Ekaterina Howard, at ekaterina@atasld.org, or Assistant Administrator Fred Grasso at fred@atasld.org. In addition to general SLD business, I am responsible for the SLD Twitter account.



COLUMN FOR NEWCOMERS

Edited by Svetlana Beloshapkina

We're very happy to present in this Spring issue two newcomer perspectives on the 56th ATA Annual Conference in Miami. Daria Toropchyn, an English-to-Russian freelance translator, and Chris Tauchen, a Russian-to-English freelance translator, have shared their impressions as first time attendees.

We all remember our first conference, and as our copyeditor Christina Sever noted in her response to Chris's experience, these two reports are sure to bring back memories of those first conferences for many of us. The striking similarity in both Daria's and Chris's write-ups is that each had doubted whether attending a conference was worth the investment of time and money, but finally was convinced to do so by translation blogs, articles in *The ATA Chronicle*, and online

translation forums. To me this proves that the translation community, both in its actual and virtual forms, is a great resource to help newcomers and experienced professionals stay connected and navigate the complexities of the language profession. That's why I once again invite all our SLD colleagues – newbies and buddies – to contribute to our wonderful gathering place outside of the ATA conference, the *SlavFile*.

Thank you, Chris and Daria, for your encouraging reports, and once again, welcome to the SLD! We hope to hear from you again soon.



Fond Memories of Miami

Reflections on My First ATA Annual Conference

Daria Toropchyn

It has been over 5 months since I attended my first ATA conference in Miami last year and I think enough time has now passed for me to decide whether the experience was useful and should be repeated. Going to the conference in Miami was a last minute decision for me, and one I am very glad I made. After I had read about the event in blogs and spoke in person with a few people who had attended previous ATA conferences, going myself felt like the right thing to do.

So, I found myself registering for the conference and then realized that it would be wise to do significant homework before going to Miami. I was excited and overwhelmed at the same time. I was not only a newcomer to the ATA conference, but to the ATA, and to the translation industry itself. The occasional projects I had completed were short of a steady workflow. When I did them I had a full-time job and was in school, so translation was more of a hobby for me. However, I very much enjoyed the work and was serious about translation as a career path.

The first and most important thing any newbie should do when going to the conference is register for the "Buddies Welcome Newbies" program. Otherwise you will find yourself walking into a conference hall with over a thousand people that you have never met before, although you know of some of them from

journal articles, books, or podcasts. But at the BWN program, all it takes is sitting at a table and saying "Hello" for all anxiety to disappear, because everyone is so welcoming, understanding, patient, really interested in what everyone has to say, and always happy to give advice.

Having gained confidence, I went to the Welcome Celebration, where I experienced a second wave of anxiety, but found my way to the SLD table. What a relief! There were so many people who spoke my native language (Russian), and some were also wearing the pink ribbon saying "First time attendee." There is no problem finding common interests when you know you are speaking with someone in your language pair. And that pink ribbon: it is the most powerful and magical thing for a newbie. It identifies you as someone who needs some guidance. People saw it and approached me at breakfast, coffee breaks, and other events. They made me feel welcome and asked questions. It would lead to the most amazing conversations.

I met so many established translators during the three days of the conference. Every one of them kindly found the time to talk to me, asking how I was enjoying everything and recommending sessions to attend. Of course they are able to do this — for some this is their 15th conference! They even introduced me to translation agencies they work with and trust. And this is another great thing about the conference. You

meet not only other translators, but also project managers and translation agency owners and CEOs who can share their perspectives on translation, explaining what they are looking for in a translator and describing the criteria they use in deciding whom to hire for a job. In my opinion, such information is priceless, especially for a newbie to the industry.

Sessions presented at the conference were so interesting and informative; there were a couple of times I really struggled to decide which one to attend. On the first night Corrine McKay had advised all newbies to attend a session that is out of their area of specialization or not quite something that seemed like a good fit, promising that this would be fun. And so I did. I attended one about creative translation that had examples in Chinese. What a fascinating experience! As I could not understand the Chinese source I concentrated on finding my own translation fit using English synonyms and the context the speaker provided. By the end of the session I felt like I had reset my brain.

Of course potential attendees are interested not only in knowing whether or not they will have a great experience; they also need to know that the investment they make in the conference will pay off. And of course I considered this; indeed I was expecting money to come in from all the projects I would get from meeting people and agencies there. Alas, this was not my case. As of today I haven't gotten a single project from any agency that I met at the conference and signed a contract with. But I can live with that! The conference gave me a much needed boost of confidence, great advice, and a plan for building my freelance business. It took me a few months after I came back home to put everything together and then I was

ready to approach both translation agencies and direct clients and offer my services to them.

That was when I began to receive a concrete return on my investment! Projects started to come from different clients, and there was a time when I was overwhelmed with work. I do realize that everyone's case is different (someone flying to Miami from California requires more work to break even than someone who lives in North Carolina). However, I strongly believe that if attendees try to seize every opportunity, are open to new things, curious, and even slightly fearless, money for the conference will have been well spent. And don't forget all conference expenses are tax deductible.

The conference did not really feel like a conference to me, but more like an annual get-together of friends who share the same hobby—foreign languages. The atmosphere was relaxed, with lots of fun and jokes at the sessions. And really, the Photo Booth and Dance Party—can it be more fun than that?

To all of you who are now trying to decide whether to attend, my advice would be--go! You will be glad you did. This year the conference will be held in San Francisco, an amazing city that I have always wanted to visit. How great to have an official reason to do just that!

Daria Toropchyn is an English, Czech > Russian freelance translator who was born and raised in Russia, spent several years in Czech Republic, and is currently living in the U.S. She received an undergraduate degree in International Economics and is currently pursuing a graduate program in Translation for Professions at the University of Illinois. Daria has worked in the areas of Business, Finance, E-commerce, and Hospitality and these are her translation specialties. She lives in North Carolina and can be reached at info@dt-translation.com.

Conference Review ATA 56 in Miami (2015)

Christopher Tauchen

Last year, after much debate, I finally convinced myself to attend the ATA annual conference in Miami. I'd been freelancing as a Ru>En translator for several years, but this would be my first conference. The cost-benefit analysis wasn't terribly promising (considerable expense, uncertain return), I hadn't yet overcome my fear of "networking" (I'm cripplingly introverted), and the sessions would all be available online afterward. Why should I bother?

The winning argument was this: everyone else was going.

I prefer to think that these things don't affect me, but it was the fevered recommendations in various books, blogs, and *The ATA Chronicle* that pushed me over the edge. Real professionals go to professional

conferences, it seemed, so if I wanted to develop as a professional translator, I would have to go to a translation conference.

I arrived in Miami with a fresh stack of business cards and an elevator pitch. First on my list of events was "Buddies Welcome Newbies," part of a program in which seasoned conference-goers adopt first-time attendees and show them the ropes. My "buddy" was an experienced technical translator who seemed to know everyone else by name. He gave me advice on how to approach the conference (in a nutshell: relax and get to know other translators) and introduced me to people I wouldn't otherwise have met.

After that structured introduction, the process for meeting other people was as follows: you approach

someone, stare at the colored stickers and ribbons on their conference badge for a moment, and then say either “What’s the blue sticker for?” or “You have yellow too!” Conversation ensues, followed by an exchange of business cards.

This was a talk best had at breakfast. People enjoying coffee and croissants are naturally welcoming and easy to talk to, and since it’s too early for anything else to be going on, nobody minds the aimless chat and badge-deciphering, which gets increasingly tedious as the day goes on. I met more people during my four- or five-course breakfast every morning than I would for the entire rest of the day.

After breakfast came the difficult task of attending practical, business-related sessions and missing the language and subject-specific ones I was actually interested in. After spending so much money on the conference, I felt obliged to go to sessions that would help my business. Anything that was not directly related to that was struck off. I envied the veteran translators who had the luxury of going wherever they liked—they already knew all there was to know about setting rates, negotiating, finding clients, and so on.

Unfortunately, this restriction kept me out of most of the SLD sessions, but I still got to meet other members at the banquet and at a lunch that was organized to welcome newcomers. I’ve seldom met such a generous and inclusive bunch of people. They even let me volunteer as the blog editor for the division’s website. Later I came to think of the division as a kind of homeroom for the conference.

I took a lot of notes, and I made an effort to approach as many people as I could. The thought of making this trip cost-effective was constantly on my mind: Would this person be a good contact? Will this agency take me on? How will this session help my

bottom line? It took some time before I understood how narrow and wrong this approach was.

My arguments against going to the conference were valid, at least when you consider getting a direct return on the investment. Paying for the online access to the sessions is a cheaper way to get much more information (you could actually see all the sessions if you wanted to). And while you might land a great new client by going to the conference, I’d wager that spending those three full days sending out resumes would do you just as well, if not better. Networking online can be effective if you care enough to do it right.

But going to the conference brings real benefits, even if they’re not the kind that can always be tallied and popped into a spreadsheet. Most of all, it feels good to meet other people who do the same thing you do. We spend so much time at home shifting pixels around that it’s easy to forget that there is a community of warm-blooded people out there. Shaking hands with a human being means a lot more than adding them to your LinkedIn profile. You shake a hundred hands, introduce yourself as a translator, talk a bit about what you do, and eventually you start to feel more confident and grounded. I now feel better about myself and my career choice, more hopeful for the future, and less tempted to abandon this venture altogether and become an insurance salesman.

Christopher Tauchen is a Ru>En translator and editor. He lives in State College, PA. He can be reached at tauchen@gmail.com

Note from the Editors: This article evoked the following letter from our wonderful copyeditor, Christina Sever. We feel it is well worth sharing.

Christopher, I am a member of the editorial board of the SLD newsletter, and one of my tasks is proofreading the *SlavFile* articles. I wanted to tell you that your newcomer review of the Conference was one of the best and most touching ones I have ever read. You so accurately described the feelings of a first-time attendee, which I was in 1988, that my own feelings on that occasion came rushing back. And I do believe that we’ve done a fairly decent job of making that experience more comfortable. There was no effort back then to recognize newcomers or reach out to them at all, no luncheon, nothing. I went to my first Conference reception as a fellow introvert (most translators are, I think) and felt quite alone and at that time, completely unable to walk up to a group of strangers and join their circle. I’m very glad now that I persisted in coming back anyway, for the business startup info, and then for translation and language sessions, and, incidentally, was one of the founders of the SLD and the first editor of the *SlavFile*. Welcome to our now very friendly and welcoming club. We’re very glad you’re here. Sincerely, Christina Sever



Miami, a short walk from the 2015 conference hotel.
PHOTO: Fred Grasso

An Illustration of Why Lexicography's Quest is So Quixotic: “What Dictionaries Don't Tell Us”

*Presented by Anastasia Koralova
Reviewed by Nora Seligman Favorov*



Anastasia Koralova

First, a recommendation to ATA conference goers with an interest in Russian<>English translation: don't miss any presentations by Anastasia Koralova. After a career teaching English>Russian translation at Moscow Linguistic University and Russian>English translation at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (her current

position), she is always ready to offer a wealth of insights and examples. This talk, like her past ones, was well organized, clearly delivered, and brought a measure of clarity to hazy thoughts about dictionaries that drift through the translator's mind every day.

Dr. Koralova began her talk with a brief overview of the history of lexicography (did you know that the first bilingual word lists date to the third millennium BCE?) and a reminder of why perfection is unattainable in lexicography, although translators, Koralova recognizes, are constantly “dreaming of having one, exhaustive, reliable bilingual dictionary.” Such a dictionary will never exist for three reasons:

1. Dictionaries are mere snapshots of ever-evolving language. The moment a dictionary is published, it is already, to some degree, obsolete.
2. However comprehensive it might strive to be, a dictionary is never a complete inventory of a language; it is a selection of units (each language being essentially a limitless universe).
3. The quest for perfection is even more quixotic for bilingual dictionaries since the meanings of (roughly) equivalent words and phrases rarely truly overlap, and try as they might, lexicographers will never succeed in creating a perfect bilingual dictionary due to the semantic, grammatical, and cultural differences between languages.

While pointing out the inevitable deficiencies of dictionaries, Koralova was quick to emphasize that she was by no means intending to diminish the work of lexicographers, to whom we are all deeply indebted.

The main focus of her talk was lexical units that are included in dictionaries, but for which important explanations, translations, and definitions are omitted. Specifically, she chose to “deal with words and

expressions that are used in language for general purposes, in everyday situations.”

Given the limitations of space and my own subjective view of what aspects of the talk will most interest *SlavFile* readers, this review will focus on Koralova's examples of words and phrases insufficiently covered by dictionaries and her suggested translations and will not get into which specific dictionaries were cited in each case. A list of the dictionaries she used in researching the treatment of these words and expressions can be found at the end of this review.

On the level of individual words, the presentation divided failures by dictionaries to capture important elements of meaning into seven categories:

a. Differences in the applicability of words and the scope of their meanings

Here, Koralova offered several examples, including семья/family. None of the dictionaries she examined would have armed language learners or translators with the information that Russians, upon marrying, are congratulated with “the creation of a new/young family” (“создание молодой семьи”), whereas in general usage within the Anglophone world, a family is not a family until it includes children.

Another example was the patch of not entirely overlapping semantic ground covered by brunette-brunet/брюнетка-брюнет, which, upon close examination, sets off a false cognate alarm (or not, depending on which dictionary you consult). Some bilingual dictionaries seemed to imply that, in English, only a woman could be a brunette (or brunet), while others disagreed, including on whether or not a person would need to have dark eyes and a dark complexion to be considered brunette. An interesting tidbit the speaker offered was the suggestion that a “жгучая брюнетка” in English would be “a woman with jet-black hair.” Oh, the subtleties of language!

One last example from this category is “funny” versus “смешной.” Both the Russian and English words can have a negative connotation, but whereas “смешной” is likely to be either amusing or ridiculous, funny is usually either amusing or odd. As the speaker remarked, there's a reason we English speakers often ask one another: “Do you mean funny ha-ha or funny peculiar?”

b. Differences in intensity of meaning

Here, the speaker lamented the lack of guidance dictionaries offer in navigating the subtle differences between words such as “stupid” and “silly.” Koralova commented that Smirnitsky, for example, provides the words “foolish, stupid, silly” as translations of “глупый” without any explanations. Non-native speakers and translators alike could easily get themselves in hot water if they are not aware of differences in the intensity of these words. Saying to someone “you are funny may well be a compliment, whereas the literal Russian translation (“ты смешная”) is likely to sound offensive. The best equivalents might be “ты остроумная” or “с тобой весело.”

c. Insufficiency of definitions or equivalents

Among the examples offered of insufficient elucidation of expressions was the negative imperative of “стесняться”: “Не стесняйтесь, звоните мне в любое время!” Among the equivalents dictionaries offered were “don’t be shy/coy” and “make *himself* at home” (an obvious misprint), whereas “feel free” would be much likelier to be used in English.

Koralova also included the Russian word “морда,” or “мордочка” under this category. Thankfully, a misguided Russian speaker relying on dictionaries would be unlikely to insult American dogs and cats by referring to their faces as “muzzles” or “snouts,” but they could very well be in danger of insulting their owners! Russians almost never use “лицо” for an animal unless they are facetiously anthropomorphizing their pet.

d. Inaccuracies of definitions

Here again, the speaker turned to the world of pets, pointing out that, whatever bilingual dictionaries might tell us, “кошатники” and “кошатницы” or “собачники” and “собачницы” do not necessarily own cats or dogs, however they are certainly fond of them. “Cat person” or “dog person” are excellent translations.

e. A missing meaning of the word

Dictionaries, understandably, cannot cover every conceivable meaning of common words that are used in uncommon ways in idioms. An example of this offered by the speaker was the meaning of the word “идти” or its form “иди,” as in “Иди знай, что он придёт так поздно” (“How could I know he would be so late?” or “There was no way of knowing he would be so late”). Neither Smirnitsky nor Yermolovich warn that this usage has nothing to do with the primary movement-related meaning of “идти.” An audience member offered “go figure” as a nice equivalent for some contexts that also use a verb of motion in an

“immobile” way. Come to think of it (an expression that also uses a motion verb), the English “go” is generally much more prone to such uses than идти (when we tell someone to “go ahead,” we’re often giving them permission to do something that does not necessarily involve even the tiniest bit of travel).

Another example of a meaning missing from the dictionaries consulted is the English word “please,” when used as a sarcastic exclamation (often accompanied by eye rolling). “Я вас умоляю!” was suggested as a suitable translation in many contexts, if said in a clearly ironic tone.

f. Complete omissions

Sometimes words that are not rare, archaic, or neologisms are simply not included in dictionaries. One example is “micromanagement.” Koralova suggested that “взедливый” would work to convey the meaning in many contexts, and a descriptive example such as “начальник, старающийся контролировать каждый шаг работы” could give a good idea of how the term is used.

g. Cultural discrepancies

This category led to a discussion of different opinions across cultures about hair that is, in Koralova’s discussion, “fuzzy,” but that I think most Americans would call “frizzy” (the Oxford Dictionary does offer an example of “fuzzy” used for hair, so that may be a primarily British usage). The point the speaker was making was that the words her sample of dictionaries offered for “fuzzy” as it relates to hair was “пушистый” and “курчавый,” both of which have positive connotations in Russian, whereas “fuzziness” (and “frizziness”) are generally considered undesirable in hair. She admitted that this was indeed a tricky problem for lexicographers, commenting, “No additional translations that are less favorable like ‘непослушные волосы’ would work since the assessment remains positive, even though to a lesser degree. Other definitions such as ‘вздохмаченные’ or ‘лохматые’ will simply be incorrect.”

Having dealt with dictionaries’ shortcomings on the lexical level, Koralova moved on to problems at the level of collocations and idioms. Making it clear that she was not terribly concerned in this context with whether or not a “prefabricated chunk” of language was a collocation or an idiom, she expressed her approval of the fact that the authors of the two dictionaries in her sample that focus on such “chunks” (Kunin and Lubensky) had also decided not to limit their references to pure idioms. Still, many common phrases have yet to find their place in Russian<>English idioms dictionaries. See page 14 for

a list of discussed omitted collocations and proposed translations.

The presentation's final portion was devoted to dictionaries' "grammar deficiencies": their failure to register grammatical features that "help produce a grammatically correct and coherent utterance." The speaker offered several examples of such shortcomings identified in her sample dictionaries.

First, she pointed out their failures to include such compound connecting phrases as "that said," "with that said," and "all that said" (suggesting the translations: "при этом," or "при всём при том").

Second, she addressed the different structural patterns in English and Russian involved in phrases built around "from ... to" (where the "to" is used multiple times, which isn't possible in Russian) and "от ... до" or "начиная ... и кончая" – something translators deal with every day. Among her examples and proposed solutions (not found in any of the dictionaries) was the following:

"Graduate schools offer various kinds of degrees, ranging from psychology, to medicine, to art."

"Аспирантура предлагает специализацию в самых различных областях – это может быть и психология, и медицина, и искусство, и прочие дисциплины".

Third, under this category, the speaker brought up a difference between Russian and English I, personally, had never focused on: the placement of personal pronouns within a sentence. As she pointed out, if the following sentence maintained the same pronoun-proper noun structure (he...Putin) when translated into Russian, the dictates of Russian grammar would require that the "he" in the sentence's first clause be someone other than Putin:

"Before he hopped on a plane to China on Monday, Russian Commander-in-Chief Vladimir Putin met

members of his Security Council in Sochi and ordered the withdrawal of the Russian army from Ukraine's border."

The personal pronoun when used first, introduces another "actor." For example in the sentence "Когда она вошла в комнату, мама начала готовить обед," "она" and "мама" are two different people, whereas in English this formula could be used to refer to a single person.

The simplest solution would be to just reverse the order and identify the subject's sentence first by name and second by pronoun.

Next, Koralova pointed out that dictionaries lack sufficient usage explanations and examples to help native Russian speakers navigate the tricky waters of the relative pronouns "who," "which," and "that" as translations of который, leading to such mistakes as "Cities who," "Magazines who," etc.

Lastly, the speaker brought up the use of singular "they" or "their," a topic more thoroughly covered in another presentation made in Miami, "Should Grammatical Gender Be Controversial," reviewed on page 9 of our [Winter issue](#).

I am certainly one of the translators our speaker was referring to at the beginning of her talk who dreams of having "one, exhaustive, reliable bilingual dictionary." By itemizing some of the ways in which dictionaries fall short, she in a way made this dream sound a bit more attainable. But one thing is clear: you cannot learn to speak or translate a language solely with dictionaries – or textbooks, or even classes. You have to immerse yourself in it – its art and literature, news reports, jokes, films, blogs, and the conversations of ordinary native speakers from a variety of population segments. Only then will you be relatively safe from the omissions by the excellent Russian<>English dictionaries examined in this talk.

Dictionaries Used in Anastasia Koralova's Study

1. Новый большой англо-русский словарь (3-х томный), под руководством Э. М. Медниковой, Ю. Д. Апресяна, 1994 [*New English-Russian Dictionary* (3-volume), compiled under the supervision of E. M. Mednikova and Yu. D. Апресян]
2. Русско-английский словарь, под руководством А. И. Смирницкого, 1989 [*Russian-English Dictionary*, compiled under the general direction of A. I. Smirnitsky]
3. Новый большой русско-английский словарь, под руководством Д. И. Ермоловича, 2004 [*New Comprehensive Russian-English Dictionary*, compiled under the general direction of D. I. Yermolovich]
4. Англо-русский фразеологический словарь, А. В. Кунин, 1984 [*English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary*, A. V. Kunin]
5. *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms*, Sophia Lubensky, 1995, 2013
6. *English-Russian Russian-English Dictionary*, Kenneth Katzner, 1984, 1994

Collocations Not Covered by Dictionaries

(From Anastasia Koralova's 2015 Presentation)

a. Set expressions that have equivalents not found in dictionaries:

dysfunctional family – неблагополучная семья

senior moments – старческие провалы в памяти, старческая забывчивость

preferential treatment – отдавать предпочтение; делать послабления; пользоваться протекцией;

to be (always) there for somebody – быть всегда рядом; быть надёжной опорой

game-changer – это меняет дело

the ultimate sacrifice – смерть; жертвовать жизнью

at the end of the day – в конечном счёте; в конце концов

мягкое место – *euphemism* for buttocks, behind

неровно дышать – to have a crush on, to be partial to smb.

инициатива наказуема – (*jokingly*) don't/it's better not to stick out your neck

Мне что, больше всех надо? – *an ironic way of saying that you are not eager at all to do smth.*

Зла не хватает – [it] makes one furious/mad/I am angry as hell

Как у (тебя, него...) только ума хватило.... – How could you be so unthoughtful!/foolish

Feel better! – поправляйтесь/выздоровливайте!

to name but a few – и это далеко не всё

dirty blond – тёмная блондинка

b. Set expressions of the lacuna-type (coinages present in one language but not the other):

wardrobe malfunction – неполадки с одеждой (*или конкретизация*: порвалось платье, сломалась молния, разошёлся шов и т. д.)

quality time – время, дающее вам максимум удовлетворения; ценное/качественное время; время, проведённое в радость; ценные часы/дни (которые ценишь больше всего)

sleeping habits – (личный режим) сна, часы сна; то, как человек привык спать – когда ложиться и когда вставать

a success story – история чьего-то успеха, которая может служить примером; история о том, как можно добиться успеха

to feel good about oneself – иметь высокую самооценку; быть довольным собой

c. Idioms

дурная трава в рост идёт – ill weeds grow fast

где сядешь, там и встанешь/слезешь – don't expect anything to be done

на тебе Боже, что мне негоже – either ironic or humorous way of saying that you are giving away a useless thing

маленькие детки – маленькие бедки – the older your children, the bigger your problems

Сорок пять – баба ягодка опять – the second bloom that comes to women later in life; blooming into womanhood

смех без причины – признак дурачины – laughter without reason is a sign of foolishness; a fool laughs at anything

perfect storm – стечение всех неблагоприятных обстоятельств

bad hair day – 1) дурное стечение обстоятельств; одно к одному;
2) день, когда не удаётся хорошо уложить волосы (lit.)

Idiom Translation for Slavic Savants

Presented by Svetlana Beloshapkina and Lydia Stone

Reviewed by Elena Sheverdinova



If you are a true word-lover, especially of Russian and English words, you would have immensely enjoyed the presentation of **Idioms for Slavic Savants** by Lydia and Svetlana on the afternoon of Saturday, November 7, 2015, at the ATA Conference in Miami.

And if you did not have a chance to come to the conference this time, here is a brief review of the translation fun and labor our colleagues generously shared with the audience.

The idioms they discussed included not just phraseological units but single words used idiomatically, proverbs and the like, and usages in all registers including slang.

To put the audience in the mood they started with some examples of proverb and idiom translation into rhyme (following the suggestion of a notable Russian idiom translation expert) and very modern language. This demonstration was accompanied by the warning that such playful translations would not be appropriate to all target language contexts.

Original in English: “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

Rendition in rhyme in Russian: “Коль нравится

тебе есть суп куриный, все яйца не клади в одну корзину.”

It was pointed out that sometimes proverbs do not have to be translated as proverbs; choosing an idiom that is closer to the original may serve better the purpose of delivering the same “message” and tone:

Original in Russian: “Не боги горшки обжигают.”

Modern English idiom closer to the original in contextual meaning: “It’s not rocket science.”

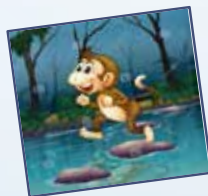
The handouts included more interesting examples of both techniques. My personal favorites were “Дуракам закон не писан” with its rhymed English rendition “For normal men the world has rules, but they do not apply to fools,” and then, the modern English equivalents of the following Russian proverbs: “Притча во языцех/It has gone viral,” and “Язык мой – враг мой!/Me and my big mouth!”

The presenters gave significant attention to HOW NOT TO TRANSLATE IDIOMS, keeping in mind Sophia Lubensky’s golden rule: “If it doesn’t make sense in context, it is wrong” (which definitely applies to anything we attempt to translate, not only idioms). Wild guesses and verbatim translations yield such nonsense as “stretched the legs” for “протянул ноги”, which, in fact, needs to be translated as “someone died.” It was mentioned that not everything found in online Internet dictionaries, especially crowd-sourced ones, can be relied on. In this case, “trust but verify” should be the translator’s motto.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FIND A BILINGUALLY OPPOSITE PARTNER TO COLLABORATE WITH

Не имей друга потатчика, а имей друга поперечника.



2. DON'T TRY TO TRANSLATE AN IDIOM WITHOUT FULLY UNDERSTANDING ALL RELEVANT ASPECTS.

Не зная броду, не суйся в воду.

3. HOW AN IDIOM IS TRANSLATED MAY DEPEND ON THE TYPE AND PURPOSE OF THE TARGET TEXT.

По одежке протягивай ножки.



Another piece of sound advice was to avoid assuming that idioms in two languages, which appear virtually identical, literally convey the same meaning. The English “misery loves company” is an interesting example. This expression is meant to point to the tendency of some miserable people to try to convince others around them to be miserable too, or at least to seek other sufferers to commiserate with. Despite the seeming similarity to the Russian “Беда в одиночку не ходит” [Misfortunes/miseries do not come by themselves], this is a mistranslation. In addition, very close idioms may bear rather different connotations in terms of negativity or positivity. For example, “войти в [привычную] колею,” which does not reflect the adverse flavor of the English idiom, “to get into a rut.” In my humble opinion, “погрязнуть в рутине” would be the proper choice for that idiom in Russian, and “to get back into the groove,” should be used for “войти в [привычную] колею.”

Quoting eminent authorities among translators and interpreters, such as Lubensky and Sergey Chernov, the speakers shared their belief that it makes perfect sense to translate conservatively, making sure, first and foremost, that you get the meaning right. People use idioms in order to communicate all the time, but the meaning is far more important than any playful intent harbored by the individual who opted to use the idiom. The idea was also expressed that it is perfectly acceptable to adjust the wording of idioms somewhat to fit the context when we translate them.

After presenting the audience with the definitions of idioms by dictionary authors Sophie Lubensky and Adam Makkai, the speakers offered their own operational definition for translators, which is worth mentioning here: “A phrase or word easily and completely understood, including its connotations, by native speakers/readers of the source language, which, when translated literally, is misunderstood by most native speakers of the target language or at least recognized as strikingly abnormal, and which is not found in a standard bi-lingual dictionary.”

Classifications of idioms from the point of view of language practitioners, or as you find them in dictionaries, was succinct and supported by bilingual examples. Five groups were identified:

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



Svetlana and Lydia consider a point made by an audience member. PHOTO: Fred Grasso

Out of all the practical recommendations given to translators on how to work with idioms, I would definitely add these to the translator’s treasure box:

- Find a bilingual native speaker of the other language to collaborate with.
- Don’t try to translate an idiom without fully understanding all relevant aspects, including connotation and tone.
- Let the type and purpose of the target text guide you when translating idioms.
- Internet research does not always replace reputable dictionaries, but it can be fast and useful, probably more so with regard to very recently coined idioms.

Lydia and Svetlana also provided examples of types of English idioms found in the press that do not fit easily into traditional classifications. A list of the latter was included in the handouts.

Recommendations for resources for idiom translations can be found on [HTTP://goo.gl/PrwKf7](http://goo.gl/PrwKf7)

For copies of handouts, you are invited to contact:

Lydia Razran Stone, lydiastone@verizon.net

Svetlana Beloshapkina,
svetlana@beloshapkina.com

The wondrous world of idioms awaits!

Seek and ye shall find/Кто ищет, тот всегда найдет!

Elena Sheverdinova is a Russian Certified Court Interpreter and a co-owner of PRIZMA Language Services, Inc., based in Florida. Her academic and professional background originates from the former Soviet Union and continues to advance in the USA. Conference interpreting and translation of creative writing pieces are among her favorite T&I challenges. Go to www.elenasheverdinova.com to learn more.

AND YOU THOUGHT ENGLISH ARTICLES AND DEMONSTRATIVES WERE DIFFICULT

Presented by Emilia Balke

Reviewed by Paul Makinen, Editor for South Slavic Languages

For a variety of reasons, I didn't attend last year's conference, so this review was based on an audio recording and a copy of the PowerPoint slides. However, as a translator of several Slavic languages into English, I found this session useful, and it provided a complete description of an area whose intricate details remain fairly obscure, especially for native speakers of English.

DEMONSTRATIVES

English and Bulgarian have similar sets of demonstratives, but with some differences: The five main categories are as follows (copied from the presentation):

1. Demonstratives for proximity & distance

2. Demonstratives that indicate characteristics, distance & difference
3. Demonstratives that indicate size & quantity
4. Negative demonstratives
5. Demonstratives with remnants of case forms (found in archaic texts).

Emilia continued with examples in each category, with appropriate translation hints, many of which translators of other Slavic languages will definitely be familiar with, but with many details peculiar to Bulgarian. For example:

	Bulgarian	English
Size	толкав (толчав) толкава (толчава) толкаво (толчаво) толкави (толчави)	this big
Quantity	толкова (толкоз)	this much, so much
Examples:	<i>Не мога да повярвам, че толкова е пораснала.</i> <i>Анка донесе толчав самун хляб.</i>	<i>I can't believe that she has grown so much.</i> <i>Anka brought a loaf of bread (that was) this big.</i>

Slavic Certification Update:

Ukrainian and Polish into English Up and Running in 2016

After many months of hard work by two dedicated teams, Ukrainian>English and Polish>English have now been added to ATA's certification program. This is the first time that Ukrainian>English has been available through ATA's program. Polish>English is being reinstated after a hiatus of several years, with a new team of graders in place.

Practice tests are available from ATA headquarters,
and these language pairs can be requested for all 2016 sittings.

ARTICLES

Bulgarian is the only Slavic language that uses definite articles; unlike English, Bulgarian articles are enclitic suffixes that attach themselves to nouns and adjectives. So far, so good, *всё ясно*.

But then things get complicated. Emilia went on to explain that Bulgarian article usage is quite different from that in English. The categories for use are as follows:

1. Nouns identifiable to the listener

Emilia explained that this category is much broader than in English

2. General statements

Note that this is very different from English practice, which is generally to **omit** the article when making general statements.

3. Use of definite article to express a total of something

4. Use of definite article with names of kinship

5. Use of definite article with diminutive forms, in baby talk and in endearments

6. Use of definite article with diminutive proper names to convey the person's young age, love, closeness or a sense of sympathy

The last use is perhaps the most surprising to speakers of English.

Искаш ли чайче, пиленцето ми?
Would you like some tea, sweetheart?

Съкровището на мама.
Mommy's treasure.

Ние със Светлето ще ходим на кино.
Svetla [little Svetla or my dear Svetla] and I are going to go to the movies.

Много му беше трудно, горкият/ горкичкия.
It was very hard for him, poor fellow.

REFERENCES

Emilia also provided several references for further information, including a Bulgarian grammar for English speakers:

Pashov, Petar (2004). *Bulgarian Grammar*

Antova, Boichinova, Benatova (1991). *A Short Grammar of Bulgarian for English Speaking Learners*

Ronelle, Alexander with the help of Olga Mladenova (2000). *Intensive Bulgarian, Part 2*

Paul Makinen is *SlavFile*'s editor for South Slavic languages. Paul is a founding member of SLD and is certified for Russian to English translation. He also works into English from Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian and Ukrainian and edits the work of other translators.

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SlavFile Wish List: Wanted

SLAVFILE INDEXER(S)

Expert Slavic translator or translators to **create an author and key word index** of the 17 years of *SlavFile* archived on our website. Indexing experience not required. Not a boring article in the bunch—guaranteed. Volunteer(s) will be acknowledged by a position on the Leadership Council (**think of your resumé**) and **up to 6 points of Continuing Education Credit** (for 12 hours of work in a 3 year reporting period) toward maintaining certification.
Contact Galina galina.raff@gmail.com.

CONFERENCE PHOTOGRAPHER(S)

SLD member(s) with interest in photography planning to attend the next conference, to take pictures of the SLD scene. **A great way to be in the thick of things** and meet our illustrious speakers and SLD movers and shakers.
Contact Galina galina.raff@gmail.com.

We Welcome Unsolicited Contributions

We are especially eager
to have more material
devoted to translation tools
and Slavic languages
other than Russian.

SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone

First, I am tired of seeing the photograph of me that has accompanied this column for a number of years. I do not have anything to replace it that I want to see repeatedly. I have decided to be up to date and instead opt for an avatar. Some time ago I acquired two refrigerator magnets—Chekhov and Tolstoy—and immediately displayed them on their intended surface. Recently we were travelling in Southern Chile and I came across another refrigerator magnet—this time a woman with black eyes, skinny arms and wispy white hair (sound familiar?). I did not hesitate a second to buy her—as I knew there was an empty place in my disastrously cluttered house waiting for her—right between Lev Nikolayevich and Anton Pavlovich. Some people, they say, wear their hearts on their sleeves, I guess I wear my literary sensibility on my refrigerator. Ignore the purple wool in her hands—knitting is huge in Southern Chile. In spite of being a bona fide grandmother, my skill with knitting needles is as woefully deficient as it is with such new-fangled devices as smartphones.

Speaking of LNT, I have not had anything to add to my “Russian literature as portrayed in the funnies” collection recently. I guess, even as a maligned stereotype, it is fading from popular consciousness. However the “Zits” comic strip recently featured an unmistakable rendering of a miniature enraged Tolstoy assaulting the derriere of and insulting (in Cyrillic) Jeremy, a teenage character. Jeremy,

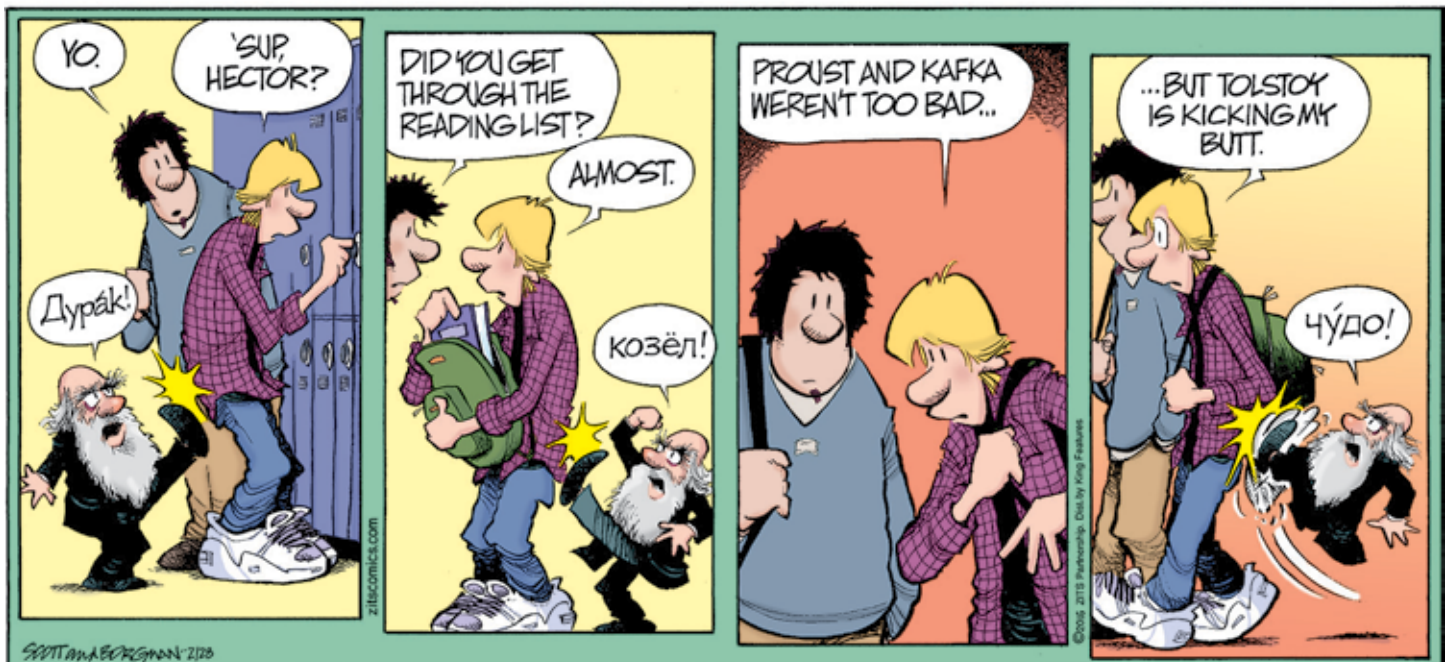
a typical teenager, and his friend are discussing their high school reading list. The last two panels have the boy announcing “Proust and Kafka weren’t too bad, but Tolstoy is kicking my butt.” Well, I acknowledge that length is important to a boy with a reading assignment and *Metamorphosis* or even *The Trial* are vastly shorter than *War and Peace*. However, the same cannot be said of *Remembrance of Things Past*. And, IMHO, compared to Proust, the style and interest of *War and Peace* (especially if you skip the pontification, as I did when I was Jeremy’s age) are comparable to that of *Harry Potter*.

With regard to the question of what sort of reading should be required of high school students, last night I found a crossword puzzle on the *New York Times* web site that purported to use a number of words that the College Board Exam has now eliminated from its verbal section. The puzzle was easy, but I was appalled by what this prominent educational organization has deemed obscure and outdated. It is true that among the 35 words marked as having been banned from the exam, there were two I could not come up with from the definitions: *serra* (a swordfish’s sword), and *ceil*



ZITS

BY JERRY SCOTT AND JIM BORGMAN



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(to cover, as the upper surface of a room). However, the rest were words like *glib*, *mores*, *lank*, *gape*, *eaglet*, and *alms*. I would not argue that not recognizing at least some or even any of these words should disqualify a student from attending any post-high-school educational institution. But the SAT, if it can be said to do anything at all, is also used in distinguishing those students verbally prepared to attend the more selective colleges and universities. And don't some of these institutions teach and even (gasp!) require courses where the classics of English and translated literature are taught and the assumption made that students can mainly read them without constant recourse to dictionaries? (Even if Jeremy's precise assignment is apocryphal.) And it is my experience, to use another archaic term, that such classics are *chock-full* of words just as obscure and archaic as *gape* and *eaglet*.

I have been reading my local newspaper, *The Washington Post*, with more attention than usual, searching for idiomatic usages likely to stump translators into Russian or other languages. Yesterday, I discovered instead what appears, to me and the three Russonate experts I consulted, to be a misleading mistranslation from Russian. In this article, the *Post* reporter describes shadowing a woman officially surveying approval of Putin for a state-owned public opinion organization in one of those enormous apartment houses. In one paragraph, a man, who previously acknowledged being pro-Putin was quoted (or really translated) as saying, "How does he sleep? He skis. He goes to factory openings to congratulate workers. He promises them support. He is in good health." I think it is quite clear from context and the man's previous statement of support that what he meant, and probably even what he said, was "How does he find any time to sleep?" What he is quoted as saying in English usually means "How can he sleep with such terrible things on his conscience?" I am told by my experts (names available on request) that this also is what would be meant by the literal Russian equivalent. Really, people have been exiled for implying far less negative things about their country's leader.

The next two examples were already pointed out or at least referred to on the Yahoo Russian Translators Group (open to everyone, contact [Nora Favorov norafavorov@gmail.com](mailto:norafavorov@gmail.com) to join) but are worth repeating here. Both involve difficulties in accurately translating English idioms used by political or diplomatic figures into Russian.

At one point before he withdrew from his campaign, Dr. Ben Carson was asked how he would deal with possible aggression by Russia and replied, "Putin

is a one-horse country — oil and energy." English speakers found this mystifying, although it was clear that he meant to dismiss the possibility of Russia representing a real threat. The idiom *one horse town* comes from a 19th century description of a very small and probably impoverished town. I myself have never heard it applied to anything other than a town or, with some exaggeration, a not very exciting city. Even taking into account the possibly diminished status of Russia as a world power compared to the time of the cold war—this is a crazy thing to say or imply, completely aside from the inanity of calling Putin a country.

Surely this was a relevant comment for the Russian press to report. Curious to know how it was translated, I asked about it on the Yahoo Russian Translators group. Marina Aronovich, Shelley Fairweather-Vega and Nina Chordas came to the rescue virtually immediately. I learned that *gazeta.ru* had translated the phrase as "страной с одной лошадиной силой." Although the original idiom has nothing to do with horsepower, this seems a forgivable rendition especially in light of the reference to energy. Another translation, "Путин — страна одной лошади," was more literal, but who knows what a Russian speaker would make of this assertion?

Shelley suggested, I am sure correctly, that in the stress of the moment, Carson, who recently talked about "the fruit salad of their lives," had gotten his metaphors or idioms confused and meant to say that Putin is a "one-trick pony," an idiom implying that someone is only good at one thing, or here has only one source of power. What is a translator to do when a speaker mistakes the idiom he is trying to use? I cannot remember a translation issue like this ever being discussed or even mentioned, but indeed the current campaign has been atypical in many respects...

Another fraught idiom mistranslation pertaining to US-RF relations was reported in *vedomosti.ru* and highlighted on the Yahoo group by *SlavFile* editor Galina Raff. On February 27, Mark Toner, a U.S. State Department official, speaking about the Syrian ceasefire, said "I don't know how to put it any better than saying: 'It's put up or shut up time.'" Now put up or shut up is not a particularly polite way to phrase things, but it probably squeaks by as not quite offensive when it is used not as an imperative addressed to a person but to describe a situation. And Toner did immediately elaborate by saying: "It is time for them to show through action rather than words that they are serious about what they profess to be serious about, which is a ceasefire" — a much less idiomatic but more polite formulation of the same point.

Does a rude or offensive phrase lose its inappropriateness when embedded in an idiom? Well, maybe, but this transformation may be lost in translation and one would think that diplomats would be trained to phrase matters so as to avoid this kind of thing. If there were repercussions for Toner, they were not reported. (As far as I know, the message I got on my computer “Toner out,” had nothing to do with this case.) At any rate, Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the RF Foreign Ministry reacted angrily, saying “*Mark had better order his own colleagues to shut up, if such an idiomatic style of communication is common among American diplomats*” (“Заткнуться – это Вы, Марк, коллегам своим приказывайте, если такой идиоматический стиль общения распространен среди американских дипломатов”).

It is difficult to know if she was giving voice to the official Russian response, or whether cooler heads and/or more idiomatically sophisticated translation prevailed, since Zakharova chose to respond to Toner on Facebook.

I have come across an equally shocking misstatement in the US news that cannot be laid at the door of translators. A lightweight article about elderly socialite Gloria Vanderbilt, in the *Washington Post*, ends with: “Willa Cather [a quintessentially American Novelist, 1873-1947] said, ‘The heart of another is a dark forest.’” Well, damn it all! Willa Cather did not say it first, even if she changed “soul” in the original Russian to the more English sounding “heart.” I in no way wish to imply that Cather violated any copyright laws by giving this quotation plus additional words of her own composition to one of her characters. However, I am outraged at several quotation sites found on the web attributing this true pearl of wisdom solely to Ms. Cather and never mentioning its previous venerable existence as a Russian proverb.

Finally, as a follow up to last issue’s rhymed translation of Russian proverbs, here are a few modern English translations of these time-honored words of wisdom.

Аппетит проходит во время еды	Try it; you’ll like it
Бог вымочит, бог и высушит	Sometimes you’re the statue, sometimes the pigeon
Был конь, да изъездился	The old gray mare, she ain’t what she used to be
В ногах правды нет	Take a load off
Волков бояться, в лес не ходить	If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen
Вот бог, вот и порог	Here’s your hat, what’s your hurry?
Где прибыток, там и убыток	Easy come, easy go
Гладко было на бумаге, но забыли про овраги	Well, it looked good on paper
Два медведя в одной берлоге не живут	This town ain’t big enough for the two of us
Деньга деньгу наживает	Them that has gets
Держи карман шире	In your dreams
Дитя не плачет, мать не разумеет	The squeaky wheel gets the grease
Ешь пирог с грибами, а язык держи за зубами	A closed mouth gathers no flies
Казенного козла хоть за хвост подержать – можно шубу сшить	No one who feeds at the public trough goes hungry
Куда иголка, туда и нитка	(They’re) joined at the hip
На брюхе шелк, в брюхе шелк.	All hat and no cattle
Назвался груздём – полезай в кузов	If you talk the talk, you have to walk the walk ...with thanks to Svetlana Beloshapkina
Наше дело маленькое	(Don’t blame/ask me) I just work here
От добра добра не ищут	If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it
Отольются кошке мышкины слезки	What goes around, comes around
Попал в стаю, лай не лай, а хвостом виляй	(You gotta) go along to get along
Попался который кусался	He got his
Попытка не пытка	Can’t blame a person for trying
Свои собаки грызутся, чужая не суйся	Don’t get between the bark and the tree
Своя ноша не тянет	He ain’t heavy; he’s my brother
С сильными не борись, с богатыми не судись	You can’t fight city hall
С соседями дружи, а тын городи	Good fences make good neighbors
Хвастать – не косить, спина не болит	He talks a good game
Худая трава из поля вон	Throw dem bums out

Tackling the ATA Russian>English Certification Exam

John Riedl, ATA Certification Grader

(with other members of the Russian>English certification group: Larry Bogoslaw, Nora Favorov, and Lydia Stone)



As graders for one of ATA's certification exams, we've certainly heard it all (at least, we feel like we have!). Certification can definitely be a hot topic at the conference, and some observations from past, present, and future candidates can be very interesting, if not always publishable. One of the most common is perhaps the most telling. "There is no way you can

evaluate my abilities as a medical (technical, legal, literary) translator without a subject-specific exam." The honest answer is...You're right. We can't. All we can do is present candidates with representative translation challenges and evaluate how well they've handled them. We're writing this article because, although there is no magic formula for passing the exam, there are a few common errors and pitfalls that account for a large number of exam failures. Avoid these pitfalls, and you will greatly improve your chance of passing. The first part of this article will provide a brief introduction to the exam, the second will discuss the most common stumbling blocks, and the third will present some best practices with respect to exam preparation. Good luck, and we look forward to grading your exams.

About the Exam

Exam Overview

The ATA Russian>English certification exam currently consists of three approximately 225-word Russian passages (one general passage and two subject-specific passages) chosen to test the following skills: source-language comprehension, target-language proficiency, and transfer skills. Candidates have three hours to translate both the general passage (which is required) and one of the two subject-specific passages (candidate's choice).

Candidates should bear in mind that the Certification Committee periodically refines ATA's examination process. See the ATA website for a more complete description of the current exam structure. While most candidates who sit for the exam in 2016 will write them by hand, some sittings will offer a computerized option where candidates work on their own laptop and have limited Internet access. Keep this in mind when reference is made below to the "exam conditions."

Each certification exam is graded independently by two graders who compare their results and discuss key parts of the exam. In the rare event that there are major disagreements, the graders try to come to a consensus. If they still cannot agree, a third grader is consulted. In addition, it is not uncommon for all four Russian>English graders to comment on translations that prove particularly challenging to grade. Acceptable translations and representative translation errors are then documented to facilitate consistent grading from exam to exam.

Standards

Without a doubt, exam conditions influence the low pass rates for ATA's certification exams (the overall pass rate for all language pairs is below 20%, although there have been some recent years when the R>E rate was considerably higher). There is, however, another "elephant in the room." ATA's certification standards, especially with respect to accuracy and English proficiency, are much higher than those of some translation buyers, especially in the global marketplace. While it is not within the scope of this article to defend or debate these standards, we can say that the people who pass an ATA certification exam have demonstrated the translation and source- and target-language skills required to produce high-quality translations that meet the standards of our most demanding clients. There is a difference between translations that can be understood with effort and translations that are clear, consistent, and of publishable stylistic quality. (See, for example, "[Translation Getting it Right](#)" for a description of the difference between "for-information" and "for-publication" translations.)

Requirements for Good Writing in the Target Language

[ATA's certification exam overview](#) gives the following criteria for good writing in the target language:

- *The target text flows smoothly and does not contain awkward expressions that mark it distinctly as a translation.*
- *There are few or no mechanical errors (relating to grammar, usage, spelling, or punctuation).*

As professional linguists, we all know that language is extremely subjective, and what sounds stylistically appealing to one reader may sound strange or "off" to another. Over the decades that the ATA certification

program has existed, tremendous effort has been put into eliminating this subjectivity and making the grading process more objective. For this reason, graders must evaluate errors from the perspective of the damage that they do to the ultimate usefulness of the translation. A missing “the” whose absence is jarring to the target reader but does not change the overall meaning of a phrase will most likely garner 1 or 2 error points (an exam passes if it receives ≤ 17 error points). However, a missing “the” that creates ambiguity or suggests a markedly different meaning from the one intended would be given 4, 8, or even 16 error points—16 if it distorts a central point being made in the text and renders the translation unusable.

A Note on English Proficiency

As the above section suggests, it is difficult, if not impossible, to pass an into-English exam if there are even a moderate number of errors in your written English. Indeed, many exams fail because they do not meet ATA’s standards for English proficiency (see Table 1 for a few typical errors). If English is not your native language or if you’ve spent more time in physics labs than writing labs, we strongly encourage you to request a practice test from the ATA before registering for the actual exam. The practice test is only a fraction of the cost—and, unlike the ATA exam, you will receive a copy of your graded test with all of the error categories and points shown. In addition, it may be beneficial to consult ATA’s [“Into-English Grading Standards.”](#)

Table 1

Original	Correct	Incorrect
В контексте указанных тенденций	In the context of the above-mentioned tendencies	In context of above mentioned tendencies (two instances of an omitted article, 1 error point for each)
Это явление представляет интерес, с одной стороны, как синтез	This phenomenon is of interest, on one hand, as a synthesis	This occurrence presents interest on one hand from synthesis (2 points)

Common Stumbling Blocks

Time Management

As professional translators, we are seldom far from our spellcheckers, electronic dictionaries, and computer browsers. It goes without saying that the exam conditions for the handwritten version, which will be phased out in the near future but is still widely in use, are very different from our normal work environments. It isn’t surprising, therefore, that a fair number of candidates underestimate their translation speed when they cannot use Microsoft Word or other electronic resources. In short, they wind up having no time to revise their translation.

Although many of us translate 400-500 words per hour, translation rates can drop considerably under exam conditions. Consider testing yourself by translating a passage (approximately 225 words in Russian or 250-275 in English) with pencil, paper, and old-school dictionaries. If you are a perfectionist and like to find the perfect translation every time, choose your battles carefully. Identify the key terms of the passage and make sure that these translations are accurate. Next, translate the entire passage and “wordsmith” only as time allows.

Translations that are too Free

ATA’s [“Explanation of Error Categories”](#) offers the following description of “faithfulness” errors:

Faithfulness: (F): A faithfulness error occurs when the target text does not respect the meaning of the source text as much as possible. Candidates are asked to translate the meaning and intent of the source text, not to rewrite it or improve upon it. The grader will carefully compare the translation to the source text. If a “creative” rendition changes the meaning, an error will be marked. If recasting a sentence or paragraph—i.e., altering the order of its major elements—destroys the flow, changes the emphasis, or obscures the author’s intent, an error may be marked.

Every once in a while we receive an exam that reads beautifully and, on the surface, appears sure to pass. The only problem is that the target text merely paraphrases the source text. It conveys the gist of the source without paying attention to subtle shades of meaning. Shades of meaning matter. Candidates, like graders, should constantly ask themselves the following question: “Is that exactly what is meant by the source text?”

Although it is more common to see exams that fail due to excessive literalness (“source language interference”), we do see exams where obviously promising candidates fail because they have taken too many liberties. While clever rewordings that preserve the source-language meaning may earn a quality point, the certification exam is not the time to be overly creative or sacrifice meaning for readability. One passing candidate, for example, was given 1 error point for translating “стремительный рост” as “steady growth,” probably because it is more common in English (стремительный is stronger than steady; “rapid” and “precipitous” were among the translations deemed acceptable).

Another common error found in exams that are too “free” are minor omissions that might be legitimate judgment calls in a real-life translation but should definitely be avoided on the exam. In an example from a few years ago, a candidate just barely passed after being marked off 2 points for failing to translate the italicized phrase in the following sentence: “Трудно сказать, чем бы кончилась битва на Куликовом поле, если *незадолго до сражения* за многодневных переходов от Дона не выросла бы белокаменная крепость на реке Москве и если бы русские не сочли ее залогом своего единства”.

In addition to omissions, candidates sometimes make minor additions to the meaning of a sentence. For example, if the Russian phrase “на удалении от берега” is translated as “a long distance off shore” instead of “at a distance from the shore,” the candidate would be marked off two points for the addition of “long” to the meaning of the sentence. Likewise, if the Russian text says that someone is sad, it would be an error to translate this as “very sad” unless there was

some other textual justification. It is important to reiterate that the ATA certification exam focuses on translation skills. Candidates should not use their subject-matter knowledge to “enhance” or “correct” the source text. In addition, do not try to read the author’s mind. Translate the text as written.

In emphasizing the need for precise adherence, we do not mean to imply that we are looking for dictionary definitions. In fact, most passages require that translators find alternatives to standard dictionary translations. (For example, translations of sentences with the Russian words обеспечение and предполагать almost always have to be paraphrased.) Furthermore, a limited number of quality points are awarded for translations that make troublesome, complex phrases sound like real English.

Translations that are too Literal

The “Explanation of Error Categories” describes literalness errors as follows:

Literalness: (L): A literalness error occurs when a translation that follows the source text word for word results in awkward, unidiomatic, or incorrect renditions.

Overall, graders, at least in our group, see many more literalness errors than faithfulness errors. The best advice for avoiding them is this: Ask yourself, “Is this how a native English speaker would express this?” If the answer is absolutely not, the phrase probably needs to be recast. Literal translations are sometimes clearly understandable, but who would argue against giving Translation B in Table 2 a better score than translation A?

Table 2

Original	Translation A	Translation B
Темпы развития человека совершенно не сравнимы с темпами эволюции в животном мире	The paces of development of the human can absolutely not be compared with the paces of the evolution in the animal world.	The pace of human development is utterly incomparable with the pace of evolution in the animal world.
Возникновение национально-культурных объединений, активное обращение к этническим ценностям обусловлено событиями второй половины 1990-х годов...	The appearance of national-cultural associations and the active appeal to the ethnic values have been conditioned by the events of the second half of the 1990s...	The events of the second half of the 1990s have led to the emergence of ethnic cultural associations and a renewal of interest in ethnic values...

Misunderstanding the Russian Text

Although the exam passages contain constructions and syntax that should be familiar to most Russian>English translators, a surprisingly large number of candidates appear to have difficulty working through the texts. Several aspects of written Russian seem particularly challenging: first, finding the correct antecedent in a long stream of verbal adjectives; second, recognizing and consistently translating terms in a way appropriate to the context; third, differentiating between adjectives, verbal adjectives, and nominalized adjectives; and finally, identifying the subject and object of verbs in highly complex sentences (see Table 3 for examples).

Table 3

Original	Correct	Incorrect
Может показаться, что это противоречит (<i>Passage then talks about how this is not a real contradiction.</i>)	This might seem to contradict	It can be shown that this contradicts (4 point error)
Возникающая вследствие этого безработица	The unemployment resulting from this	The consequences of this unemployment (4 point error)
В признании и исполнении решения может быть отказано	The acceptance and execution of the judgment may be rejected	Something may be denied when acknowledging and implementing the decision (8 point error)

In addition to sentence-level issues, there are a number of passage-level errors that occur because the candidate hasn't grasped the overall meaning and context of the Russian passage. A candidate who understands the gist of a passage is more likely to select appropriate translations for key terms. For example, depending on the context, the Russian word *симптом* can mean "symptom" or "sign" in medical English. If you choose the wrong translation for the context, it may cost you a few error points. Furthermore, fluency in decoding written Russian has a direct impact on translation accuracy. Candidates who have understood the overall meaning and flow of a passage are less likely to lose track of their terms. In a recent practice test, a candidate used a single English word (*control*) to translate every instance of the Russian word *контроль*, even though the context implied at least two distinctive meanings: *oversight* (or *monitoring*) and *control*. Needless to say, the usefulness of the translation was seriously compromised, and the candidate failed.

In short, the exam cannot be passed if the candidate cannot grasp the meaning of Russian passages without constantly referring back to a dictionary. In addition, word-by-word translations are seldom sufficient for certification. If you are someone who relies

on an electronic dictionary for instant translations, practice translating without this "crutch." You may find that your translations are more cohesive and read better in the target language.

Incorrectly Translated Terms

Although time management is critical, candidates should not scrimp when it comes to translating the main terms of a passage. A mistranslated term can affect the entire passage and result in a failure even if the rest of a translation is accurate. We highly recommend that you read through the entire passage first, marking key terms as you go and checking your dictionaries for the best equivalents.

Best Practices

Just as there is more than one correct translation of a given source text, there is more than one way to prepare for the ATA exam. The following is a list of strategies that have worked for people in the past. We invite you to share your own strategies through the SLD blog.

Visit the ATA website and familiarize yourself with the exam and grading criteria

Avoid exam-day surprises. The ATA website contains an excellent overview of exam conditions and grading criteria. Pay particular attention to the “[Explanation of Error Categories](#).” It explains the error categories and gives the candidate an idea of what we are looking for when we grade an exam.

Take the practice test

The practice test is an excellent and cost-effective way to get feedback before taking the full exam. Practice tests consist of retired exam passages and are graded by the same people who grade the real thing. When you get your practice test back, you will see what type of errors you made and can prepare for the exam more effectively. (In the interest of passage security, candidates are not shown their graded certification exam unless they request a review, which costs an additional \$250.00. Exam results are rarely changed as a result of the review process.) Candidates who take the practice test have a better understanding of how the full exam is graded and can better determine whether or not to go forward with the certification process.

Choose a few reliable dictionaries and practice using them

At the ATA Conference, one of the graders was asked which dictionaries to bring to the exam. The answer was, “It depends.” If you can’t translate, no dictionary will help you pass this exam. If you can translate, you may fail the exam if you spend too much time fumbling around with dictionaries. One strategy that has worked in the past is to bring, in addition to a good general Russian-English dictionary, subject-specific dictionaries in each of the key subject areas (for example, some candidates bring legal, scientific, business, and medical dictionaries). Ideally you should also have good monolingual target- and source-language dictionaries. Candidates who take the computerized exam should decide in advance which electronic resources they may need, bearing in mind that some sites (e.g., Google Translate or ProZ) are prohibited.

Translate as many passages as possible under exam conditions

One prominent ATA member passed the Russian-English exam on her first try. Here’s how she did it.

I ordered a practice test to get a feel for the kinds of texts I would see on the exam. After taking the practice test, I searched for similar Russian texts and their English equivalents. I used online sources that have semi-reliable English translations like the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs website and literary translations for which I had both the Russian and English texts (I remember using some of Tatyana Tolstaya’s stories for this). Then I selected a passage of comparable length, took out my pen, paper, and paper dictionaries, set the timer, and got to work. When I finished, I compared my translation to the English translation I had found online or in a book. This gave me a reasonably good idea of the quality of my translation. I think it is really important to practice under exam conditions. You may be a highly experienced translator, but for this exam, you have to translate a certain number of words in a certain amount of time, and I think it makes sense to prepare for this under exam conditions. In other words, just doing your job every day is not enough preparation.

This pretty much sums it up. Just remember to practice under exam conditions (pen, paper, and paper dictionaries, if you are taking the handwritten version) and select passages with long sentences, complicated antecedents, and inverted word order.

Conclusion

There are many myths and legends about the ATA exam. Our goal has been to demystify certification by giving potential candidates a view of the exam from the grader’s perspective. By avoiding the pitfalls and following the best practices, you are not guaranteed to pass, but you will certainly improve your chances. For all those interested in continuing this discussion, especially those who have passed the exam, feel free to comment on the [SLD blog](#). We’d love to hear your ideas and are especially interested in any best practices that we can add to our list.

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