

## INTERVIEW WITH OUR 2019 GREISS SPEAKER: BORIS DRALYUK

Nora Seligman Favorov

We are thrilled that this year's Greiss Lecture will be delivered by Boris Dralyuk, a literary translator, Executive Editor of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and—through his blog and writings in the LARB—what you might describe in Russia as a публицист (of the essayist rather than the false-cognate variety). He earned his doctorate in Slavic Languages and Literatures at UCLA, where he was mentored by our 2002 Greiss speaker, the late Michael Henry Heim. He went on to teach at UCLA, as well as at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, before turning to full-time translation, writing, and editing.

His work has appeared in a long list of top-tier publications, including *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Yorker*, *London Review of Books*, and *The Guardian*. He is the author of *Western Crime Fiction Goes East: The Russian Pinkerton Craze 1907-1934* (Brill, 2012) and translator of several volumes from Russian and Polish, including, most recently, Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* (Pushkin Press, 2015) and *Odessa Stories* (Pushkin Press, 2016), Andrey Kurkov's *The Bickford Fuse* (MacLehose Press, 2016), and Mikhail Zoshchenko's *Sentimental Tales* (Columbia University Press, 2018). He is also the editor of *1917: Stories and Poems from the Russian Revolution* (Pushkin Press, 2016) and co-editor, with Robert Chandler and Irina Mashinski, of *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry* (Penguin Classics, 2015). He received first prize in the 2011 Compass Translation Award competition and, with Irina Mashinski, first prize in the 2012 Joseph Brodsky/Stephen Spender Translation Prize competition.

Dralyuk will be giving two talks at ATA60 in Palm Springs: his Greiss Lecture, "A Guided Journey: The Importance of Mentorship" (Friday, October 25, 11:15) and "It's Got Flavor: Translating Odessa" (Thursday, October 24, 3:30 PM).

Among the many fine things by Boris Dralyuk available on-line, we recommend [his article about Los Angeles's Russian past](#) published in the LARB.



Boris Dralyuk

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*SlavFile* is published four times yearly.

Articles of interest to Slavic translators and interpreters are invited.

Designation of Slavic Languages Division membership on ATA membership application or renewal form provides full membership.

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Submissions become the property of *SlavFile* and are subject to editing.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or of the Division.

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Thanks to Jamie Padula of ATA Headquarters for his advice and help.

NORA FAVOROV acted as the principal editor of this issue of *SlavFile*.

**My internet explorations in preparation for this interview informed me that you were born in Odessa and left when you were 8 years old. Can you tell us a little more about your background and how your family history has influenced your literary interests?**

First, let me thank you, Nora, for taking an interest in my work and for making an internet foray into my checkered past! My family—a very small one—did indeed emigrate when I was eight. This was in April 1991. We were granted refugee status by the US and, with the help of a small loan from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, boarded a Pan Am jet. LA was our final destination. (I often reflect on the fact that both the USSR and Pan Am collapsed shortly after that flight—in the same month... I hope I didn't jinx them, with my Jewish luck.)

I didn't speak a word of English when we landed. Actually, that's not quite true—I had two words: "Hello" and "poppy," the California state flower. Don't ask... The elementary school I attended had been inundated with ex-Soviet pipsqueaks. It was, to say the least, ill prepared to deal with us. There were no Russian speakers on staff, and the best the teachers could do was to pair us up; children who barely spoke English served as bumbling guides and interpreters for those who spoke none at all. It was clear to me that I had to catch up quick, on my own, so I spent my first American summer watching reruns of *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show* on the sturdy old Zenith set we'd found on the sidewalk and dragged into our Hollywood apartment. I entered the fourth grade with a half-Havana, half-Mayberry drawl. (Need I add that I was bullied mercilessly?)

I think this self-motivated plunge into punchline-driven, regionally inflected varieties of midcentury American English left a mark. And this English mishmash melded almost immediately with my undercooked and atrophied Odessan Russian—also punchline-driven and regionally inflected—which I continued to speak at home, with my mother and grandmother... My early encounter with midcentury humor certainly influenced my reading, pushing me into wilder and woollier verbal terrain. Serve me a generous helping of S. J. Perelman, Ring Lardner, and Damon Runyon, and I'm happy. Throw in a little Mark Twain and Charles Portis too.

**You mention in an on-line interview that you are "hopelessly addicted to detective stories." Do you think your Odessa roots—a city with a tradition of veneration for the clever crook—is directly tied to this interest?**

Without a doubt! Even as a little squirt in Odessa, long before I could read Isaac Babel's tales of Jewish moxie on the other side of the law, I lived in awe of the strong personalities that surrounded me, and of the Technicolor terms in which they recounted their own mythic exploits. I heard and learned by heart, without fully understanding, songs about "pulling jobs" with the treacherous Rabinovich, about "poor little Charlie Chaplin" surviving a clash with violent sailors, so as to dine and dash another day... I love a vivid tale of close scrapes, of an underdog trickster snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. But I'm not blind to the dark side of this

mythology. My father wasn't a savory character, a walking cautionary tale... I prefer to listen and to read, keeping my own nose clean. To paraphrase Babel's wise Reb Aryeh Leib, I'll never forget that I've got (or should have) glasses on my nose and autumn in my heart, that I raise hell at my desk and stammer in public.

**A couple of your recent books—Osipov's *Rock, Paper, Scissors, and Other Stories*, Ozerov's *Portraits without Frames*—were produced in collaboration with other translators. How did that work? Did you all critique each other's translations? Did you discuss challenges as you went along?**

An excellent question. The translation of Lev Ozerov's *Portraits without Frames*, a collection of delicate, sensitive, free verse poems that serves as a kind of personal encyclopedia of Soviet culture, grew out of the work Robert Chandler, Irina Mashinski, and I did on *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*. We were joined by Maria Bloshteyn, who would certainly have been a co-editor of the Penguin book, had we connected with her earlier. Our four-way exchange is among the great pleasures of my life; I continue to learn from Robert, Irina, and Maria every day, and my work improves with every suggestion they make. Their brilliance and generosity humbles and astonishes me, and I honestly don't know what I did to deserve such friends, whom I consider family. Initially, we had only planned to translate a handful of Ozerov's portraits, but every time we thought we were done, one of us would spot the glint of treasure in another poem—and we were at it again, exchanging countless drafts, until the name at the bottom of the translation was a mere technicality. It was, sincerely and seamlessly, *our* work.

My collaboration with Alex Fleming and Anne Marie Jackson on Maxim Osipov's *Rock, Paper, Scissors, and Other Stories* was somewhat different, but no less exciting or rewarding. Alex, Anne Marie, and I had not worked together before, but I had long admired their translations of individual stories by Maxim. In fact, I used these translations as tuning forks, adjusting the tone and diction of my own renditions to resonate with, if not to match, theirs. Both Alex and Anne Marie are British, and so, as the volume's editor, I also adjusted their diction ever so slightly, bringing the volume closer to a Mid-Atlantic norm without, I hope, homogenizing the stories. And Maxim, too, read through each story carefully, making sure that his voice was accurately reflected in English, and that the nuances of his fine-grained prose weren't lost. It was a thrill to collaborate with translators as marvelously talented as Alex and Anne Marie, and with an author as perceptive and appreciative as Maxim. In fact, it's almost always a

thrill to collaborate, in ways big and small—and I am especially, unaccountably lucky to share my life with the most brilliant of my collaborators, my fiancée Jennifer Croft, who inspires and enlivens all my writing.

**What inspired you to go into literary translation?**

I first felt an irrepressible urge to translate when I read a poem by Pasternak, at the age of 14. It was his poem dedicated to Akhmatova, which begins:

*“Мне кажется, я подберу слова,  
Похожие на вашу первозданность.  
А ошибусь, — мне это трын-трава,  
Я все равно с ошибкой не расстанусь.”*

I don't know what it was, exactly—partly the music, partly the challenge Pasternak poses to himself... Could I too pick the right words? I've tried and tried to translate that poem, and I still haven't done it to my satisfaction. But the last line of that quatrain has become my motto: “No matter what, I'll never part with error.” It allows me to keep trying...

**On a technical level, how do you approach a literary translation? Do you plow through a text, quickly creating a first draft before editing your translation, or do you take your time with each paragraph from the outset? Do you do a lot of historical and background research in advance or do you look things up as you encounter a name or a term? Also, what resources do you find yourself turning to most often?**

When translating prose, I find it hard to move on from a sentence until I have it right—or what in isolation appears to be right. Once I finish a paragraph, I go back over it, making sure that what appeared to be right earlier still sounds right in the new context. And I do the same after I finish a page, a chapter, etc. It's a slow process of constant refinement, which explains why I usually can't manage more than 500 words of prose a day. And though I do some background research at the outset, I always look things up as I move along. I find it helps to have a concrete goal in mind: it's one thing to brush up on the history of the current conflict in Ukraine, for instance, but another to search for the exact location and regional significance of Zhdanivka in Donetsk Oblast. (I'm currently translating a novel by Andrey Kurkov, titled *Grey Bees*.) That's my approach to prose, but when it comes to poetry, all bets are off. Some poems just pour straight through me—Russian into my eyes, English out of my fingers—while others lodge deep inside, making their way to the surface when they're good and ready. Unpredictable—and I wouldn't want it any other way.





## THE ADMINISTRATORS' COLUMN

*Ekaterina Howard ([ekaterina@atasld.org](mailto:ekaterina@atasld.org))*

*Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya ([eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com](mailto:eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com))*



Dear SLD members,

As many of you are preparing to meet in Palm Springs, I'm getting ready to hand over the SLD administrative to-do lists to the new SLD Administrators, Eugenia and Steven (you'll be able to read their candidate statements on page 5).

It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with many of you on a variety of initiatives to grow and foster our community within ATA.

For me, the greatest value of SLD has been getting to work with so many wonderful people. Thank you to all who contributed, shared their ideas, helped us move forward, and showed up to do the many tasks that SLD volunteers have been performing: everything from helping to produce *SlavFile* to organizing the SLD dinner, and especially to those who have spear-headed new initiatives. Not all of them have worked out as we planned, but some of them went on to flourish.

SLD initiatives that stand out in my mind in the last 4 years include:

- Moving the website to a WordPress template and reviving the SLD Blog, most recently with the [information on different CPD options](#) by Maria Guzenko

- Trying new ways to reach SLD members and stay in touch throughout the year, with Anna Livermore (SLD Facebook group) and Yulia Thornton ([SLD Discussion Forum](#)) taking on dissemination of SLD updates in their groups and posting information of interest on their own
- Perhaps the most thriving of the initiatives—the SLD ATA Examination Preparation Group run by Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya and Maria Guzenko, now supported by Yulia Thornton—helps new members (and not so new ones) prepare cooperatively to take the ATA certification exam
- The most fun (for me, at least)—[the SLD podcast with Veronika Demichelis](#)—allows us to connect with different translators and interpreters, as well as profile SLD presenters in 2018.

I am very sorry I will not be able to attend the conference this year, but I'm sending all who do my best wishes.

Thank you again to all SLD volunteers, Leadership Council members, Administrators and Assistant Administrators past and future! I would encourage every SLD member to consider helping out in some way, to make our division better and more useful for every one of us. Please see the agenda for this year's division meeting (page 6). I encourage all of you going to ATA60 to attend.

## SLD NEWCOMERS LUNCH

Who to lunch with the first full day of the conference? Why, your SLD colleagues, of course! This event gives first-time conference attendees a chance to meet their experienced colleagues, so **all are welcome!** We will dine at the Grand Central Palm Springs – see info below. Meet us in the lobby of the Renaissance Palm Springs Hotel (connected to the convention center) at 12:20 to walk over together (about a 12-minute walk), or just meet us at the restaurant around 12:30. **Reservations required.**

Space is limited; to reserve your spot, please email Jen Guernsey at [jenguernsey@gmail.com](mailto:jenguernsey@gmail.com) by Tuesday, October 22.

Thursday, October 24

12:30 PM

Grand Central Palm Springs

160 La Plaza, Palm Springs, CA

Website: [grandcentralpalmsprings.com](http://grandcentralpalmsprings.com)

# MEET THE NEW SLD ADMINISTRATORS

Below are statements for the SLD candidates selected by the 2019 Nominating Committee. In accordance with ATA procedures, since no alternative candidates were put forward in the 45 days following the announcement, these are our new administrators by acclamation. By the way, *SlavFile*'s editorial staff considers Eugenia and Steve to be superbly qualified for these positions.

## CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

### CANDIDATE FOR ADMINISTRATOR

*Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya*

I am honored to have been nominated for Administrator of ATA's Slavic Languages Division. I have been serving as the Assistant Administrator for two years now, as well as helping run the ATA exam practice group, the division website, and the blog. If elected, I intend to leverage my prior experience in division leadership to further initiatives that connect our members and facilitate knowledge transfer.

Being an SLD member has been a central benefit of my ATA membership, providing a community under the broader ATA umbrella to learn from and call home. My primary goal as administrator would be to promote the various resources that the SLD offers and ensure that they remain relevant to our members. These include the website, *SlavFile*, the podcast, and the blog, as well as the more participatory offerings of the exam practice group, proofreading pool, and listserv.

I started in translation about nine years ago, as a sophomore in college, armed only with native fluency in both Russian and English. Since then, I graduated from Kent State University with an MA in Translation, passed the ATA exam for Russian into English certification, and launched into a full-time freelance career. I now work as a Russian to English translator specializing in legal and financial texts.

I am glad to have this opportunity to continue to serve and promote the SLD!

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya  
[eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com](mailto:eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com)

### CANDIDATE FOR ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

*Steven McGrath*

I am honored to be nominated to serve as assistant administrator of the Slavic Languages Division.

I began accepting freelance translation jobs while I was earning my master's degree at Moscow State University in 2010. When I returned to the United States in 2017, I joined ATA and became certified in the Russian > English language pair later that year. Since then, I have translated three books for publication and have expanded into new areas such as mobile app localization, copywriting and TM building for AI.

As I have seen from the annual ATA conferences and my work for *SlavFile*, the SLD provides an excellent system of collegial support for members. If elected assistant administrator, I will seek to continue this fine tradition while helping the administrator to address issues that affect SLD members. I will set the following goals for myself:

- Support the administrator in coordinating SLD functions and responding to member concerns.
- Encourage dialogue among SLD members to support one another's professional growth and represent the industry.
- Promote engagement among SLD members who work in underrepresented languages.

I am grateful for this opportunity to give back to the SLD, which has done so much for me since I joined

Steven McGrath  
[steven@mcgrathtranslations.com](mailto:steven@mcgrathtranslations.com)

## ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION

Thursday October 24, 2019

Palm Springs Convention Center

Palm Springs, CA

### 1. Call to order

### 2. Accept agenda

### 3. Approve minutes of last year's meeting

### 4. SLD Overview for 2019

The most important objective of our Division is to provide opportunities for professional education and enrichment to Division members.

- Report on sessions at the Annual Conference
- Report on *SlavFile* and blog
- Report on website
- Report on online forum and social media
  - Twitter—discuss shutting down
  - LinkedIn
- Review of SLD Outreach initiative
- Review of SLD Podcast
  - Call for a new volunteer to be in charge of SLD's Podcast
- Review of SLD Proofreading Group
- Review of SLD ATA Certification Exam Prep Group
- Review of subject-matter webinar

### 5. New Business for 2019

- Note that a revised Division Handbook (July 2019) exists to help volunteers
- Call for volunteers
  - New head of the SLD Podcast, SLD outreach, Twitter curator if continuing, webinar manager
- ATA's 61st Annual Conference (Boston, MA October 21-24, 2020)
  - Discuss topics and speakers wanted
  - Ask for Distinguished Speaker recommendations
  - Encourage division members to submit proposal form to make presentations at the next conference (usual online deadline February 1)
- Division plans for coming year (if not covered during report on previous year)

### 6. Announce election results

- Recap on candidates
- Election by acclamation

### 7. Call for feedback and suggestions from the members

### 8. Call for newcomers to introduce themselves

### 9. Adjourn

## Recommended Sessions for ATA60

**SESSION BY SLD MEMBER: HIGHLY RECOMMENDED ESPECIALLY  
FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS****Exploring the English Tense System****Thursday 11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Pasadena****Speaker: Paul B. Gallagher****Topic:** Translation; **Level:** All Levels

**Description:** This will be a greatly expanded and refined version of the seven-minute outline presented as part of the speaker's session on Slavic tenses at ATA59. Based on that framework, we'll cover the natural speaker's selection of past/present/future, simple/perfect, and progressive/nonprogressive forms in American English. The use of modal verbs will also be covered, as will cases where more than one option is available (with different connotations or denotations). Participation from attendees is expected and welcome.

**SLAVIC LANGUAGE SESSIONS****It's Got Flavor: Translating Odessa****Thursday 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. - Mesquite E****Speaker: Boris Dralyuk, 2019 Susana Greiss Lecturer****Topics:** Literary Translation, Slavic Languages; **Level:** All Levels**Presenting Language(s):** English and Russian

**Description:** The speaker will discuss his experience translating the colorful literary treasures of his native Odessa, Ukraine, which include the stories of Isaac Babel, the poems of Eduard Bagritsky, and a whole slew of infectious criminal ballads and tangos. The discussion will include elements of the speaker's biography, as well as his reading and listening preferences. Translating slang, dialects, and idiolects will also be discussed.

**SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION MEETING  
THURSDAY 4:45PM - 5:45PM****Decolonizing Central Asia through Translation****Friday 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. - Mesquite D****Speaker: Shelley Fairweather-Vega****Topics:** Slavic Languages; **Level:** Intermediate**Presenting Language(s):** English and Russian

**Description:** Whether it's Turkestan, Eurasia, or the "post-Soviet space," words matter when we talk about those countries formerly known as the Soviet Republics. That means that how we translate texts from and about those places also matters. This session will explore common but not always obvious pitfalls facing a translator working from Russian when Russian is not the only language in play. From place names to personal names, bureaucracy to burqas, the speaker will examine translation strategies and identify ways in which translators can either combat or reinforce Russian stereotypes about non-Russian people and places using examples from literary and technical translation.

**A Guided Journey: The Importance of Mentorship****Friday 11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. - Mesquite D****Speaker: Boris Dralyuk****Topics:** Literary Translation; Slavic Languages; **Level:** Beginner**Presenting Language(s):** English

**Description:** The speaker will discuss his journey in translation, which began when his family immigrated to the U.S. from the Soviet Union in 1991. He was lucky enough to study under Michael Henry Heim, professor of Slavic languages at the University of California, Los Angeles, and to work with Robert Chandler, British poet, literary translator, and the editor of *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*. The speaker will stress the importance of mentorship and relate some of the lessons learned from these two titans.

**On Understanding and Translating Humor:****The Spirits of Heinrich Böll's House****Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. - Mesquite D****Speaker: Martha Kosir****Topics:** Slavic Languages; **Level:** All Levels**Presenting Language(s):** English and Slovenian**Description:**

Although very rewarding, translating humor proved to be a lot more challenging than expected. This session will focus on specific examples from the novel *The Spirits of Heinrich Böll's House*, by the Bosnian-Slovenian poet and novelist Josip Osti. In what the author describes as a "kaleidoscopic novel," he recreates, through a fascinating mixture of humor and tragedy, the rich and vibrant literary scene in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Many of the characters described are eccentric and highly unconventional, making the collection (and its humor) especially interesting.

**Empowerment, Objectification, and other Linguistic Challenges when Translating an Academic Textbook on Polish Medical Law from Polish into English****Saturday 11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. - Mesquite D****Speaker: Katarzyna Diehl****Topics:** Medical T&I Slavic Languages; **Level:** Advanced**Presenting Language(s):** English**Description:**

This session will be based on the experience the speaker gained while translating, project managing, and preparing an academic textbook on Polish medical law for publication. The textbook includes a comprehensive analysis of Polish regulations concerning neutral, organizational, and socially sensitive areas of medicine, such as genetic engineering, birth control, medically-assisted procreation, aesthetic surgery, the donation and harvesting of cells, transplantology, and end of life issues and medically assisted suicide. The speaker will focus on the specialist language and the translation challenges involved.



# MY RELUCTANT PATH TOWARD TRANSLATION

Irina Knizhnik

(An expansion of Irina's presentation as part of a 2018 ATA Annual Conference panel,

"Variety is the Spice of Life," moderated by Jennifer Guernsey.)

"Many of us have to settle for something," he said. "And then we find the thing we've settled for is as good as the thing we wanted to do in the first place."

Alexander McCall Smith,  
*The Department of Sensitive Crimes*

Ever since childhood, the only area I have had any real interest in studying and working in has been human language, its workings, intricacies, and fine nuances, its history and origin.

But I never thought of becoming a translator, even though on graduating from my English immersion high school back in the USSR I was given a certificate licensing me as technical translator, mid-level grade. There we had courses in English and American literature and learned some geography, physics, and zoology in English, albeit taught by Russian speakers. I got to read such disparate works of literature (complete, unabridged, non-adapted texts) as *Hamlet*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and many more. During my high school years, I taught myself French because I had always liked the sound of it, along with enough Polish to read books and magazines that were far more interesting than anything you could get in Russian or Ukrainian. In addition, I read a thick volume in German from cover to cover because I was interested in the subject. I did not want to stop there but dreamed of learning a language that I definitely couldn't master on my own with just books. On the other hand, it took all my energy to graduate high school with a gold medal. At the time, earning this honor required getting excellent grades in every subject in every quarter for two years straight: a single merely "good" grade, and you didn't get the coveted prize. Why did I so covet it? Because it qualified a high school graduate to enter a college with only a single "excellent" grade on the qualifying exam. This wasn't something to be sneezed at. The fact that I was Jewish meant my parents were adamant about my going to college, but it also meant that this was very hard to achieve. Exhausted from schoolwork, I didn't want to go to college at all, so my parents and I reached a compromise. I would apply to the School of Oriental Languages at the University of Leningrad, and if I did not get admitted, they would let me be.



The rules clearly stated that the admittance system gave priority to males having residency registration in Moscow and Leningrad and that females were admitted at a ratio of 1:3 (a system that directly contravened the Soviet Constitution). The qualifying exam I had to pass was oral English judged by two evaluators. I had the great luck to be evaluated by two courageous Jewish women who did something out of the ordinary. They graded my oral exam "excellent" and entered that grade right into the official record, which they were

not supposed to do without the Examination Board chairman's approval. To put it bluntly, I was NOT supposed to get in, no matter how good my English was at the time. That is how I got to graduate from this very prestigious school. I applied to specialize in Japanese history but was told there was no way I would be accepted and that my choice was between Chinese language and literature or... nothing at all. I settled for Chinese language and literature, a specialization that no one applied for of their own accord that year, because this was 1971, the heyday of the "Great Cultural Revolution," one of the innumerable huge tragedies in Chinese history. I settled for this as my fate—and I never regretted it.

In Leningrad, I learned Chinese, Japanese, and English. I also took one year of German and two years of French in addition to the mandatory curriculum. In my fourth and fifth years of college, I taught myself Czech through reading immersion. I was the only one to have passed every exam with a grade of "excellent," and my thesis was also highly praised. Nevertheless, I was not recommended for a research position, unlike my colleagues of Slavic and every other imaginable ethnicity. I had to rely on my second oriental language, Japanese, to find a job and was unable to find one in my home city of Lviv. There were quite a few industrial and research facilities that could have used a Japanese technical translator, but no one would hire a Jew. The same story repeated itself time and time again. "Yes, we'd love to hire a Japanese and English translator. We have tons of documents waiting to be translated. Come in and fill in the paperwork." Then, a week later, it would be: "You know, there is literally

nothing to do for a technical translator.” Human resources everywhere saw to it that yet another Jew would not infiltrate their payroll. Theoretically, I could buy a ticket and move elsewhere in the country, but, as some of you probably know, there was a vicious circle: you needed residency registration to get a job, and you needed a job to be eligible for residency registration. It took all of my late father’s perseverance and ingenuity to get me a residency permit in my family’s apartment, which I had left in order to study in Leningrad. Once, I was told by a friend of my parents that an interview had been arranged for me at a factory, but that I would have to go there and claim that I knew every language they might ask me about. I refused. I ended up being hired to work from home as an English translator by a Typing Bureau with a company that also dealt in house cleaning, appliance repairs, etc. I also registered with the local branch of the Chamber of Commerce, which gave me an opportunity to translate Japanese patents. Every translation had to be handwritten (as proof that I did it myself) and then typed. Getting my hands on a portable typewriter was no easy feat. Again, my late father pulled some strings. I can’t begin to tell you how devastated and depressed I was. Deep in my heart, I believed every translation I was doing would be the last one of my life. That was because I hated doing translations; I was still dreaming of doing research. I could not believe that I would never again work with Chinese, which had become the love of my life, and that the huge effort I had invested in mastering Chinese would go to waste. Furthermore, I had dreamed of doing linguistic research. In my eyes at that time, the job of a technical translator had about as much to do with this dream as a plumber’s or electrician’s has to do with research physics.

Work (and money) from the typing bureau hardly ever materialized, but it was this “job” that gave me legitimacy (being a jobless “parasite” was a crime that authorities could prosecute should they so choose). So I focused on the patents. I can remember those bleary Xerox copies on grey paper, paragraphs that could easily be half a page long, characters that looked like blob after blob after blob. I remember the absence of any professional mentors or any contact with colleagues. Two or three paper dictionaries—that was all I had at my disposal. Each sentence took me hours to decipher and translate. I hated what I was doing because of my mostly basic Japanese, and because I hated doing translations. Most devastating of all was the loneliness, the fact that my desk was five paces away from my bed, and that was to be my world from now on.

But in hindsight, those years gave me invaluable experience, and as I became better at what I was doing, I gained confidence that I would succeed in unlocking the meaning behind the convoluted grammar, and translation began to grow on me. To this day, I am thankful to my teachers of Japanese and classical Chinese. I was thrown into the ocean of patent translation feet first—sink or swim—and it is to them I owe my miraculous survival. In a few years, through the kindness of strangers and string-pulling by my family, I got a job as translator at a computer center. Ridiculous though this may seem, my official title was “engineer.” My job was translating copies of manuals for pirated software from English into Russian. At the same time, I continued with my gig translating Japanese patents. My biggest accomplishment of those years, one that still warms my heart, was managing to translate the single Chinese patent that came along; I considered it a matter of honor to do it well. Without the aid of the Internet or any contemporary dictionaries, I managed to guess that 激光器 meant “laser.” To this day, I am proud of this. A lot of translation from Japanese depended, likewise, on a hunch, a flash of intuition, a “eureka” moment.

In 1989, I arrived in the United States with my husband and 1 month-old son, who had been born in Italy. On our way here, I truly thought that I would never get to work as a translator again. However, a couple of weeks later, I was interpreting for new immigrants at job-hunting classes. My dream was to get into interpreting or earn an advanced degree in linguistics. But we had no money for college classes or to enable us to get a babysitter on short notice. In addition, I had yet to learn to drive, so it turned out to be impossible to get my foot in the door. When I first became aware that in order to translate, I would have to learn to use a computer, I literally wept. A friend who lived nearby let me use her computer while she was at work and vouched for me at the Congressional Research Service so they let me do a translation into Russian. I kept running back home to nurse the baby and calling my husband in desperation because I had never used a computer before. But would I ever be able to translate anything into English? By sheer (and incredible) luck, in January 1990, I got hired by Schreiber Translations. I owe an undying debt of gratitude to Morry Schreiber, who took that leap of faith. The company urgently needed someone to improve the quality of Japanese patent translation on their new USPTO (United States Patent and Trademark Office) contract, and Mr. Schreiber even agreed to employ me part-time only, leaving me time to care for my children. This allowed me to teach both my sons Russian as their native tongue. At STI, I

gained priceless experience performing a number of jobs: translator, interpreter, editor, and project manager. The job was tough and the pressure was immense, but I did enjoy the challenges and the variety it offered. I had the honor of interpreting for NASA on assignments that were related to the International Space Station. I had the privilege of working on projects related to the implementation of the treaty on the elimination of chemical weapons. I had had no inkling that documents like “Notices to Mariners” even existed when at Schreiber’s I got the task of translating them from Russian.

I had been freelancing ever since I left college, and in 1999 I left STI to concentrate on my own business. Things went quite well until two things happened. One: translators in Russia got access to the Internet and, using pirated software and other people’s free computers, brought down rates to where I would have been earning more panhandling in the street but with the added benefit of breathing fresh air while I did so. Two: September 11 took any money the government was willing to spend on translation in the direction of Middle Eastern languages, which I could not handle. I guess I never had any business sense or aptitude for marketing.

With the advent of the Internet, I was not feeling so lonely and isolated anymore. I began to take part in discussions in professional groups, and it was a wonderful liberating feeling to be able to talk about language-related matters with other professionals. Then, in 2004, I ventured to my first ATA Annual Conference in Toronto. That was a transformative experience: I met colleagues face to face, struck up new acquaintances, and made new friends.

In 2005, I went to work as translator for the USPTO. Initially I was hired to translate Japanese patents, but in a few years, the office saw a growing demand for Chinese patent translation, and I was able

to step up to the plate and prove myself equal to the task. In my capacity as a USPTO translator, I routinely have to consult examining attorneys on a few dozen foreign language trademark applications a week. In addition, I am called upon to provide sight translations of parts of patents and non-patent literature. Of course, these days, with all the vast capabilities offered by the Internet, things are so very different. Many tasks are much easier, but reliance on grammar to ascertain meaning is still an absolute must. As technical translators, we still have to have extremely good intuition to allow us to figure out what the source language means.

I know that my career is coming to an end, and I am a bit sad about it. I had thought that I would be able to keep freelancing even after I retire, but I am no longer sure if that will be possible. These days, everyone wants their translations by “the day before yesterday,” and everyone keeps telling me how machine translation has been making human translators useless. As someone who deals with machine translation on a daily basis, I see how smooth machine translations have become. But at the same time, I also know that very often they only look flawless until compared to the original text. This makes me a firm believer in the future of human translation, as long as the texts are written by human beings.

Young people are often told that they should follow their dream no matter what. That may well be a valid principle, but that is not the story of my professional life. Mine is a story of settling for something “as good as the thing we wanted to do in the first place.” All in all, no regrets.

Irina Knizhnik translates from Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese, Japanese, Polish and Czech into English and from all of these languages (except Russian of course) into Russian (with limitations on types of documents and subject matter). She is ATA-certified from English into Russian.  
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# New(ish) Kids on the Block

curated by Maria Guzenko ([maria.guzenko@intorussian.net](mailto:maria.guzenko@intorussian.net))

As we revive our Newcomers feature, I would like to (re)introduce myself to our readers. My name is Maria Guzenko, and I translate and interpret mainly between Russian and English. I started taking on occasional translation jobs in college and eventually got a Master's degree in translation. After working as a translation project manager for a few years, I became a full-time translator specializing in healthcare. I am currently ATA certified (English<>Russian) and certified as a medical interpreter (CMI-Russian). Some of you may also know me as a co-administrator of the SLD exam practice group.

In this feature, we will be publishing profiles of and articles by newcomers, as well as stories, advice, and other items of special interest to newcomers to our profession(s) and organization. A regular feature will be questions and answers from and for those starting out or wanting to expand their expertise in our profession. Recognizing how daunting it may be to attend one's first ATA Annual Conference, we will regularly publish post-Conference newcomer reviews and links to other such reviews published in the past. Please write to Maria at the address above with contributions, questions to put to our membership, and suggestions for articles and features.

Our first newcomer profile was contributed by Iryna Lebedyeva.

## Newcomer Profile

**Iryna Lebedyeva ([iryna@iltechtranslations.com](mailto:iryna@iltechtranslations.com))**

My name is Iryna Lebedyeva. I am a technical translator based in Lviv, Ukraine, currently working from French and English into Russian and Ukrainian and specializing in electrical engineering, automation systems, and automotive and industrial equipment.

I got my first professional assignment—a huge localization project—while I was studying at Karazin University. Although initially, it was a bit difficult to deal with the technical aspects of the project, it gave me the opportunity to draw upon the skills and experience I had acquired as part of the requirements for my previous MA degree in electrical engineering. I am happy to report that the client liked my translation and became my first major regular customer, jump-starting my career. This first success gave me the confidence to start translating regularly in the areas I mentioned above. I now have 13 years of professional experience as a technical translator.

I take my yearly continued professional development (CPD) and professional association memberships very seriously, as they allow me to improve my technical skills and linguistic competence and strengthen my resolve to continue broadening my knowledge base and developing new skills.

After three years of practice, I was proud and excited to pass the ATA certification exam (English>Russian). I attribute this success, in large part, to my membership in the ATA Slavic Languages Division's Certification Practice Group, especially the practice it gave me in editing others' translations and having them edit mine. I found the sharing of experience with others invaluable.

I'm very grateful to my colleagues for their unflagging help and support every step of the way! It was a pleasure to meet some of them in person at the ATA58 conference in Washington, DC, and at other translation industry events (such as BP and Elia) in Europe. It's very inspiring to be part of a professional community.

So, to those of you who are still thinking about taking the ATA certification exam or attending an ATA Annual Conference, I would recommend doing just that. It is more than worth the investment.



# Newcomer Questions

In addition to profiling new and “newish” members, we will use this space to ask our more established members for their perspectives and advice for those starting out. Please share your questions via email or on social media with the hashtag #sldQs.

To get the ball rolling, I (Maria) asked the first question.

*I've mainly been exposed to more “corporate” text types in my studies and work: contracts, manuals, that sort of thing. Yet when I think about the English-Russian pair specifically (and Slavic languages in general), literature and journalism come to mind. If you work with the more “creative” content, how did you get into it and how does it compare to corporate translation?*

I have received several thoughtful answers from our veteran members, which are reprinted below. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their expertise.

**Lydia Stone, SlavFile Editor**  
([lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net))

My career path as a literary translator (mostly of poetry) has been ridiculously nonremunerative, but I got to see my work in print and to read it to others, and that made me happy. Somewhat late in what was already my second career as an R>E translator I began to get some reputation, at least in ATA/SLD circles, and some work (and more work offers) as a literary translator. I have published five bilingual volumes including my translated poetry, and from 2002 to 2017 I translated poetry for *Chtenia/Readings* (a journal of translated Russian literature that the publisher of *Russian Life* magazine put out for a few years) and did some other translation and editorial work for Russian Life Books. My translations have appeared in a number of other journals, even one in Russia. My route was indirect and I never could have lived for even a couple of months on what I earned at it in a year. However, some aspects of my experience may give young translators wanting to work at least partially with literature some ideas. I would assume that anyone interested in the answer to this question will have already tried translating literature for (and to) their own satisfaction, as I did for years. If not, try it before you do anything else toward obtaining literary translation jobs.

I should note that I joined ATA when I was already working fulltime for NASA as a biomedical translator. My own literary career would never have come about if I had not attended ATA Annual Conferences and made myself somewhat known to ATA and SLD by giving literary presentations, participating in ATA poetry readings (aka the After Hours Café), and publishing and discussing literary translations in *SlavFile*. Through this I was introduced to a poet who was an avid participant in R<>E literary events and

thus was introduced to a number of others who offered me commissions, some of which I took. Through friends in SLD I was recommended to the editor of the *Chtenia* journal and *Russian Life* magazine. I offered to translate poetry for no pay other than free copies of publications. (I know this may be considered unprofessional and do not advise it, but frankly the going per line rate was insulting for poetry, while translating for art's sake made me feel noble.) Ultimately this same press published three of my bilingual poetry books and commissioned me to do the translations and editing for two prose volumes devoted to the 19th century prose greats.

Maria, I am impressed with your English writing style and your recent certification into English, but still wonder if literary publishers would not be leery of a person whose native language is Russian. On the other hand, your into-English certification, along with the into-Russian one, should be doubly impressive to those wanting you to go into Russian., Be sure to mention your TWO certification credentials and how few native Russian speakers have earned the into-English one.

I would advise the following for those interested in pursuing literary translation:

1) Join ALTA (the American Literary Translators Association). I never did because of travel conflicts around the usual time of their annual conference and because, when I attended one meeting last century, there seemed to be no other Slavists to talk to. Now I believe the situation has changed significantly and that this is a good way to make literary contacts (in conjunction with ATA membership).

2) Have some samples and try to publish them (think Martha Kosir's column in *SlavFile* for example) and give presentations at ATA, ALTA, and your local organizations. Most of our members (especially Russian native speakers) love literature but prefer more lucrative work, yet are sometimes asked to translate memoirs, novels, etc. (If they know you might consider a lower rate, as you may well have to do at least to get started, they will be happy to refer potential clients to you.) Give presentations on such jobs at ATA as well as ALTA.

3) Try to make contacts with emigre Russian-speaking writers and would-be writers in Russian communities in various cities as a willing translator. The pay offered may be below your consideration, but such jobs under you belt may gradually get you a good one.

4) Never, never quit your day job (or, to put it another way, believe you can support yourself) to translate literature. I myself know only one Russian >English literary translator who makes a living at it; the others all have "day jobs" in nonliterary T/I or in teaching. A mixture of literary and more lucrative non-literary work may well be the only way to go until and unless you find yourself one of the few lucky ones.

5) The copyright issue is tricky—it may be impossible to track down the widow or estate of a deceased 20th century author whose copyright is still in force. On the other hand, you can make a name for yourself by publishing translations of works that are no longer copyrighted and at least occasionally be paid for publishing them.

6) If you can afford it and have a work of publishable size completed, consider self-publishing and selling through on Amazon.

### **Liv Bliss, ATA-Certified Russian to English Translator ([bliss.mst@gmail.com](mailto:bliss.mst@gmail.com))**

In addition to all the excellent suggestions made here, I recommend trying to find online translation journals that accept unsolicited submissions, in order to develop a track record, however modest, of published literary translation. (Looks good on the resume!) I have no specific leads for any out-of-English direction, but Ezra ([www.ezratranslation.com](http://www.ezratranslation.com)) and Exchanges (<https://exchanges.uiowa.edu/>) are the sort of e-zine I'm talking about for into English. The journals I have in mind seem to prefer works that have never been translated before and tend to lean toward contemporary pieces—which, of course, means that you'll have to secure permission from the author or copyright holder. I'd steer clear of any journal, e- or hardcopy, that charges a fee to publish your work, though.

You can also publish your own translated material without anyone's say-so (except that of the copyright holder) if you start a blog of your own. A tall order, I

know, but worth mentioning. If you're interested in reading about other translators' adventures in self-publishing, check out this page on Lisa Hayden's remarkable "Lizok's Bookshelf" site: <http://lizoks-books.blogspot.com/2014/08/diy-self-posting-about-self-publishing.html>

And don't stop boosting your name recognition among your colleagues and in the world at large, because that increases the chances that people will think of you when they need someone to do what you do (or want to do). Keep your ears open, for information and possible leads. Write an article for an industry publication, sharing your experiences—good, bad, and meh—in jump-starting your literary translation career. Nurture and expand your contacts in the translation world, through ATA, its Literary Division, a local ATA chapter, LinkedIn, Twitter—aside from the sheer good karma of it, you never know where your first offer in a new field will come from.

**ARE YOU A NEWCOMER TO SLD OR TO A PROFESSION IN SLAVIC TRANSLATION  
AND/OR INTERPRETATION?**

**DO YOU HAVE SOME ADVICE TO OFFER THOSE WHO ARE OR DO YOU SEEK ADVICE FROM THE MORE  
EXPERIENCED?**

**WOULD YOU SIMPLY LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO OUR READERS?**

**CONTACT THE EDITORS AT THE ADDRESSES ON THE MASTHEAD.**

**Shelley Fairweather-Vega, ATA-Certified Russian to English translator**  
**([translation@fairvega.com](mailto:translation@fairvega.com))**

I got my start in literary translation accidentally, but I think success in this field mainly comes down to being in the right place, at the right time, with the right people. The usual route is to find work you think needs to be translated into your target language, seek permission to translate it, and try to convince publishers to publish it. Once you have established a name for yourself as a literary translator, publishers will come to you with projects, if you're lucky. But the route I have followed so far is different: authors have come to me seeking translation into English. They find me online, through portals like ProZ, my own website, social media, and by reading work I've already done. Other authors have been sent to me by colleagues I've met in person at conferences or local translation events, which I attend as often as possible. So I would say that making yourself visible (as opposed to our usual agenda of invisibility!) is absolutely vital if you want to find work in literary translation. It helps if

you have a skill that naturally helps you stand out—in my case, my ability to translate Uzbek as well the more common Russian. But even if you don't have that advantage, be sociable, don't be afraid to promote yourself a little, and—of course—have good work at hand to back up your bragging.

Keep in mind that authors and publishers are direct clients, and need to be handled as such. Cultivate your relationships with them, teach them things they didn't know they needed to know, be their reliable partner and an authority in your field. Be prepared to spend all the time you need to make sure they're confident in you and your work, both before you start a project and after you've turned it in as finished. Handing over a play or novel or poem to a translator is a huge leap of faith for an author—make sure you're worthy of their trust. And remember to have fun, because good literature is a lovely thing, and it's a privilege to be a part of it.

**Evgeny Terekhin, English>Russian marketing translator**  
**([terekhin11@gmail.com](mailto:terekhin11@gmail.com))**

I got into literary translations in 1993 while working as an interpreter for an American mission. The people I worked for asked me to translate a study-guide. I took it and liked translating very much. After that, I got a couple more offers, mainly through the same people. I tried to do a very good job, and people liked my work and referred me to others.

When I finally decided to make literary translation my full-time job, I created a very targeted cover letter and a CV. I made the content very specific to what I did and relevant to the people I was trying to reach. It was at the dawn of the email and internet era, but I was able to do a search online and found emails of publishers who dealt with my areas of specialization. After sending out about 200 emails, I got a response from a publisher who became my long-term client (for over 10 years). Over time, I built a solid portfolio and decided to branch off into other similar areas of specialization, mainly because the client stopped sending regular assignments.

In 2006, I got to ProZ.com and started building a profile within my areas of specialization, answering KudoZ questions to improve my ranking. This helped me to find clients in the corporate world and land some “creative” jobs, but not too many. I still find most of my “creative” assignments (90% of what I do) through cold emails. I find it quite effective if I do a very targeted search of the potential audience, create a very customized proposal and provide relevant samples.

Networking is another way that has been helpful to me. I use LinkedIn to inform my colleagues and potential clients of what I do, the projects I have completed, the number of words I have translated, best practices I follow, issues I am trying to resolve, etc. This is a great way to gain exposure and build trust in the translation world.

# Answer Our Next Question!

Our next question comes from Lindsay Smith, Russian to English translator and Russian/ESL instructor:

*“Since I graduated, I’ve realized that the vast majority of R>E work is done by residents of Russia because the clients either don’t care or don’t want to pay the higher rates of native English speakers. Instead they try to hire us to edit/proofread and clean up a lot of stuff that either is a field I’m not qualified in or is underpaid. What fields/specializations will customers pay EN natives to translate?”*

Share your thoughts or ask a question either by emailing me at [maria.guzenko@intorussian.net](mailto:maria.guzenko@intorussian.net) or by posting your answer on your favorite social media platform with the hashtag #sldQs.

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## IGOR BEKMAN (1948–2019)

### TRIBUTE BY MICHAEL ISHENKO



Igor Bekman, without exaggeration one of the best Russian technical translators of our time, died on the last day of July 2019 in San Francisco. He was 71. Igor is survived by his mother, sister, and wife.

His career began in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), Russia. Generously endowed

with extraordinary intellectual capacities, he was an outstanding student and an avid reader. He finished a radio-engineering college, where all disciplines were taught in German, and defended his graduation project in German. He sought admission to Leningrad Polytechnic but was denied entry because he was Jewish. The only solution for him at the time was to find a job and take part-time evening classes at the Polytechnic. To make ends meet, he would accept occasional German translation jobs from the Leningrad Chamber of Commerce, but when demand for German translation began to decline, he taught himself English. When we first met in San Francisco in 1992, his English vocabulary was quite exceptional.

While still a young man, he joined a science-fiction book group at a local library in Leningrad. One day, a group member brought a *samizdat* (self-published) book by Mikhail Bulgakov for discussion. The book was banned in the Soviet Union at the time, and the discussion was reported to the KGB. The book group was disbanded immediately, and all of its members, including Igor, became politically suspect. Finding a job was even more problematic now, so Igor, who by

then had received his engineering degree, instead focused on technical translation. He applied for an exit visa to Israel, but his request was denied by the Soviet authorities. Like many Soviet Jews, he became a *refusenik*, i.e., someone who had been refused permission to emigrate. Finding a job in his field was out of the question now, so he traveled all over the former Soviet Union as a railroad engineer. In 1989, at the peak of perestroika, he finally was able to emigrate to the United States.

His technical erudition was incredible. I once joked that Igor, who was quite spartan by nature, could live without food and water for long periods of time, but what he couldn’t live without for a single day was new information. A modest, even shy, man in his everyday life, he preferred to keep a low profile but turned into a lion when he felt his professional principles were at stake. He was proud of his profession and any work he left his mark on. His work capacity was mind-blowing: at the peak of his career, he could produce about 10,000 words a day. Igor Vesler and I, who had the honor to work with him on multiple shared projects, came up with a nickname for him: we called him Величайший (The Greatest) between ourselves.

Igor was more than just a colleague: he was a friend, an advisor, a guru. Over the years, I learned a lot from him as a technical and legal translator. Most importantly, I learned how to be humble and curb my ego and personal quirks, always keeping in mind that faithfulness to the letter and spirit of the original should be the top priority in our profession.

Igor Bekman will be greatly missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and the entire translation community.



## TRIBUTE BY IGOR VESLER

I feel both sad and honored to write this tribute to Igor Bekman—a friend and colleague, a true Renaissance man in both his profession and his life.

I first met Igor back in November 1993 when both of us were working for the same client, a leading international law firm providing support to a major oil and gas project in Kazakhstan. From the very first, I was deeply impressed by his vast and detailed knowledge of both the technical and the legal aspects of the project. That first encounter marked the beginning of our longstanding professional friendship and business collaboration.

Prior to becoming a professional translator in the US, Igor, with his background in mechanical engineering, was employed, among all else, by a patent information bureau in St. Petersburg, Russia. His passion for languages, combined with an insatiable desire to explore new areas of science and technology, very soon turned him into a much sought after translator whose skills and knowledge were a valuable asset

to his clients. He had a profound understanding of computer technology and the tenacious patience required to complete the most demanding translation tasks successfully.

Beyond his total devotion to his work, Igor always found time for his colleagues, his friends, and his family, especially his parents. Working with Igor quite a lot over the last 25 years, I learned a great deal from him. His knowledge of politics, international affairs, and corporate and business matters was astounding, and he never hesitated to spend long hours sharing what he knew with his colleagues.

It was a privilege for me to have been a part of Igor's life. When I think about Igor, the first qualities that come to mind are his energy, commitment, integrity, and work ethic. He was one of a kind and will be sorely missed by many as a cherished colleague and friend, and will never be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to have known him well.

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# SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

*Lydia Razran Stone*

Note: This is the second of a projected four columns dealing with the translation and analysis I have done on Krylov and his work over a decade or so.

## Krylov PART IIA: How I Translate Krylov

When I translate poetry, I try to reproduce the original formal features of each poem as exactly as I can without compromising meaning. When I first got the assignment to translate a book of Krylov's fables (eventually consisting of 62 individual poems), without at first consciously planning to diverge from this method, I found myself staying within the bounds of Krylov's verses overall rather than of a particular verse. Thus, each translation may not coincide exactly with the formal features of the particular original but does, at least so I hope, sound like **a** Krylov fable. This has made my task easier and allowed me to translate to date 100 of these fables. I have never attempted to use this relaxation of fidelity translating any other poet, but then I have never translated so much of another poet's work. Even within these loosened constraints, I have still been unable to consistently faithfully render all the feminine rhymes that abound in Krylov. This has always been my biggest failure in translating Russian poetry. Some Russian native speakers are tolerant of this failure and some are not, but I persist.

What are the constraints that the original poet imposed on himself or at least are suggested by his body of work? Every Krylov poem I know of is in iambs. Lines end with, and thus rhymes are based on, either stressed syllables or a stressed syllable followed by one unstressed. I could not find any dactylic rhymes in Krylov but cannot say for sure they do not exist somewhere. Line length varies, seemingly at random, between one syllable (only one example, but two-, three-, and four-syllable lines are quite common) and 12 or 13 syllables (i.e., six feet), although I did find one seven-foot line. Krylov recognizes no need for lines that rhyme to be the same length. Rhyme schemes vary widely.

Here is a sample poem I recently translated that illustrates my chosen translation technique. I am satisfied that it sounds as much like Krylov as I can get it (bilingual readers may disagree). Number of feet and rhyme designator are given after each line.



### ATTENTION READERS WHO WORK WITH SLAVIC LANGUAGES

#### OTHER THAN RUSSIAN!

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

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Polish to Christine Pawlowski [pawlow@verizon.net](mailto:pawlow@verizon.net)

Ukrainian to Olga Shostachuk: [olgalviv27@yahoo.com](mailto:olgalviv27@yahoo.com)

South Slavic to Martha Kosir: [kosir001@gannon.edu](mailto:kosir001@gannon.edu)

We are without language coordinators for the remaining Slavic languages. Would you like to volunteer for your language? Send contributions on them to Lydia Stone: [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net)

<p>12. Не во время гости (Not published in Krylov's lifetime.)</p> <p>У Рифмократа А 5 Случилась гостей полна палата; А 11 Но он имея много дум. В 8 На прозе и стихах помешанный свой ум В 12 И быв душой не много болен, С 9 Гостями не очень был доволен, С 9 И спрашивал меня, как горю пособить, D 12 Чтоб их скорее проводить: D 8 Сбеситься надобно, коль дома их оставить, E 13 А честно их не лъзя отправить E 9 Из дому вон: F 4 Но только стал свою читать он оду; G 11 Не стало вдруг народу, G 7 И при втором стихе один остался он. F 12</p> <p>Number of lines: 14 Number of words: 72 Number of syllables: 130 Number of rhymed pairs: 7 (2 pairs with feminine rhymes) Number of rhymes of consecutive pairs: 5 (and one ABBA) Range of line length: 4-13 Greatest length discrepancy within a rhymed pair: 8 syllables</p>	<p>12. Uninvited Guests *</p> <p>I knew a man, a half mad versifier, A 11 Who thought that he could play Apollo's lyre; A 11 By all poetic stuff he was possessed. B 10 He wrote new odes with mad unhealthy zest. B 10 And yet, was sane enough to dislike guests, B 10 The kind that parlors oft infest. B 8 He asked me how to swiftly make them vanish, C 11 Desiring these household pests to banish. C 11 Could he escort them out D 6 Without appearing rude? E 6 Begin to rave and shout; D6 Or did that seem too crude? E-6 I came up with a most ingenious ruse F 10 For him to use: F 4 If he'd begin to read aloud his latest ode, G 12 Before he'd reached first stanza's end H 8 He'd find his guests had fled from his abode G 10 And he would be alone again. H 8</p> <p>Number of lines: 18 Number of words: 120 Number of syllables: 168 Number of rhymes: 8 (of which 1 is feminine; 6 are of consecutive pairs, 1 set is of 4 consecutive rhyming lines, and 1 is in an ABBA group) Range of line length: 4-12 syllables Greatest length discrepancy within a rhymed pair: 6 syllables</p>
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## PART II B. Krylov's Civil Service Theme

As I noted in my previous column on the subject, Krylov was a member of the Russian civil service at various levels for most of his life. A striking number of his poems revolve around what I call a "civil service theme," mainly involving complaints about the sycophancy, abuses, and foibles of appointed officials. Note that the laws themselves and people at the very top, usually but not always a Lion, are never depicted as directly at fault, though sometimes they are dupes. Krylov, who was, somewhat unaccountably, in high favor for most of his career, clearly knew what side his bread was buttered on. Here is a sampling of these accusations.

### Complaints about a Civil Servant

1. Length of service vs. achievement. From "The Rock and the Worm" («Камень и Червяк»), in which a rock complains of not being admired for his lifelong service lying in a field:

Так хвалится иной, что служит сорок лет, А проку в нём, как в этом Камне, нет.	Some men who boast of service long and yet can name no yield Do nothing more of service than that rock out in the field.
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2. Looking busy but accomplishing nothing. From “The Squirrel” («Белка»), in which a squirrel running frantically in a wheel attracts a crowd of onlookers. See also “The Hardworking Bear” («Трудолюбивый Медведь») and “The Monkey”\* («Обезьяна»), among others.

«Да, — улета, Дрозд сказал, — то ясно мне, Что ты бежишь, а всё на том же ты окне». Посмотришь на дельца иного: Хлопочет, мечется, ему дивятся все: Он, кажется, из кожи рвётся, Да только всё вперёд не подаётся, Как Белка в колесе.	The Thrush flew off, remarking, “Now, it’s clear. You run like mad, but never get an inch from here.” There are like cases in the world of men Where someone runs and runs. But is his striving real? Or does it get him nowhere like the Squirrel in the wheel?
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3. Currying or buying favor. From “Two Dogs” («Две собаки»), in which a pampered lap dog and a hardworking but underappreciated guard dog compare their lots, and the latter asks the former what she does to earn such favor. Her answer is that she has learned to walk on two legs, which amuses her master. Krylov comments:

Как счастье многие находят Лишь тем, что хорошо на задних лапках ходят!	Men, too, win favor, fame, applause If they can walk on their hind paws!
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From “The Peasants and the River” («Крестьяне и Река»), in which farmers go to complain to the river (personified as a kind of upper midlevel manager) that its tributaries’ flooding is robbing them of their goods and livelihood. The farmers:

Пошли домой. А отходя, проговорили: «На что и время тратить нам! На младших не найдешь себе управы там, Где делятся они со старшим пополам».	And then they turned around For home. They knew complaints are of no use When smart abusers pay their dues. And share their plunder With those that they serve under
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4. Misuse of power (to the point of eating those one has been hired to protect).

From “The Vixen and the Woodchuck” («Лисица и Сурок»), a riff on the fox guarding the hen house. A vixen complains to her friend that she has been fired from her job running the henhouse although she has never been caught doing anything wrong. There is, however, the fact that feathers appear on her chin from time to time. Krylov draws his moral quite explicitly here.

Иной при месте так вздыхает, Как будто рубль последний доживает: И подлинно, весь город знает, Что у него ни за собой, Ни за женой, — А смотришь, помаленьку, То домик выстроит, то купит деревеньку. Теперь, как у него приход с расходом свесть, Хоть по суду и не докажешь, Но как не согрешешь, не скажешь: Что у него пушок на рыльце есть.	Some public servants moan and sigh, Complain they’re barely getting by. Indeed in town it is well known They have no fortunes of their own. And yet from year to year we see Them growing richer gradually, Beyond their modest salary. And though hard evidence is slim We’d have to say (to lie’s a sin), They too have feathers on their chin.
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In “The Popular Assembly”\* («Мирская сходка») a wolf is nominated to run the sheepfold, and to ease King Lion’s doubts, a democratic meeting is held to assess the wolf’s suitability for the post. But somehow the powers that be forget to invite the sheep to testify. Krylov’s moral:



Какой порядок ни затеи, Но если он в руках бессовестных людей, Они всегда найдут уловку, Чтоб сделать там, где им захочется, сноровку	However just the rules and laws, In unjust hands or beaks or paws They can be bent to serve the goal Of leaders loath to lose control
--	--

This is a very common theme in Krylov's works. See, for example, "The Wolf and the Shepherds"\* («Волк на Псарне») and the "The Lion"\* («Лев»).

5. Administrative dysfunction caused by assigning impossible tasks to those who are incapable of performing them, conflicting interests, or the impossibility of the tasks that are assigned.

From the "Swan, the Pike and the Crab," («Лебедь, Щука и Рак»), one of Krylov's most well-known fables and universally considered to hint at the dysfunction of the State Council of Alexander I.

Да Лебедь рвётся в облака, Рак пятится назад, а Щука тянет в воду. Кто виноват из них, кто прав — судить не нам; Да только воз и ныне там.	The Pike sought water, Swan of course the sky; While Crab a sideways course did ply. Which one of them was right's not ours to judge. As for the cart—it never budged.
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See also "Friendship among Dogs" («Собачья дружба»), "The Quartet" («Квартет»), "The Ass and the Peasant," «Осел и Мужик» and "The Peasant and the Dog" («Крестьянин и Собака»).

6. Sometimes good things are accomplished if a high (but never the highest) incompetent official has an underling who can manage his work for him.

From "The VIP" («Вельможа»), in which a high official has left all the work to his aide and upon death is called upon to account to an underworld judge for his life. The judge sends him to paradise and is questioned for this decision. The judge replies:

«Эх, братец! — отвечал Эак, — Не знаешь дела ты никак. Не видишь разве ты? Покойник - был дурак! Что, если бы с такою властью Взялся он за дела, к несчастью, — Ведь погубил бы целый край!... И ты б там слез не обобрался! Затем-то и попал он в рай, Что за дела не принимался.»	The judge then said, "It's very plain That you're new here, so I'll explain Just why this verdict was accorded. You surely see this man's a fool And quite incapable of rule, So if to rule his province he'd endeavored It might have been destroyed forever. To paradise we send a few As a reward for what they failed to do."
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See also "The Oracle"\* («Оракул») in which a pagan wooden "oracle," renowned for great prophesies and advice, suddenly begins to spout nonsense. This is attributed to a replacement of the original priest sitting in the hollow statue and actually producing its pronouncements by a less competent one.

Я слышал — правда ль? — будто встарь Судей таких видали, Которые весьма умны бывали, Пока у них был умный секретарь	I've heard that in a long past age, A judge who wanted to seem sage A name for wisdom could maintain When he'd an aide with first-rate brain.
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7. There are a few cases where a high-ranking or even ultimate authority, King Lion in most cases, is fooled by his underlings. This is mostly explicitly or indirectly explained by old age, the relative forced isolation of the authority from the situation on the ground, or the cleverness of the deceiver. For the elephant in the poem whose moral is cited below, the ruler's problem is sheer stupidity.

From “The Elephant Appointed Governor”\* (“Слон на воеводство”).

Кто знатен и силен, Да не умен, Так худо, ежели и с добрым сердцем он.	If one in power’s good and kind But isn’t very strong of mind. You cannot always guarantee That all will turn out happily.
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See also: “The Lion”\* («Лев»). “The Lion’s Education”\* («Воспитание Льва») and “The Dance of the Fish”\* («Рыбья Пляска»).

If you will bear with me, I will devote more *SlavFile* space in future issues to Krylov, in particular to whether he was indeed the social liberal that he was portrayed as to Soviet, and possibly Russian, school children before and after the Soviet era.

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\*The majority of the poems discussed here were published in my bilingual book *The Frogs who Begged for a Tsar*. The translations marked with a \* have not yet been published, and if you write to me at [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net), I will send the full versions to you.

## ARTICLES BY PAST CONFERENCE NEWCOMERS FOR 2019 CONFERENCE NEWCOMERS

For a number of years we have been publishing reviews written by first time conference attendees. We have stipulated that criticisms as well as praise are welcome, though you [spoiler alert] will find more of the latter. Articles also include tips for making the most of your first or even subsequent conferences.

2018 Evgeny Terekhin: [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SlavFile-2019-2-Spring.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SlavFile-2019-2-Spring.pdf) pg.8

2017 Steven McGrath [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SlavFile-2018-1-Winter.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SlavFile-2018-1-Winter.pdf) pg. 10

2016 Natalie Mainland [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-4-Fall-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-4-Fall-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 1

2015 Daria Toropchyn [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-2-Spring-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-2-Spring-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 8

2015 Christopher Tauchen [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-2-Spring-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-2-Spring-SlavFile.pdf) pg.9

2014 Ekaterina Howard [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2015-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2015-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 7

2013 Adam Fuss [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2014-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2014-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 10

2012 Sam Pinson [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2013-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2013-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 5

2010 Todd Jackson [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2011-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2011-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 1

2009 Vitaliy Plinto [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2010-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2010-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg.10

2008 Monika Pilecka [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2009-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2009-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 9

2007 Tom Fennell [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2008-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2008-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 5

2006 Lucy Gunderson [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2007-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2007-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 14

2005 Kathleen Davis [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2006-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2006-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 8

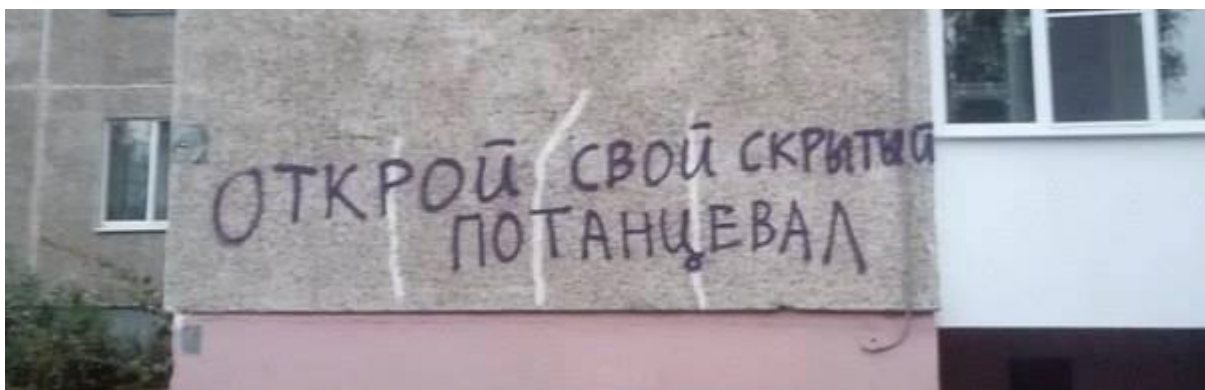
2004 Leah Misbin [www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2005-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf](http://www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2005-1-Winter-SlavFile.pdf) pg. 3

# Selections from the «Смешная лингвистика» Facebook Group

*Eugeny Terekhin*

It's not so easy to spot humor in a language that's not your own. Here are some examples of funny ways people speak, or write, or hear things in Russian. If you translate from Russian, you might see such strange wordings in text messages, chats, comments, or anywhere on the Internet. All of them were posted in my [Facebook group «Смешная лингвистика»](#), which was created for the sole purpose of sharing the humorous language members come across on the Internet. Some of the examples represent the actual way people speak while others are intentional puns, homophones, etc.

Original	Explanation
«Открой свой скрытый потанцевал» (could be the name of a dance club).	The funny effect is created through the use of «потанцевал», which sounds similar to «потенциал». The phrase is a play on the common saying «Открой свой скрытый потенциал».
«Кто у нас в России богатый, так это язык».	Everybody in Russia knows Ivan Turgenev's words «Великий и могучий русский язык». Russians are proud of their language almost to the point of worship. This phrase is a play on this "language worship." The implication is that the language is the only thing (person) in Russia that is rich.
Постерилизованное (молоко)	A funny cross between «пастеризованный» and «стерилизованный».
Административно хлопнул дверью	Should be «демонстративно хлопнул дверью». It's fun to actually imagine someone slamming the door in an "administrative fashion."
Развивающиеся игрушки	Should be «развивающие игрушки». Just imagine a toy that is self-developing (well, now with the rise of AI it's possible).
Кипячино	A funny twist on "cappuccino." I heard this word from an old man who was asking his wife to buy him "the kind of coffee that's hot"—«кипячино». Sounds close to «кипятить».
«Это выше моего достоинства»	The standard usage is: «это ниже моего достоинства.» But some jokesters apparently have a very low level of dignity.
«фотогигиеничный»	A funny play on "Photogenic." A cross between «фотогеничный» and «гигиеничный». I guess it makes perfect sense that to be «фотогеничный» you must be somewhat hygienic.
фамилиё	Considered illiterate, but it's still a funny way some folks pronounce or write the word "фамилия".
бацкетбол	«Бац» means "bang," or "zap"; possibly, some folks think that the sound of a ball bouncing off the floor makes for a good game of "bang-ball."
«Рыдала на взрыв»	Should be «рыдала навзрыд». But рыдать на взрыв is actually closer to the English phrase "burst into tears."



Artwork: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/454100328263041/>

Тубаретка	An illiterate way to say «табуретка». Swopping syllables around is quite common for children’s speech and that of simple “village” folk.
Сёравно	Все равно
Ей до тебя, как Мамаю до кургана	Not so common but funny. Probably a combination of «Куда ей до тебя» and «Как пешком до Китая». The “Mound of Mamai” in genitive sounds sort of similar to «пешком до Китая», or at least the syntax is close.
Христос воскрес – воинственно воскрес!	Should be «воистину воскрес». Possibly, “rose militantly” sounds even more triumphant.
Обвал лица	Овал лица
Лисапед	Велосипед
Употребление алкоголизма и табакокурения приводит к гибели человеческих жертв!	From an actual sign.
«Не надо меня уговаривать» vs. «Меня не надо уговаривать».	These two phrases have opposite meanings. The first one means “no way,” the second one “I am all for it.”
Борщ пересолила = с солью переборщила.	«Переборщить» = do something in excess. «Пересолить борщ» is the same thing as «переборщить с солью».
Экспрессо	Same as “Espresso” but prepared very quickly.
«Буду рожать сома»	From a tweet. Obviously, the lady means that she wants to give birth herself, but with the replacement of one letter, her task becomes an ordeal—giving birth to a catfish.
Умиротворение	A word meaning appeasement becomes death from an overdose of preserves. «Умер от варения».
«Всех больных закапывать в 7 утра»	Sounds like a quotation from Zoshenko. A sign in an eye clinic. Don’t be alarmed—it’s about “eye drops,” not about burying patients.
Утренник – Дневник – Полдник – Вечерник – Ночник –	Мероприятие Книжка Еда Студент Лампа      Sorry if it’s too confusing.
Надпись на торговом автомате «Кофе»: «Зерна молятся отдельно».	Russia is a very spiritual country—even coffee beans pray here. (Should be «мелятся».)
В связи с ремонтом парикмахерской, укладка женщин будет производиться в мужском зале.	An unintended pun with «укладка» as in hairdressing vs. «укладка» as in “laying.”
Жители Британии очень любят кататься на великах. Так эту страну и называют «Великобритания».	No comments
Ввиду холода, в рентгеновском кабинете делаем только срочные переломы.	I wouldn’t want to use these service.
Дети выдаются отцам только в трезвом состоянии.	A sign in a preschool. «В трезвом состоянии» is attributed to the children instead of the fathers.

Evgeny Terekhin is an En-Ru and Ru-En translator with a master’s degree in English and German. Born and raised in Omsk, Russia, he moved to the US in 2016. In the course of his 25-year career, he has translated and edited over 150 books, brochures and tracts across a wide range of subjects (such as children’s literature, marketing, psychology, spirituality, health-care, business, and law. He lives in Friendswood, TX and can be reached at [terekhin11@gmail.com](mailto:terekhin11@gmail.com) [www.russiantranslators.org](http://www.russiantranslators.org)



# Pitfalls, Spitballs, and Pratfalls in US Journalese

Lydia Razran Stone

**All language is metaphoric, some language is more metaphoric than others.**

*(Allusions to George Lakoff and George Orwell)*

Three years ago, I started collecting English idioms (broadly defined) in news reports, then classifying them, thinking about them, and presenting a talk about them at the ATA Annual Conference. Recently, as another politically fraught period revs up the idiom-generating engine, I have started again. I would like to discuss the kinds of issues presented to non-native speakers of English, particularly translators, by the more difficult-to-understand turns of phrase. I am under no illusions at all about my ability to translate them into even the strongest of my non-native languages (Russian), but am hoping to find one or more Slavic-language native speakers to help out. After all, I reason that the key to translating non-literal meanings is to understand them and possibly also the principles by which they are generated. Also, I must confess to finding the general subject fascinating.

Since all language is based on an arbitrary association of sound patterns with things (concepts, actions, qualities, feelings, etc., etc.), it is by definition metaphoric. The addition of visual signs to represent the sounds introduced another level of metaphor. The expansion of the meaning of certain established sound/word correspondences to represent less primitive and/or more subtle concepts—the use of “hot” to describe a person’s mood or temper, for example—is yet another level of metaphor, as is the use of the same word to describe a sexually alluring person. Since different language communities developed different sound and visual systems, bilingual dictionaries had to be created.

Based on the complex interaction of basic concepts within a language community, combinations of words began to signify more complex interactional concepts through the use of phrases, referred to as idioms. Insofar as different language communities share the same concepts and experience the same interactions, such idioms (when translated literally) may be clear to those who speak another language. The more different the experiences of the two communities, the less likely this is. The first English idiom dictionary (targeted at the deaf) was evidently published in 1966. Bilingual idioms dictionaries came later; I myself have never encountered one nearly as good as Lubensky’s for Russian to English.

Many allusions are also used with metaphorical meanings based on specific named events, people and characters, phenomena, quotations, etc., that members of a cultural group are able to recognize and generally interpret in context. These allusions therefore become a kind of idiom/metaphor, and those whose underlying connotations are not shared between language communities certainly present an idiom/metaphor-level challenge to translators. Although allusion and idiom/metaphor are usually distinct concepts, they do on occasion co-occur with traditional idioms in extended strange-bedfellow combinations, as I will illustrate later.

Note: my chief sources have been *The Washington Post*, Yahoo News, and Google News. I cannot handle any more, but if others want to send me similar difficult to understand usages from other English news sources, I will be happy to discuss them.

To introduce readers to the kind of thing I want to deal with, let’s start with the title of an article that I read recently: “‘I take your question’ is the new ‘Bye Felicia.’” (Who says there are no novel utterances in the world?) This particular beauty contains three non-literal references/usages, each of which has its own history and meaning, and which, I warrant, have never before appeared together in such proximity.

a) *I take your question* is the totality of a reply by Robert Mueller to a number of questions put to him during his recent appearance on Capitol Hill earlier this summer. The legal use of this phrase has been explained as follows by a legal expert on the web: “‘I take your question’ is used often when the witness doesn’t know the answer to the question. It’s distinct from a straight ‘no,’ because it indicates that the answer may well be knowable, just that this witness doesn’t know it.”

b) The second phrase, “is the new” is used in fashion reporting, a realm in which black is the perennial “go-to” color, and every year a new candidate for short-term popularity is referred to as “the new black.” The phrase skyrocketed in popularity on the basis of a book and TV series called *Orange is the New Black* referring to an upper-middle-class woman who spent a year in a woman’s prison and thus wore the requisite orange jumpsuit. By the way, my research tells me that “X is the new Y” belongs to a class of terms dubbed “snowclones” by Professor Glen Whitman in 2004. This portmanteau word (an apparent pun on “snow cone”) is based on the putative fact that Inuits have 40 words for snow.

c) The third phrase, “Bye, Felicia,” which apparently rose and set without my ever hearing it, was first used in the 1995 “stoner” movie *Friday*, in which a character uses it to dismiss another character who is about to start badgering him for favors. The phrase was then used in a series of similar movies as a dismissive... well, *dismissal*.

The following is a sample of some of the categories of “higher order metaphors” that I have identified from my research, along with several of my favorite examples of the phrases that fall into them and explanations of what they refer to and intend to convey. In future columns, these and other sorts of difficult to understand and translate idioms will be discussed in more detail.

## PART I. AREN'T PLAIN ENGLISH IDIOMS HEADACHE ENOUGH?

**1. Cultural allusions**—most fairly low, some high, many no longer current—are less likely to be interpretable by someone who has not spent a lifetime exposed to American and English language culture and idioms.

a) From a discussion about which candidate(s) or policies are likely to appeal to the middle class: *Middle class is an elastic term, but if you're thinking Donna Reed and Leave it to Beaver, dial that back to Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton.*”

This sentence contains two relatively understandable, albeit non-literal terms: *elastic* as applied to a nonphysical entity and *dial back*, meaning reduce the frequency or intensity of something. In addition, “thinking Donna Reed,” etc., is a quite informal way of saying: “If the middle class you have in mind is exemplified by Donna Reed and *Leave it to Beaver*...”

The allusions here are to three TV programs all of which had completed their first run by the mid-1960s. The first two programs concerned families living a well-manicured upper-middle-class suburban existence; the second pair of names refer to two characters from *The Honeymooners*, which featured two working class and uncouth men and their wives.

A literal paraphrase of the whole would be: “*The term ‘middle class’ covers a wide range of social groups. If you have understood the previous use of the term to refer to the suburban upper middle class, you are wrong (about whatever is under discussion); here the very lowest stratum of the middle class is what is being referred to.*”

b) *What, Pete Worry?* This is a reference to the calm way Democratic Candidate Peter Buttigieg reacted to Donald Trump’s having said he looked like Alfred E. Neuman, the “mascot” of *MAD*, a satirical magazine for teenagers that had its greatest

popularity in the 1950s and 60s. Pictures of Neuman were always accompanied by the phrase “What, me worry?” Though the comparison is far from complimentary and the candidate is certainly pleasant looking, there is indeed a certain resemblance in my opinion.

c) *No, they did not come in the same car.* A negative reference to the number and quality (or possibly behavior) of the current potential Democratic candidates for the presidency. The reference is to a “clown car,” a stunt in which a small car would drive into a circus ring and disgorge a surprisingly large number of normal-sized clowns. This is simply an indirect, if not subtle, way for the writer to call the people in question a bunch of clowns.

d) *Slouching toward war.* This is a quotation from “The Second Coming” by W.B. Yeats, which provides an apocalyptic vision of the beginning of the end of the world. The poem ends “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” The use of this allusion suggests a fear of the end of the world and the existence of the beast perhaps in the person of an individual under discussion. On the other hand, the phrase may simply be intended to give the “warning” a more ominous tone.

## 2. Combinations of two or more idioms (allusions, metaphors, clichés, etc.)

a) *Continuing to stomp our feet if nothing is behind the curtain makes us look like it has been a wild-goose chase.* If memory serves, this was a caution against publicly counting too much on what the Mueller testimony (or perhaps report) was going to reveal, since those doing so would look foolish if nothing particularly spectacular came out.

1. *Stomping one’s feet*—is a gesture description usually implying childish tantrums and ineffective attempts to get one’s way. 2. *Nothing is behind the curtain* refers to a late episode in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, in which the supposedly all-powerful and all-knowing wizard, always hidden behind a curtain, is revealed to be a small elderly man operating various devices to create illusions. While the phrase suggests that the inquiry will not reveal anything damaging about its subject, note that this image also invokes the idea that a figure thought all powerful is actually a sham. 3. *Wild goose chase* was coined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, possibly by Shakespeare, and may refer either to chasing a wild goose or to a horse race likened to a goose flock in flight. In either case it is a sports metaphor (broadly defined) that implies being engaged in an effort that is likely to have no useful results.

b) *In the broom closet*. I confess this is not from a political article but an advice column. However, it is too good to pass up. Rather than a sequential combination of two idioms, it is a mashup of an idiom and a lowly household term. A *broom closet* is a closet sized room to hold brooms and other tallish cleaning implements. *In the closet* refers to the concealment of one's less mainstream sexual preferences or gender identity from society at large. The advice columnist was replying to a request for support from a young woman with a highly conventional religious family who had switched her allegiance to the Wicca (essentially witches') faith and was concealing this from her family. Witches are, of course, associated, at least in the minds of the uninitiated, with brooms.

### 3. Extensions (frequently whimsical) of known metaphors based on the literal meanings of the terms used in idioms.

a) *Being a speaker... is like herding cats*. *The cats have to understand who provides the water and kibble and cleans the litter. Once the cats understand that, it'll get better*. This is from a discussion of the difficulty of being a majority leader in the House of Representatives. *Like herding cats* is a common idiomatic way to refer to trying to lead a group of people resistant to being led en masse or at all and was originally coined with regard to political leadership. Cat owners will not need to have the metaphor explained. The general meaning of the extended phrase is that giving those who are resisting being led a clear understanding of where their personal benefits are coming from will eventually lead to diminished resistance on their part.

b) *She said that Americans did not want to see a food fight, but then she dumped a platter of mashed potatoes and gravy on him*. *Food fight* literally refers to a typically spontaneous and disorderly outbreak in which food is thrown for amusement, especially across a school cafeteria, as a form of chaotic collective behavior. Various participants in the recent Democratic presidential debates have used this term to refer to other participants' attacks on each other, with the implication that such unpleasant measures are unneeded, below them, and denigrate everyone involved. The extended metaphor refers to a debate participant who accused another of starting a food fight and then attacked him in just such a way.

**4. Altered idioms.** Related to the examples above are variations (rather than extensions) of a well-known (at least to native speakers) idiom. To understand these, one has to understand not only the underlying idiom but also the implications of the

variance from it. This may be difficult if the original idiom has not been cited within the context.

a) *She had no thunder to steal*. "Stealing someone's thunder" means usurping someone's chance to get attention or recognition by saying or achieving something the victim had intended to do first. This rather nasty variation suggests that the person in question had nothing striking or worthwhile to say in the debates or had racked up no stellar accomplishments.

b) *There was no hatchet*. The response of a political actor to the question of whether that person and another actor had *buried the hatchet*, i.e., smoothed over a previous source of contention. This rather clever answer implies that there never was any contention to begin with.

**5. Puns based on idioms or allusions.** These may be particularly difficult for non-native speakers to understand. There would seem to be no great need to translate a pun as a pun but rendering a snarky (aka snide) tone would increase the accuracy of a translation.

a) *Ikea has better cabinets*. Ikea, as virtually all of you will know, is a large Swedish-based furniture and houseware store selling decent but not high-class products at relatively low prices. The statement is a disparagement of the current White House Cabinet and is based on the pun of this upper case word with the lower-case word meaning a piece of furniture containing shelves, drawers and/or compartments.

b) [A certain candidate] *has too much past and not enough presence*. A complaint that this particular person relies too much on his past accomplishments, some of which are subject to criticism, and currently does not present himself strongly enough to audiences (a play on "past and present" and "[stage] presence").

c) *"Les Muellerrables"*, a reference to the disappointment of Democrats with the failure of Robert Mueller to reveal anything helpful to them during his recent testimony to Congress. The play on the word *miserable* (an allusion to the book and musical *Les Misérables*), which is a cognate of the English "miserable" and refers to the supposedly bleak mood of the Democrats, rather than the allusion itself, is the source of the wit. A subtle allusion to the French Revolution (the setting of the novel) may also be intended.

More next time. Contact me ([lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net)) if you would like to volunteer (if only occasionally) as a coauthor of this new column, either by providing a Slavic perspective and/or counterpart example or by sending me appropriate terms that you encounter.





## SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION DINNER

Please join us for a convivial evening during the ATA 60th Annual Conference in Palm Springs. Enjoy a great meal, greet friends, and meet new colleagues. If you plan to attend the SLD Dinner, please purchase the ticket(s) on or before October 18, 2019, in order to avoid potential event cancellation.

**WHEN:** Thursday, October 24, 7:00-9:00 pm

**WHERE:** Greek Islands

(about a 15 minute walk from the convention center)

139 E Andreas Rd

Palm Springs, CA 92262

(760) 413-3811

### MENU

**APPETIZERS:** Large Greek Salads; Tzatziki, Hummus, and eggplant spreads with pita bread.

**MAIN COURSE:** One sampler plate per person with the following, rice pilaf, and seasonal vegetables:

- Stuffed Filet Fish Florentine with spinach, feta, herbs
- Stuffed Chicken with portabella mushrooms and feta
- Marinated Lamb Skewer

**OR VEGETARIAN OPTION:** Sampler plate of the following with rice pilaf or rice stuffed grape leaves and seasonal vegetables: Marinated Vegetable Skewers: mushrooms, zucchini, yellow squash, onion, bell peppers

Falafel Sandwich: falafel, hummus, red onion, tomato.

**Please notify us when purchasing your ticket that you will be ordering this option.**

**DESSERT:** Baklava: walnuts wrapped in phyllo with honey syrup

**DRINKS:** Soft drinks and ice tea included with dinner

**NOTE:** Dietary Options: The restaurant is willing to accommodate dietary restrictions if notified in advance. Please coordinate any special dietary requirements with [Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya](mailto:eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com) (610-955-7940) no later than Wednesday, 10/23/2019.

## COST / RESERVATIONS

\$58.00 per person (incl. sales tax & gratuities). Seats can be reserved and tickets purchased via PayPal (preferred) or mailed check received **not later than Friday, 10/18/2019**.

Payment via PayPal:- Access the PayPal [website](#) and select the "Send Money" tab.

- Enter the amount (\$58 per person) and choose the "Friends and Family" option.

- In Step 2, use the following e-mail address:

[eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com](mailto:eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com)

Check payment: Mail a check for the appropriate amount made payable to "Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya," addressed to the following address: 565 Juniata Ave, Swarthmore, PA 19081.

SLD members are strongly encouraged to purchase the ticket(s) early, and no later than Friday, October 18, 2019. The event may be cancelled if a sufficient number of attendees is not reached. **There will be no last-minute ticket purchases. If you intend to pay cash at the Welcome Celebration, you must let Eugenia know in advance and bring exact change.**

## QUESTIONS?

**Contact Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya;  
cell: 610-955-7940**