

“Translation and Interpretation as Acting”

The 25th Annual Susana Greiss Lecture

Presented by Dmitry Buzadzhi

Reviewed by Svetlana Jacobs



With the conference being held in Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood, our speaker chose the title of his lecture deliberately, and he hit a bullseye: attendance was through the roof!

Dmitry did not hide his surprise at how popular his session turned out to be. In his own words, “Oh, wow, I thought only about 10 people would show up. Now I have the added pressure to perform” (the pun was probably intended).

“I have encountered many practitioners who show disdain for theory, as in ‘those who don’t know how to do, teach,’” Dmitry started his presentation, further stating that translation theory is a necessary foundation for understanding why we do what we do and how we do it.

He then described the main objective of the lecture: to compare the act of translating and

interpreting to dramatic acting, i.e., the act and skill of performing on stage. Dmitry acknowledged that in his own professional life as a translator and interpreter, he realized early on that both in its written and spoken forms, translation is akin to acting: like actors, we take on someone else’s life, ideas, and messages and convey them, keeping our own individuality invisible.

If translation is similar to acting, then, Dmitry posited, there must be a method to this madness and lessons that translators and interpreters can draw from the world of dramatic performance. And whom better to consult if not the great master of The Method in acting, Konstantin Stanislavski. (To give the Wikipedia summary: “*Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski was a seminal Soviet and Russian theater practitioner. He was widely recognized as an outstanding character actor and the many productions that he directed garnered him a reputation as one of the leading theater directors of his generation.*”)

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ATA64

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**Are you an experienced translator willing to share some knowledge?
Would you be interested in answering questions from newcomers to our profession?**

Newer SLD members have expressed an interest in being put in contact with experienced colleagues working in their language pair, as an alternative to the more formal and non-language-specific ATA mentoring program. If you would be interested in helping newcomers get their bearings or have questions about this initiative, please email Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya at eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com. Be sure to list your language direction(s)! The more language directions we have represented, the more helpful this pool will be.

To support his hypothesis, Dmitry drew several parallels, each illustrated by a quote from Stanislavski's manual for actors, *An Actor's Work on a Role* (the source of the italicized quotes below.)

Theory and Technique

"You're waiting for the state of experiencing and inspiration to come on its own. It does happen, but only on the 29th of February. On all other days, you have to be able to evoke experiencing naturally, every time and at every repetition of your art. This is what you need the internal technique for. Technique first—experiencing later, not the other way around as you'd have it. Technique for the sake of experiencing, not experiencing for the sake of technique."

Can this "experiencing and inspiration" help a translator solve a linguistic problem or overcome a "translator's block"? We all know that sometimes it's the simplest expressions, phrases in common usage in the source language, that can be the most challenging to transpose into equivalent common phrases in our target language. And what technique should be applied? To illustrate, Dmitry drew on his own experience from subtitling a video in which a photographer sets out to show beautiful forest scenery through the lens of his camera to a person with a muscular degenerative condition.

Down a little...little more...right there. Lovely.	Чуть пониже... еще... Ага. Отлично.
Look up, look way up.	Давай верхушку покажу... Видно?
Oh, I like that a lot. Yeah, macro that one.	Ага, здорово. Давай сейчас крупным планом.

This very simple colloquial English phrase that a native speaker wouldn't think twice about saying—**Look up, look way up**—turned out to be a real stumper. Translating it literally would have resulted in exactly that—a literal, unidiomatic utterance: "Смотри вверх, дальше вверх" or something similar. Dmitry recounted how, after having endured some painful moments of mental exertion, he decided to act out the photographer's movements, putting himself in the physical position of the speaker at the moment the utterance was produced. The result was a natural, fluent phrase the photographer could have said if he spoke Russian: **Давай верхушку покажу... Видно?**

In sharing this example, Dmitry brought us to the second parallel, backed up by another Stanislavski quote.

On Physical Actions

"If you're going by physical actions in the given circumstances, or, in other words, if you're going by the pattern and believe in it, you can be sure that you're playing faithfully."

If this argument was proven to be true in the above example showing how "acting" can facilitate the process of written translation, it became even more convincing in the example that followed. It was a short video of a pair of simultaneous interpreters working on transferring a motivational speech by Tony Robbins into Russian. The two guys in the booth were not simply interpreting the speech: they were one hundred percent performing "in character." They were on fire!—mirroring the speaker's impassioned manner, his looming presence on stage, channeling his force of expression and infectious energy. If you've ever seen any of Tony Robbins' motivational speeches, you would agree that this is the only correct way to interpret them if they're to have the desired effect.

Some might argue that interpreters must always remain "professional." But what exactly does this mean? Professionally detached? Professionally unengaged? Professionally uninspiring? Dmitry argued that those who study interpretation and can't bring themselves to act at all because of "who they are," who aren't willing to channel the speaker, are doing a disservice to the speaker and their creative intent,

while also depriving the audience of the speaker's true message.

That's why it's so important to:

Make the Target Text (Message) Your Own

"It is possible to subjugate oneself to the external desires

and commands of the poet or the director and fulfill them mechanically, but the artist can only experience his own, real, genuine wishes born and processed inside himself, using his own will, not someone else's. Let the director or the poet suggest their desires to artists, but let the artist's own nature process these desires, let the artist appropriate and possess them completely. If wishes are to come alive on the stage, they must become the creative wishes and actions of the artist himself, be related to his organic nature. In short, one can only experience one's own, real, genuine feelings."

While this is as true for interpreting as it is for translation, it is essential for the literary genre. Stanislavski's acting method backs that up for us yet again.

On Literary Translation

“If you’re only guided by what the book tells you to do, you will not fulfill the task I need because you will subjugate yourselves blindly and completely to the author. You will count on him while rigorously repeating the words of his text, taunting his image and his actions, which are alien to you, instead of creating your own image analogous to that of the author.”

Analyze everything, all the elements of the text, yes, but try to be the voice of the author in your language, do become the author in your own language, “create your own image,” is what both Dmitry Buzadzhi and Stanislavski urge.

“To be truly professional,” Dmitry said, “you need to care about your text, have artistic imagination, be genuinely interested in the subject of your translation, become professionally interested in it, be passionate about the subject. Whether your translation or interpretation assignment is on oil and gas, or blockchain, or medical devices, become passionate about it for the length of the assignment.”

But what if we’re not good at acting? What if being an actor is a talent we were not born with?

Stanislavski has advice for that, too:

Trivial? Or Insightful?

“Shchepkin said: ‘You may play well or badly—this is not important. What’s important is for you to play faithfully.’”

Dmitry stated that it doesn’t matter how many fancy words we may employ on any given day or how dazzling our work may be—what counts is being faithful. As a teacher of translation and interpretation, with experience in both the US and Russia, Dmitry noted that in Russia, the student body is 99.9% linguistically homogeneous, with Russian being the mother tongue, and English an acquired language. In the US, there are students who are fully bilingual. Yet native bilingualism is not at all an indicator that a student has a better prospect of becoming a successful interpreter or translator if they’re only working with text, structures, and words, without really acting the part.

If you don’t have an artist inside of you, says Dmitry, maybe this profession is not for you. Learn to become a vessel for someone else’s expression.

The lecture sparked a lively discussion among attendees about translators and interpreters being “actors” in various fields, such as courtroom interpreting, healthcare, and entertainment, and whether channeling, embodying, empathizing, mimicking tone

and gestures might do more harm than good, especially to the interpreters themselves.

One commenter said, “As someone who trains court interpreters, I teach my students that in the courtroom you get to be the judge, the defense attorney, the defendant,” to which another attendee retorted, “By putting yourself emotionally in their place, are you not opening yourself to vicarious trauma, and what are Dmitry’s thoughts on that?”

Dmitry’s response was, “Sometimes the misconception is that there are multiple translation theories for various specialties/fields—e.g., technical vs. legal or literary. My thought is that there is a scale of being the actor-translator, and depending on the context, we should be able to move the notch up or down on the scale.”

Someone else compared the act of translating to performing a piece of classical music, where the performer needs to be humble, yet to bring their own creativity to the piece.

An interpreter working in the entertainment industry attested to the necessity of maintaining the timing of the original message, which means the kind of acting where switching between simultaneous and consecutive modes is often the key to successful interpretation.

Overall, Dmitry’s lecture stood out for me in the way that it didn’t focus on the speaker’s biography or achievements, but rather presented a point of view that to many of us may seem novel, yet revelatory. A true educator, Dmitry was able to give us not a set of instructions or best practices, but food for thought, a chance to reevaluate our craft in order to become true artists.

Whether you had the opportunity to attend the Greiss lecture or not, I highly recommend visiting Dmitry’s YouTube channel and website, which are a treasure trove of valuable information, guidance and tips for translators and interpreters, as well as interesting discussions and interviews often presented in a lighthearted and fun manner.

Dmitry Buzadzhi, PhD, is currently Visiting Professor of Translation and Interpretation at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. A graduate of Moscow State Linguistic University’s School of Translation and Interpretation, he went on to teach in and ultimately head the English Translation and Interpretation department. He is an active translator and simultaneous interpreter, literary translator, and co-creator of the Перевод Жив YouTube channel and <http://thinkaloud.ru/> website.

Svetlana Jacobs (née Beloshapkina) is a trained English and French into Russian translator and interpreter, currently working as a localization producer in the streaming media technology industry. She is a former member of *SlavFile*’s editorial board.

Notes from the Administrative Underground

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya, SLD Administrator

It's been months, and I'm still thinking back fondly to October and the excitement of the Annual Conference. How refreshing to come back after two years online and see people in person! Everyone's mileage may vary, but I for one made some exciting and unexpected new connections. I even came away with an idea for a session for this fall and was even more excited when I saw how many different presentation formats there will be at ATA64. I ended up settling on an hour-long session (as a colleague reminded me, "we're going to want to play around with examples"), but I'm optimistic that the shorter formats will be more welcoming to some new presenters. Maybe presenting for an hour feels intimidating, but what about a half-hour? Or just fifteen minutes? I firmly believe that everyone has something to share. Maybe you have enough for half an hour! Or at least fifteen minutes! I firmly believe that *everyone* has something to share—at least fifteen minutes' worth.

Conference aside, the big happening since my last column for SLD and for me personally was the winding down of SLD's practice group for the ATA certification exam. Maria Guzenko and I started the group in 2016, taking advantage of a generous free plan from Slack that had all the features we needed. The first year or two we had very active participation, with up to ten people practicing in a given round, members suggesting texts for practice, and lively discussions after each round of feedback. While the group wasn't for everyone, many of those who did practice with us went on to pass the exam. Gradually, our ranks thinned. But there were always a few people looking to practice, so it never felt like it was time to pull the rug out from under them and move on.

Ultimately, it was Slack that decided the issue for us. That generous free plan that lured us in? Late last year its terms changed: instead of showing us the latest 10,000 messages, it was now only displaying the last three months. Nearly all our past discussions, texts, resources for feedback, and direct message histories vanished. The documents we shared, including the practice texts and input from graders, were now scattered among those of us who served as admins. Combined with the declining interest, this was our cue to wind everything down.

As I assured our practice group members, this is not the end of exam practice within the SLD! Members are welcome and encouraged to set up new practice groups, whether they follow the same format or a different one, with or without SLD's assistance. It was simply time for this iteration to wrap up and move on from Slack. It was also time for me, Maria, and Julia Thornton, who took over the English>Russian channel after Maria, to take a break.

And finally, I have to recognize and applaud the newest SLD volunteer, Mikhail Yashchuk, who stepped up to take over moderating SLD's LinkedIn group (yes, we have one!), and then springboarded from there to updating SLD's logo, which may have been in SLD longer than me. This sort of initiative is always welcome and makes my life as administrator that much easier. Thank you, Mikhail!



SlavFile's Past and Future

Nora Seligman Favorov, editor

SlavFile has existed for more than 30 years. It was founded in the early 1990s by the indefatigable Susana Greiss. Rereading Susana's "Brief History of the Slavic Languages Division" (see the [Winter 2003 SlavFile](#) for the full text), it's striking how much the times and our membership have changed.

Susana herself did not work with any Slavic languages. Having grown up in South America, to which her Russian-speaking parents emigrated from Soviet Georgia when she was 4, she worked primarily in Spanish and Portuguese. However, she "kept hearing complaints" about the work being done by aspiring translators from among the new wave of immigrants showing up on American shores. "They didn't deliver on time, they started a translation and then demanded more money, the work was sloppy, and so on. It bothered me to hear these stories. I wondered how I could identify the good translators, and show the negligent ones how to deal with clients and how I could explain to them what was expected in the American market."

To that end, Susana went on to found what started as a "Special Interest Group" of the New York Circle of Translators, became ATA's Russian Division, and is now our Slavic Languages Division. At an early meeting she "promised to write and distribute a newsletter to keep everyone informed of what we were doing, give our members tips on where to look for work, how to set up a home-based office, provide news on dictionaries, and encourage and organize sessions at ATA conferences." *SlavFile* was born.

Today both our membership and our newsletter look very different. Under the leadership of Lydia Stone (who served as editor during 1996-2021, delighting readers with her epigrammatic "*SlavFile*: Not By Word Count Alone," filled with hilarious intercultural anecdotes, thought-provoking observations about the workings of language, and brilliant poetry translations), the newsletter increasingly focused less on "tips on where to look for work" and more on the substance of translation and interpretation. Our layout editor, Galina Raff, has an even longer tenure with the newsletter, improving its appearance from the second or third issue to the present day.

I remember the excitement with which I read the very first *SlavFile* that landed in my (physical!) mailbox sometime in the mid-nineties. Having never been to an ATA conference, having no friends working in translation, and with the internet in its infancy, I hungrily devoured every word. When I first met Lydia

at the 1998 ATA Annual Conference, she might as well have been a movie star, I was so excited.

When Lydia stepped down as editor, I did my best to fill her shoes (having served as associate editor since 2004). I am particularly proud of my one innovation: the annual Focus issue, which allows our inevitably Russian-dominated newsletter (a reflection of the composition of our membership) to shine a spotlight on a SLOTR (Slavic Language Other Than Russian—an acronym proudly coined by Lydia). Our next issue will shine that spotlight on South Slavic languages.

However, it is time for a new generation to take over. It is a tremendously satisfying experience to put together a newsletter filled with valuable information packaged, one hopes, in entertaining prose, and I hope some SLD member or members will want to take up this project, leaving their personal imprint on the publication. If not, perhaps that is a sign that *SlavFile*'s newsletter format is no longer ideally suited to the task it was designed to fulfill, given all the new communication media available today. The winter 2023-2024 issue will be the last produced under my editorship. I will, of course, be available to help and advise anyone interested in taking over.

Whether under the *SlavFile* banner or in some new form, I look forward to seeing what means of communication and cohesion the up-and-coming generation of our division comes up with.

Nora Seligman Favorov is a Russian-to-English translator specializing in Russian literature and history. Her translation of Sofia Khvoshchinskaya's 1863 novel *City Folk and Country Folk* (Columbia, 2017) was recognized by the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages as "Best Literary Translation into English" for 2018. Her translation of *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* by Oleg Khlevniuk (Yale, 2015) was selected as Pushkin House UK's "best Russian book in translation" for 2016. She serves as translation editor for *Russian Life* magazine and took over as chief editor of *SlavFile* in 2021 after Lydia Razran Stone's retirement. She can be reached at norafavorov@gmail.com.



A Succession of Somnolent Souls

An Interview with Larry Bogoslaw

Interviewed by Nora Seligman Favorov

Congratulations on the recent publication of your translation of Alexander Veytsman's poetry, *A Succession of Somnolent Souls* (M-Graphics, Boston: 2022). In the book's introduction, you mention hearing Veytsman recite his poetry in 2015 at the Compass Poetry Translation Awards ceremony (at which, though you modestly neglect to mention it, you received first prize in a competition involving translations of the poet Arseny Tarkovsky). Was that your first encounter with the poet? Please share with our readers the story you tell in the introduction about what captivated you in Veytsman's work.

Thank you, Nora, for your kind words and for sharing the detail about my winning the Compass Award. Alex Veytsman was the coordinator of the competition that year, which meant that he was the one who notified me personally that I had won. Not only that, but he took into account my personal schedule when he arranged the award event at Poets' House in New York City. I didn't know at the time that he was a published poet himself, so it was a pleasant surprise to me when he read a couple of his own poems as part of the ceremony.

And they were so good! The first one impressed me in two ways. First, it was well suited to the occasion in that it affirmed the abiding value of the written word to preserve art and memory. Second, it contained a reference that only poetry nerds like me might have recognized. It was in the lines:

а Моцарт в птичьей гамме
летит, попутно рассекая облака

The literal meaning is: "and Mozart in the scale of birds / flies, slicing through clouds on the way"—which is an interesting image. But the secret message hidden in the phrase в птичьей гамме struck me almost like a bolt of lightning from Tyutchev's 1830 poem "Весенняя гроза" (Spring Thunderstorm), which contains the line В лесу не молкнет птичий гам ("in the forest the din of birds does not fall silent"). With just one added syllable—*gam* to *gamma*—Veytsman had brought

together two eras, two nations, two forms of art. Of course, such a play on words would be untranslatable, I thought—and yet, at the same time, I was fascinated by the challenge. So, after the ceremony, I asked Alex if he would consider letting me translate that poem into English.

So that's how it all started! What can you tell us about the process of working with Veytsman? How did the idea come up to do a whole book?

Well, from the very beginning he was patient, generous, and accommodating. For example, he didn't just send me a copy of the Mozart poem—he emailed me the electronic file of the entire collection it came from, which is called *Лето, взятое в скобки* [A Summer In Parentheses] (Stosvet, 2011). I read the whole thing and realized it was full of well-crafted poems that were worth translating. I started with a handful that were my favorites and emailed Alex draft translations starting in the summer of 2015. He liked them, suggested small changes here and there, and gave really helpful answers to questions I had about word choices, style, and subject matter. This process of consultation, which was quite harmonious and instructive, made me appreciate the depth of almost every poem he wrote—each one informed and inspired by history (both factual and apocryphal), as well as culture and the arts. So I kept diving deeper and deeper, drafting more and more translations.

During a vacation to Arizona in 2016, I worked through a good chunk of the collection, including the title poem, which has as its "background" Chopin's Nocturne in E Major. Such a captivating piece! I remember spending part of one morning sitting on a hillside overlooking the Sonoran Desert, listening to that piece over and over on my phone. (The translation of that poem ended up being the first one we got published, a few years later, in the arts-and-letters journal *East on Central*, Volume 18.)

It was later that year, 2016, after I had revised that chunk of translations and sent them to



Alex, that he suggested we try publishing a book. By then I felt very committed to his work, so of course I said yes, although we had no idea who would take a chance on a relatively little-known poet and completely unknown translator. But we continued our process of drafting, consulting, revising, until I had produced English versions of nearly every work in the *Jemo* collection, as well as eight or nine poems he had published more recently in various journals. Along the way, we got three poems and translations published in Nina Kossman's online EastWest Literary Forum in 2021. Shortly after that, Alex wrote me with the great news that he had found a publisher for our book. That was when I realized I'd better write an introduction quickly, which I did in January 2022. And then, before I knew it, we were going through proofs of the layout!

The book has some interesting design features, in terms of how its bilingualism was handled. There is a vast world out there (and most readers of *SlavFile* belong to it) of people who know both Russian and English but are more comfortable with one or the other. Everything from the title pages to the author's and translator's introductions in two separate languages and the two separate indexes seems to reflect a rather original and practical approach that recognizes the complex nature of the book's audience. Was there much debate about this design? Were you copying this format from some other recent publications or just visualizing an audience and meeting its needs?

From the very start, Alex and I both envisioned a bilingual collection, so that readers who knew Russian could appreciate the poems in the original and also appreciate the choices made in the translations. For readers without Russian, I even considered at one point including an interlinear gloss of each poem alongside its polished "literary" translation, to make the whole process more transparent. Eventually we decided that was impractical, so instead I used part of the introduction to gloss two of the poems and explain some of the decisions involved in translating them. As for the front matter, it was Alex who worked out with the publisher what components would appear in Russian and/or English.

In the introduction you write at length about your decision to preserve the rhyme and meter of Veytsman's originals, stating: "Veytsman's choice to use canonical rhyme and meter in itself attests to his reverence for the Russian poetic tradition. To discard

those compositional elements would be to discard part of Veytsman's role in that tradition." Did you get the sense from the poet himself that his work should be translated that way?

Actually, Alex set no parameters for how his poems should be approached. He gave me total choice in poetic structure, as he recognizes that free verse has been the standard for English poetry for over a hundred years. In fact, when he writes poetry in English, he uses free verse. But for me, it was obvious from the beginning that the translated poems should follow the meter and rhyme of the original. Besides the reason you cited above, there's the issue of poetic process, which has become very important to me over the years. Even if my poetic product does not measure up to the technical achievement of the original, I consider it my duty as a translator—as well as a great pleasure—to pursue the process of making poetry. Those who translate and interpret professionally sometimes talk about taking on the role of the writer or speaker: learning to talk like a doctor or argue like a lawyer. I look at literary translation the same way: like the original poet, you go through the process of seeking the right phrasing, the right rhythm, trying out fresh possibilities over and over again until the poem sounds right.

As part of that process, you also write about the work that went into conveying Veytsman's imagery, which is often rooted in history, art, and music "not always self-explanatory to the non-Russian reader." Can you give an example or two of what was undoubtedly a long and thoughtful process of achieving at least potential clarity for the Anglophone reader while maintaining the subtleties of the original?

There are so many examples, but I'll cite just two that appear in the introduction. The first one gives an idea of how far back Alex's imagination goes into history. There's an amazing part in his cycle "Puerto Rican Diary" where the poetic narrator describes swimming through a cove at night and imagines a mythic underworld beneath the surface populated by ancient Greek scholars. A plain translation of the Russian lines looks like this:

And onward – gazes fated never to see the light...
And ears that hear just one
And the same thing: from Plato, Diogenes.
And the profile of Ptolemy,
And the silhouette of Euclid.

These juxtapositions seem unmotivated, even to American readers well versed in literature—not just me but others I asked who are better informed. When they too were at a loss, I searched the annals of literature and eventually found that all of these figures are named in Canto IV of Dante’s *Inferno*. There the central figure is Aristotle, whom Dante doesn’t name but denotes with the phrase “maestro di color che sanno” (master of those who know). In my translation of Alex’s poem, I offered readers the added hint of Dante’s words, as well as explicit connections between the other philosophers:

And ears attuned to the master of those who know
who learned from Plato and Diogenes
and charted the course to Euclid and Ptolemy.

When it came to Soviet-era references, I sometimes asked Alex for extra help. For example, in the poem he read at the award ceremony, there are two lines that translate roughly as: “Now Stalin thinks again of going out to see *The Turbins* on a free evening.” Well, I recognized the literary reference per se, because I had read Mikhail Bulgakov’s play *Дни Турбиных* (Days of the Turbins) in graduate school. But what did that have to do with Stalin? Here is the backstory that I put together from correspondence with Alex, supplemented by some cursory research: Bulgakov’s play opened in 1926 but was soon canceled under criticism by the Soviet press. After all, the eponymous protagonists are enemies of the Soviet regime—an

anti-revolutionary family in Ukraine during the Civil War. It was only through Stalin’s direct intervention that the play reopened in 1932, and word has it that he saw it many times during its long run, which lasted until 1941. Of course, it would be hard to cram these historical details into the middle of a poem, but at the very least I decided not to foist the name “Turbins” on English readers. Not only would they probably not recognize the reference, but they wouldn’t know to stress the word on the second syllable. To make the meaning more transparent, as well as to highlight the odd irony of Stalin’s fondness for the play, I used the phrase “White Guards,” which was the title of Bulgakov’s novel on which he based the play. So those lines came out as:

Now Stalin thinks of going out to see White Guards
again after a busy day.

This is just one of several meaningful allusions that Alex fit into that one poem.

I’m sure you have many fellow “poetry nerds” among *SlavFile* readers. I encourage them to spend some time with your book. Both Veytsman’s originals and your translations offer a marvelous mental playground for bilingual Russian<>English lovers of exquisite poetic imagery, and intriguing semantic connections between different cultures, times, and places.

Вот зеркало, в котором были счастливы с тобой мы зря; которым плавно создавалось марево из октября; которое хранило душу выкреста и дар прощать; к которому я припадал в неистовстве, но видел мать.	Here’s the mirror where we watched our happiness dissolve in vain; where a fused mirage was gently fashioned from October rain; which safeguarded a convert’s soul and blessed it by the gift of grace; toward which I flew in rage but was arrested by my mother’s face.
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Alexander Veytsman writes poetry and prose in both English and Russian. His original poems, translations, short stories, and essays have appeared in more than 50 publications worldwide. A graduate of Harvard and Yale universities, he lives in New York City.

Annual Meeting Minutes

The American Translators Association Slavic Languages Division

October 1, 2022

Held online via Zoom

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya, Administrator; Steven McGrath, Assistant Administrator

1. The meeting was called to order shortly after 1:30 PM ET.
2. The agenda was accepted with no changes.
3. The 2021 Annual Meeting minutes were accepted with no changes.
4. Eugenia and Division members presented an overview of Division events over the past year.
 - a. Report on *SlavFile*
 - i. Editor Nora Favorov reported that three issues had been published since the last meeting: a winter, a spring (with a special focus on Polish in collaboration with the ITI Polish Network), and a summer-fall combined issue. The Polish issue was a success, and the plan going forward is to continue making each spring issue a focus issue. The next spring issue will focus on Interpreting. Nora announced her intention to step down as chief editor in 2023, after which she is hoping a younger SLD member will take over.
 - b. Report on blog
 - i. On behalf of blog editor Marisa Irwin, Eugenia reported that the blog has continued publishing articles from *SlavFile* in addition to other articles in its membership profile track. Anyone who has an idea for something to contribute was invited to get in touch with Marisa.
 - c. Report on SLD Podcast (*Slovo*)
 - i. Eugenia reported that Halla Bearden had taken over the podcast and that it continues to publish new episodes. Suggestions for speakers and topics are welcome.
 - d. Report on SLD networking sessions
 - i. Steve McGrath reported that three Zoom networking sessions had been held in 2022 (January, April, and July), each with attendance of about 12.
 - e. Report on website, online forum, and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)
 - i. Eugenia reported that the division's website and online communication channels remain open. The website is maintained by Eugenia; Julia Thornton runs the online forum; Anna Livermore runs the Facebook group; and Maria Guzenko runs the LinkedIn group. Elizabeth Adams has taken over responsibility for the Twitter account. Eugenia invited members to contact Elizabeth about the opportunity to be featured in a member spotlight.

- f. Report on SLD ATA Certification Exam Prep Group
 - i. Eugenia reported that the group continues to operate, with her and Julia Thornton as administrators.
 - g. Report on legal webinar
 - i. Eugenia reported on Tom West's September 22 webinar on legal translation from Russian, which was a Law Division initiative supported by SLD. The webinar received very positive feedback.
- 5. New Business for 2023
 - a. ATA's 64th Annual Conference (Miami, FL, October 25-28, 2023)
 - i. Ideas were solicited for Distinguished Speaker recommendations and session proposals. The online proposal submission form typically opens February 1. Members were encouraged to contact Eugenia if they had any questions about the proposal process. There was a suggestion to ask members local to Florida for potential speakers.
 - ii. Nora leads the search for the DS and mentioned Andrey Pominov, the founder of the online crowdsourced dictionary Multitran, as a potential candidate but said that recommendations of speakers specializing in languages other than Russian would be especially welcome.
 - b. Nominating Committee for 2023 Elections
 - i. Two SLD members who are also voting members of ATA or willing to undergo active member review to achieve voting status are needed to serve on the nominating committee. Elections for administrator and assistant administrator will be held next year. Eugenia and Steve are ineligible for reelection due to term limits. Tom Fennell and Ana Biskup were nominated to serve on the nominating committee and constituted by acclamation.
- 6. Call for feedback and suggestions from the members
 - a. Eugenia made an announcement about the division off-site event at ATA63, a dinner at the 10e Restaurant, and reminded people to RSVP if they were going to attend in person.
- 7. Call for newcomers to introduce themselves
 - a. Four new members were present and introduces themselves: Gosia Wheeler, who translates from English into Polish; Tamara Hoard, who works from Russian into English and from Korean into English; Ana Biskup, based in Croatia, who works between Croatian and English and from French into Croatian; and Elena Fradkin, who works between Russian and English.
- 8. The meeting was adjourned.

“You Let Me Down” (Ти ж мене підманула)

Ukrainian Folk Song (Traditional)

Translated by Larry Bogoslaw

After the SLD Dinner at ATA63 in Los Angeles, a few SLD members got together in one of the many nooks and crannies of the Bonaventure Hotel to partake in a longstanding SLD tradition: the Slavic Singalong. Thankfully, we have two guitar players—SLD administrator Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya and Larry Bogoslaw—able and willing to accompany our blend of naturally endowed and less-so voices. At the singalong, this traditional folk song was sung in Ukrainian. It was an ideal pick, since even those of us who didn’t know it were eventually able to join in on the chorus. The following evening, at the After Hours Café, Larry performed the following translation of this song.

Ти сказала: в понеділок Підем разом по барвінок. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Monday you said you’d be fine To meet me for a glass of wine. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів: Ти ж мене підманула, Ти ж мене підвела, Ти ж мене, молодого, З ума-розуму звела!	CHORUS: You lied and stood me up, You went and let me down. You drive me so crazy That my head is spinning round.
Ти сказала: у вівторок Поцілуєш разів сорок, Я прийшов – тебе нема, – Підманула, підвела!	Tuesday you told me your wishes, Said you’d give me forty kisses. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів	CHORUS
Ти сказала: у середу Підем разом по череду. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Wednesday you and I were talking, You said we would go out walking. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів	CHORUS
Ти сказала: у четвер Підем разом на концерт. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Thursday you said you would call To meet me at the concert hall. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів	CHORUS
Ти сказала: у п’ятницю Підем разом на вербицю. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Friday you said that you will go Meet me underneath the willow. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів	CHORUS
Ти сказала: у суботу Підем разом на роботу. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Saturday you gave your word to Meet me on the way to work. I show up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.
Приспів	CHORUS
Ти сказала: у неділю Підем разом на весілля. Я прийшов – тебе нема, Підманула, підвела!	Sunday morning we were getting Ready to go to our wedding. I showed up, you can’t be found. You stood me up, you let me down.



Larry performing at the After Hours Café at ATA63.

Photo: Nora Seligman Favorov

“Anticipation in Interpreting”

Presented by Dmitry Buzadzhi

Reviewed by John Riedl

From the start, it was clear that “Anticipation in Interpreting” was going to be a good presentation. With his casual demeanor and self-deprecating humor, Dmitry Buzadzhi, a professor of interpreting at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, immediately put his audience at ease and assured the room that he knows his topic well. Dmitry Buzadzhi’s sessions were a highlight of ATA63.

In his introductory remarks, Buzadzhi reminded the audience that six minutes of speech is equivalent to two standard pages of oral text. There is just no way that oral interpretation can be as good as high-quality written translation.

The formal session began with a quote from Russian and Soviet linguist Gely Chernov:

“The essence of our hypothesis is that, in the process of auditory perception of the original speech, the interpreter’s brain produces hypotheses on possible logical or verbal developments or conclusions of the speaker’s intentions. The construction of such hypotheses is based on a subconscious subjective assessment of a priori (objective) probabilities in the further development of a given verbal or logical situation.”

In short, anticipation of an argument’s development is critical to the work of an interpreter. In this reviewer’s opinion, however, these words and the presentation itself apply equally well to translators,

who use anticipation to build cohesion and structure into their translations.

After the quote, Buzadzhi drew on his experience interpreting for Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to illustrate the importance of understanding the communicative situation: who, where, when, for whom, about what, and for what purpose. Indeed, anticipation happens at multiple levels, from the situational down to the lexical.

The session went on to discuss the communicative structure (introduction, body, and conclusion) and showed how interpreters can avoid headaches by anticipating such things as potential greetings, acknowledgements, condolences, solemn moments, allusions to the title of the conference/session, and references to recent events. In other words, the more interpreters can anticipate, the more they can focus on the unexpected things that come up. Something as simple as knowing the official title of a prominent guest can preserve mental resources for unexpected or more difficult linguistic tasks.

In one example of the crucial role of anticipation, a quick look at the headlines came in handy for



John Riedl



Dmitry Buzadzhi presenting the Susana Greiss Lecture with a slide showing Tony Robbins’ interpreter (see review p. 1).

Photo: Nora Seligman Favorov.

Published with the presenter’s permission.

Buzadzhi and his booth partner. On the day in question, the news of Steve Jobs' death had broken just before the start of an interpreting session. Buzadzhi had heard the news on the metro to work, but his partner was taken aback when the session began with a reference to this event. Buzadzhi won a friend for life when he quickly updated his partner about the relevant details.

Anticipation is not only crucial to higher quality preparation. There are other advantages as well. For example, an interpreter who can follow and anticipate the course of an argument is prepared for unexpected difficulties such as a strong accent, poor sound, or a speaker who doesn't know how to work a microphone. Such interpreters can also speed up during a presentation and spend more time on anecdotes.

Buzadzhi continued his talk by discussing how to use contextual clues and the logical framework of oral text to anticipate what might be coming next. This framework can take on a variety of forms:

- Cause implies effect
- Effect implies cause
- Concession/Contradiction (implied counterargument)
- Attitude: Is the speaker about to say something positive or negative?

As an example, Buzadzhi provided the following pair of sentences.

“December 2017 marked the 75th anniversary of Enrico Fermi's first controlled nuclear chain reaction. This launched the nuclear age and **set the stage for...**”

In this context, “set the stage for” indicated a cause-implies-effect argument, which was completed with “set the stage for the Manhattan Project to develop the first nuclear weapons.”

Buzadzhi also discussed the corollary construction effect-implies-cause: “Like many of you, we went to church, got there a little early. We ended up sitting in that church for two hours. I **know because my little girl** ... asked me about every five minutes about how much longer we had to be there.”

At the end of his talk, Buzadzhi described students who have the makings of good interpreters. In his opinion, promising students can anticipate omitted content when given paragraphs with missing words or phrases. Other students, in contrast, may speak their A and B languages very well but have difficulties anticipating the flow of spoken text. When interpreting, wrong expectations are better than no expectations.

Reflecting on this session, this reviewer is reminded that linguists, whether interpreters or translators, cannot just mechanically process the oral or written texts that we translate. Rather we must actively engage with our speakers/authors/topics in order to achieve the intended linguistic purpose. Anticipation can help us achieve this task.

Dmitry Buzadzhi, PhD, is currently Visiting Professor of Translation and Interpretation at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. A graduate of Moscow State Linguistic University's School of Translation and Interpretation, he went on to teach in and ultimately head the English Translation and Interpretation department. He is an active translator and simultaneous interpreter, literary translator, and co-creator of the *Перевод Жив* YouTube channel and <http://thinkaloud.ru/> website.

John Riedl is a freelance Russian>English translator and chair of the ATA Certification Program's Russian>English group. After receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees in engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he worked as an electrical engineer for several companies, including GE Medical Systems. He left the corporate world in 2002 and taught seventh grade math for two years as part of the New York City Teaching Fellows Program. He has been translating ever since he completed the University of Chicago's Translation Studies Certificate Program in 2006. He would like to express his appreciation to Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya for sharing her excellent notes from this presentation with him.



Dmitry Buzadzhi drew large crowds for both his talks.

Photo: Nora Seligman Favorov.

A Newcomer's Experience at ATA63

by Tamara Hoard

My decision to become a professional translator was made less than a month before the ATA Annual Conference. With my membership card at the ready, I traveled from my small mountain town to Los Angeles.

This being not only my introduction to the world of translation and interpretation but also my first conference, I was determined to maximize my time. I arrived Tuesday evening so that I could attend two AST courses the next day. As I looked out the taxi window at downtown LA, I was struck by the similarities between Los Angeles and Oz.

The Westin Bonaventure Hotel lobby was confusing with its circular layout and multiple futuristic towers, but after only a few walks around the perimeter I found the elevator that would take me to the 28th floor. Looking through the elevator glass at the surrounding skyscrapers became one of my favorite little rituals over the next four days. In my hotel room, I gazed out of the floor-to-ceiling windows at the city and thought, "Wow... I should go to conferences more often."

The next morning found me circling the lobby again, looking for the first Advanced Skills and Training session room. The hotel was filled with people engaged in conversation, and from the perspective of a newcomer, it looked an awful lot like everyone knew each other already. Walking down the hallways, I felt that if I could talk to even one person this week, it would be a miracle. The "newbie" ribbon on my badge seemed like a scarlet letter, and while I later appreciated its utility as a conversation starter, at the time it felt horribly unjust.

But my chance to network was soon to come. Halfway through the morning session was a coffee break, and I learned then that the coffee breaks were some of the best times to meet new people. It was surprisingly easy to start up conversations with other attendees: I would introduce myself and ask how they entered the profession, what they specialized in, and what they were working on now. The coffee breaks were almost as valuable as the sessions themselves.

It was during the afternoon AST session that I felt a premonition. I had spent hours before the conference researching how to prepare for it. One piece of advice that I wrote down but evidently did not internalize



was, "Do not overload yourself by attending every session, event, and networking opportunity," but that was exactly what I ended up doing.

The morning AST session was about translation, but the afternoon session was about interpretation, a sphere in which I had no experience. As I sat there trying to interpret English into Russian, I began to doubt that I knew any language at all. I left the course feeling like my head was swimming its way up to the

28th floor. For beginner translators or interpreters—not first-time attendees, but novices in the profession—I recommend sticking to one type of AST course, because three hours of practicing a totally new skill was more frustrating than I expected.

I walked straight from the afternoon session to the Buddies Welcome Newbies event, followed immediately by the Welcome Celebration. Both events were fun, but the Welcome Celebration was especially interesting because I met my fellow Slavic Languages Division members. I had attended virtual division meetings before ATA63 (something I strongly encourage newcomers to do!), so seeing familiar faces made me feel like I, too, belonged at the conference. The biggest impression I got from the first day, which thankfully did not change but instead became stronger as the week went on, was that the translators and interpreters at ATA are friendly, welcoming, easy to talk to, and happy to share their knowledge with beginners. This realization is what makes me excited for future conferences!

The next day I stuck to my "Never waste a moment" mantra with almost fanatical zeal. If I rested at any moment between 9:00 and 18:00, it was unintentional. I went to three sessions, two of which were my absolute favorites of the conference: the SLD's Greiss Lecture, "Translation and Interpretation as Acting," and the Korean Language Division's "Collaborative Translation" (I had lived in Korea for two years and studied the language). Both gave me an entirely new perspective on the philosophy and methodology of translation.

Between sessions I visited the Exhibit Hall and the Book, Podcast, and Blog Fair. The Exhibit Hall was a good place to chat with people associated with the T&I

industry—such as CAT tool representatives and website designers—and even with some prospective employers. In the evening I attended the Stronger Together Networking event; I had been told ahead of time that the scheduled networking events were great for meeting people, and that proved to be true.

I had a wonderful time at the Slavic Languages Division dinner and sing-a-long, but was absolutely exhausted by the time I came home. Convinced that I would feel this tired forever, I collapsed into bed.

Friday was the second official day of the conference. By this time I felt completely in my element vis-à-vis the daily routine, the ATA atmosphere, and the hotel floor plan. Of the four sessions I attended, the one I enjoyed the most was “Secret Sauce to ‘Success’ in Working with Language Services Companies.” The advice from agency owners and project managers was helpful, and it was especially interesting to hear about the audience members’ experiences working with language services companies.

Weary once again but determined to push on, I went to the Job Fair: all my hopes of finding in-house work with an agency were pinned on it. I came away with a few promising leads, but mostly with the conviction that the beauty of the conference was in meeting new people via sessions, coffee breaks, and networking events, not in spending even half an hour at the Job Fair.

After three days of nonstop conference events, I woke up on Saturday a shadow of my former self. I stayed in all day, mentally kicking myself that I had not followed the advice of my elders when they said to allocate time for rest.

I boarded the plane back to Colorado, tired but full of new ideas. Upon reflection, my advice for ATA conference newcomers, and for myself in the future, is:

1. Avoid filling up your schedule with an activity for every hour.
2. Plan to spend most of your energy on meeting people and networking instead of attending every session known to man.

Exhaustion notwithstanding, I had an incredible time at ATA63. Meeting my fellow members of the Slavic Languages Division and learning more about our profession was amazing. I look forward to keeping in touch and seeing everyone at upcoming ATA conferences!

Tamara Hoard recently embarked on a career as a Russian to English translator. A heritage speaker of Russian, she graduated summa cum laude with a degree in International Relations and Russian Language and Area Studies. Her passion for languages (and high-quality skincare products!) led her to South Korea, where she taught English as a Second Language to rowdy but lovable elementary school students. The ATA conference inspired her to search for an internship in the T&I industry. She is currently working as a translation project manager for an agency and enjoying it very much.

Call for Submissions on South Slavic T/I

In keeping with our fairly recently established tradition of devoting spring issues to a particular Slavic language or field, our next (spring) issue of SlavFile will focus on South Slavic languages. We have a number of excellent submissions in hand or promised, but more are still being accepted. If you have an idea for an article, dictionary review, glossary, tale of translation or interpretation woes, deep dive into a troublesome term, or profile related to any of the South Slavic languages, please contact Nora Favorov: norafavorov@gmail.com.

“Americanisms: To Use or Not to Use? (Американизмы, нужны ли они?)”

*Presented by Svetlana Ruth
Reviewed by Larry Bogoslaw*



Svetlana Ruth, a certified Russian medical interpreter and licensed interpreter trainer, started her presentation about Americanisms on a poetic note, displaying the following lines on screen:

...Я вам, сэр, назначаю апойнтман.
Вы знаете, кажется, мой апартамент?
Тудой пройдете четыре блока,
потом сюдой дадите крен.
А если стриткара набита,
около можете взять подземный трен...

When she asked whether anyone in the room recognized them, only one or two hands went up. It turns out that these verses are not a contemporary diatribe about how English jargon is destroying the noble Russian language—this litany of Russified borrowings is actually nearly 100 years old! The lines are from Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poem “Американские русские,” which parodied the speech of Russian immigrants that he heard during his visit to New York in 1925.

Thus, the Russian language is well acquainted with so-called “Americanisms”—which Svetlana defined as follows, citing T.F. Yefremova’s dictionary: words, expressions or phrases that display marked characteristics of the version of the English language used in the United States or are borrowed from that version of English. According to Svetlana, Americanisms are found in all languages, especially (British) English, and they are just as frequent in Russian. Some of these Russian borrowings are technical terms, and others are used in all walks of life.

Svetlana gave a few current examples drawn from her experience as an interpreter in Oregon, where Russian immigrants use loanwords based on common English terms like **welfare**, **apply**, **benefits**, **book** (as a verb, meaning “to reserve”), **screen**, **slice**, and **pound** (unit of weight):



- “Сходи на **вэлфер**, там можно **апплаивать** на **бенефиты**.”
- “Вы уже **забукали** номер в отеле?”
- “Скиньте мне **скрины** переписки.”
- “**Наслайсайте** мне **пол-паундика** колбасы.”

Some Russians—not only linguists, but members of the general public—are worried by the fact that many Americanisms are crowding out their Russian equivalents. This worry, like the very phenomenon of foreign loanwords, is nothing new: Svetlana pointed out that from time to time there have been a number of attempts to “purify” the Russian language. Then she raised the question: Does the contemporary Russian language need protection?

Her own answer is that language is a “self-purifying system” in which borrowings tend to arise when new phenomena occur in real life. So the choice for translators and interpreters is not whether to keep Russian “pure,” but whether to use existing Americanisms or not.

When Svetlana put this question up for a vote, the attendees were about evenly divided between yes and no. Several were ambivalent. Svetlana then refined the question to ask “when and how” Americanisms should be used in interpreting practice. She explained that Americanisms can be divided into three categories:

1. Those for which suitable Russian equivalents exist. For example: **секьюрити** (security) — охрана, **брифинг** (briefing) — летучка
2. Those that have complex and/or long equivalents. For example: **риэлтор** (realtor) — агент по продаже недвижимости, **зафрендить** (to “friend”) — добавить к списку друзей
3. Those for which NO suitable Russian equivalents exist. For example: **вигвам** (wigwam), **фаст фуд** (fast food)

In order to decide whether to use an Americanism in a professional situation—where key information must be conveyed as effectively as possible—the interpreter must decide quickly whether there is a suitable Russian equivalent for a given concept. To give us a feel for this rapid decision-making, Svetlana distributed cutout sheets containing about 30 Americanisms each; there were three different lists in circulation. Attendees were divided into small groups that shared the same list, and we had just a few minutes to assign each word or expression to one of the three categories above.

On my group's list, we found ready Russian equivalents for about half the items—for example, тренинг (training) has the lexical counterpart обучение, and позитивный (positive) can just as well be expressed as положительный. On the other hand, we noted several borrowed terms that are so specific that they have become part of the Russian language, such as бейсбол (baseball) and файл (file, in the computer technology sense).

The most thought-provoking examples were those for which it was hard to decide whether a Russian equivalent exists, and if so, whether it is practical to use in a professional setting. It turned out that each group had encountered at least one or two such expressions. Here are a few examples that prompted lively discussion:

- вайталс (vitals). This expression can of course be paraphrased in Russian, to the effect of “measurements of basic body functions, such as heart rate, temperature and blood pressure,” but in an urgent situation—e.g., when a paramedic tells a patient in medical distress, “I’m going to take your vitals”—it would be justified to use the Americanism, provided that the patient has had enough exposure to English to understand it.
- смайлик (smiley face). This expression, too, can be paraphrased in Russian—and Svetlana did so humorously, describing it as a stylized graphic depiction of a smiling human face, using dots, parentheses, etc. —but since the phenomenon has become common currency in the digital age, it is preferable to use the concise Americanism.
- митинг (meeting). This is one to be careful with, as it has different meanings for different demographics. When this Americanism entered the Russian language many decades ago, it was used in the sense of “protest event” or

“demonstration.” However, people from the younger generations use it simply as “meeting,” in which case there are several handy Russian equivalents, such as собрание and встреча. Thus, this Americanism should be avoided in an interpreting setting.

These discussions provided an engaging opportunity to highlight extralinguistic factors that play an important role in interpreting, such as the urgency of a situation, the age(s) of the clients, their prior exposure to English, their amount of time living in the US, etc.

Toward the end of the presentation, Svetlana brought up specific problematic situations such as the following:

- The client speaks Russian, but it is not their native language; therefore, their vocabulary may differ from that of the interpreter.
- The client is young and has recently arrived in the US—a combination of demographic factors that leads them to use some Americanisms without actually knowing English.

The overall takeaway from these examples was that the interpreter must be sensitive to such situational factors and be prepared to convey information in a variety of ways, with and without Americanisms.

The idea that Svetlana left us with is that translators and interpreters are, in today’s parlance, “influencers”—each of us has the capacity to make a significant impact on the development of the Russian language.

Svetlana Ruth is a Russian medical interpreter certified by the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters and the Oregon Health Authority. With 30 years of interpreting experience, she is passionate about promoting professional development for interpreters and has offered numerous workshops, seminars, and webinars. In collaboration with the Oregon Society of Translators and Interpreters, she leads discussion groups on ethical dilemmas. She is a licensed interpreter trainer under Cross-Cultural Communications, LLC, and the owner of Svetlana’s Training, LLC. She received the Interpreter of the Year Award from the Oregon Health Care Interpreting Association in 2017.

Larry Bogoslaw (CT, Russian-English, Spanish-English) is a Russian-English grader and also Trainer for the ATA Certification Program. For fun, he likes translating poetry, and just had his first collection of verse translations published: *A Succession of Somnolent Souls*, from the work of Russian émigré poet Alexander Veytsman (M-Graphics, 2022).

The SLD Takes the Stage at ATA63

Nora Seligman Favorov

In addition to the fact that, as ATA President-Elect and therefore conference-organizer, valued SLD member **Veronika Demichelis** presided over the entire conference, three SLD members took the stage at ATA63 when it came time to recognize award-winners.

The 2022 ATA Impact award, which recognizes “a person or entity that has demonstrated outstanding leadership having an impact with ATA through work on a specific project or initiative,” went to SLD member **David Stephenson** for his work with the certification program. Alongside Paula Gordon and the late Marijan Bošković, David was a key player in establishing ATA certification for Croatian twenty years ago. In various certification leadership roles since then, including his current position as Certification Committee chair, he has helped add nine more language pairs to the certification roster (including Ukrainian), and he was also heavily involved in the transition from the former handwritten in-person exam format to the current online, on-demand exam.



David Stephenson with the ATA Impact Award.
Photo: Jeff Sanfacon

Also on stage were SLD members **Jill Neuendorf** (leftmost in the picture below) and **Halla Bearden** (to her immediate right). They both won \$500 scholarships for first-time ATA Annual Conference attendance from the American Foundation for Translation and Interpretation. Jill, who holds a PhD in second language acquisition and Russian and two masters degrees from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, is currently pursuing an MA in Russian>English translation from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Halla, who currently hosts SLD's podcast series, is completing her MA in translation and interpreting at the University of Vienna, Austria. She is ATA-certified for German>English and is working toward passing the Russian>English ATA Certification Exam. It was great having them both at the conference!



Photo: Jeff Sanfacon

ChatGPT: Interview with a Robot

Interviewed by Steven McGrath

Unless you've been limiting your screentime as part of a New Year's resolution (which is an entirely good idea), you've most likely heard something about ChatGPT, OpenAI's highly literate online chatbot. How does this technology work? How will it affect our work as translators and interpreters? Will it kill us all before stealing our jobs, or after? I've decided to get answers straight from the electric sheep's mouth in a series of interviews. The following questions focus on ChatGPT's corpus linguistic and machine translation functionality. I will provide commentary in italics.

What does your software mean for the future of translation?

Language models like ChatGPT have the potential to revolutionize the field of translation by providing fast, accurate and cost-effective machine-generated translations. However, as of my training data, it is still important to note that while these models have made great strides in the quality of their translations, they are not yet capable of fully replicating human-level nuance and understanding. Therefore, it is likely that they will continue to play a complementary role to human translators for the foreseeable future.

Well, that's reassuring—all except for that “as of my training data” part. While chatting, it's easy to forget that these fluid, grammatical, coherent sentences are springing out of seemingly nowhere. Even the best machine translation engines can't turn the highest-quality source text into anything this colloquial.

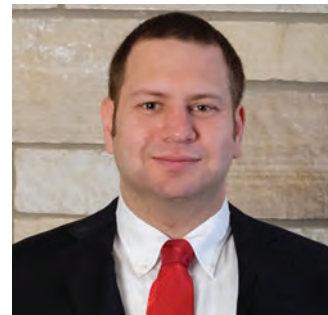
Which engine do you use for machine translation?

As a language model developed by OpenAI, I do not use any specific machine translation engine. Instead, I was trained on a diverse range of text from the internet, including websites, articles, and social media, in order to learn the patterns and relationships between words and phrases in multiple languages. This allows me to generate text in various languages, including translations, based on the input I receive.

So, ChatGPT itself is the MT engine. If Google or DeepL gave me that answer, it would have led me to the same unsettling thought: Translations don't just appear out of thin air—and, for that matter, neither do original texts! Where do all these fine words—and their translations—come from?

Do you do corpus linguistic analysis?

As a language model developed by OpenAI, I have been trained on a large corpus of text data, and I can perform various linguistic analyses based on that training. This includes tasks such as part-of-speech tagging, named entity recognition, sentiment analysis, and many others. The goal of these analyses is to identify patterns and relationships in language, which can then be used for various applications, such as generating text, answering questions, or translating between languages. So, in a sense, I do perform corpus linguistic analysis, but my abilities in this area are focused on using the results of such analyses to support my language-related tasks, rather than on generating the analyses themselves.



What sort of text data go into your training corpus?

The training corpus for the language model I was trained on, ChatGPT, is made up of a diverse range of text data, including but not limited to:

- Web pages
- Books
- News articles
- Scientific papers
- Social media posts
- Conversations and dialogue

The data was sourced from the internet and is from a variety of sources and genres in multiple languages, with a focus on English. The aim of this diverse range of data is to enable the language model to be able to generate text that is similar in style and content to a wide range of text found in the real world.

I'm just going to let you, fair reader, draw your own conclusions from that. So, based on “a variety of sources and genres in multiple languages,” what has ChatGPT learned about the corpus?

What is the most common English translation of the Russian word “область”?

The most common English translation of the Russian word “область” is “region.” It is used to refer to a geographical area, typically a subnational division of a country, that is defined by its boundaries and has its own specific characteristics, such as its culture,

economy, and geography. The word “область” can also be used in a more general sense to refer to any area or sphere, such as a particular field of study or activity, and in this context, it may be translated as “domain” or “sphere.”

This is quite cogent, even if it contains the odious “sphere.” But it raises an obvious question:

What’s a good way to distinguish the terms “область,” “округ” and “регион” in English translation?

In English, the terms “область,” “округ,” and “регион” can be translated as “region,” “district,” and “region,” respectively, but each of these words has a slightly different connotation in Russian, and it can be helpful to distinguish between them.

“область” typically refers to a geographical area that is defined by its boundaries and has its own specific characteristics. It can refer to a subnational division of a country or to a particular area within a country.

“округ” refers to a district or a circumscription, often used to refer to administrative divisions within a city or a country.

“регион” refers to a geographical area, but it is typically used to refer to larger regions, such as

regions of a country or regions of the world. It can also refer to a specific area within a country that is defined by its own specific characteristics, such as its culture, economy, or geography.

In general, it’s useful to consider the context in which these words are used when translating them into English, as this can help to clarify their meaning and determine the most appropriate translation.

This answer highlights some key strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT. If you’re collecting entries for a glossary, or if you’re coming up blank while translating a list of similar terms, this functionality might be handy. That said, the bot can’t manage your terminology for you, and it has no apparent prospect of doing so. Intelligence without consciousness has its limits.

Check out ChatGPT for yourself here:
<https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>

Have an idea for future interview questions?
Email me: steven@mcgrathtranslations.com

Steven McGrath is an ATA-certified Russian to English translator who received a Master’s Degree from Lomonosov Moscow State University. He translates material in the humanities and social and natural sciences. Steven lives in Iowa City, Iowa and can be reached at steven@mcgrathtranslations.com (website: www.mcgrathtranslations.com). He is currently serving as the SLD’s Assistant Administrator.

The screenshot shows the OpenAI website with a dark green background. At the top left is the OpenAI logo. To the right are navigation links: API, RESEARCH, BLOG, and ABOUT. The main heading reads "ChatGPT: Optimizing Language Models for Dialogue". Below this, a paragraph states: "We've trained a model called ChatGPT which interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes it possible for ChatGPT to answer followup questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests. ChatGPT is a sibling model to InstructGPT, which is trained to follow an instruction in a prompt and provide a detailed response." A pink button labeled "TRY CHATGPT" with an external link icon is positioned below the text. On the right side, there is a large, stylized graphic consisting of horizontal bars of varying lengths, colored in shades of pink and green, resembling a bar chart or a data visualization. At the bottom left, the date "November 30, 2022" and the text "13 minute read" are displayed.

Slavic Poetry In Translation

Feature Editor: Martha Kosir

VITA ŽERJAL PAVLIN

Translation and introduction by Martha Kosir

Vita Žerjal Pavlin was born in 1963, in Postojna, Slovenia. In 1987, she graduated from the University of Ljubljana with a degree in Slovenian Language and Literature and Journalism and received the prestigious Student Prešeren Award for her thesis entitled “Slovenian New Wave Poetry of the 1980s.” In 2007, she earned her doctorate in Slovenian Language and Literature, and published her research in a monograph entitled *Lirski cikel v slovenski poeziji 19. in 20. stoletja* (*The Lyrical Cycle of 19th and 20th Century Slovenian Poetry*, 2008).

After graduation in 1987, she briefly worked as a journalist and then began her extended career teaching Slovenian language and literature in high school. Between 2008 and 2011, she also collaborated with the department of Slovene Studies at the University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia.

In addition to scholarly articles, forewords, and reviews of poetry, Žerjal Pavlin is the author of four poetry collections to date: *Pljusknem preko okna* (*I Splash Through the Window*, 1982), *Uglaševalni ton* (*Pitch Standard*, 1996), *Široka* (*Broad*, 2013), and *Obrazi* (*Faces*, 2020).

The first two poems selected for this article were written in 2022, at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The third poem was published in Žerjal Pavlin's latest collection *Obrazi* (2020).

The poems speak to the horrors of war and the senseless suffering of the innocent. Žerjal Pavlin's language is poignant, and the imagery pronounced.

The poems center on lives that are plagued by grief and misery, yet the victims are expected to carry on while trying to preserve some humanity in a dehumanized world. Despite relentless uncertainty and anguish, they are to look forward, maintain a goal, and persevere.

Hope remains, as people walk together and look for new routes to sunny locations, discovered through the purity of expectations, in the whiteness of time and place.

Martha Kosir has been contributing to *SlavFile* since 2008 and has served as our poetry editor since 2011. In addition to translating poetry from Slovenian into English, she has done poetry translations from English into Spanish, from Slovenian into Spanish, and from German into Spanish and English. In addition to *SlavFile*, her translations have been published in the literary magazine *Sirena: Poetry, Art and Criticism*, the journal *Contemporary Slovenian Poetry*, *The International Poetry Review*, *The Drunken Boat*, *Solstice*, *Plume*, and *Source*. She has likewise completed translations into English and Spanish of several poetry collections by the Slovenian-Bosnian poet Josip Osti. Her research focuses on translation studies, film, and cultural studies. She works as Professor of Spanish and Program Director for Global Languages and Cultures at Gannon University and can be reached at: kosir001@gannon.edu



Vita Žerjal Pavlin
Photo by Primož Kandare and Alen Milavec.
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The following poems and their translations are being published with the author's permission.

<p>VONJ HIJACINTE</p> <p>I. vonj hijacinte prinese ure nedelje dolgo se žogajo s soncem kako ustaviti vojno ko steče pomlad ne pomaga ptice odletijo trave zgorejo ljudje trpijo norijo od bolečine in zemljevidov zasedenih ozemelj od načrtov premikov umikov naskokov ko je olimpijade konec in ni več nobenega <i>fair playja</i> treba je še vedno jesti spati vstati še vedno ostati človek v razčlovečeni pomladi</p> <p>II. Gibanje, usklajeno z zrakom v vetru: gibko, vedro, gosto kot nenadno ozelenela krošnja (zdi se v pospešenem posnetku, narejenem preko noči). Ne reci, da se te ne dotakne. In nekje, ne daleč, gre vse po načrtu, čeprav se je ta že večkrat spremenil. A cilj ostaja in človeški stroj (hierarhija komand) se ne ustavlja. Nismo ptiči in nagon gnezdenja pritiče le nosečnicam, če jih eksplozije izstrelkov (s poveljniškega mesta od daleč) niso prisilile v beg in so barabe paglavske vsa gnezda uničile. Ker je naseljevanje lastne vrste privilegij oblasti.</p>	<p>THE SCENT OF HYACINTH</p> <p>I. the scent of hyacinth conjures up long Sunday hours they play with the sun how to stop the war as the spring begins it doesn't help the birds fly away the grass is scorched people suffer in madness from pain and maps of occupied territories from planned advances withdrawn attacks when the Olympics are over and there is no fair play left people still need to eat sleep get up stay human in the dehumanized spring</p> <p>II. Movement, in harmony with the air and the wind: flexible, clear, dense resembling a canopy suddenly turned green (as if fast-forwarded, created overnight). Don't say it doesn't touch you. And somewhere, not far away, everything goes according to a plan that changes repeatedly. Yet the goal remains the same and the human machine (a hierarchy of command) does not stop. We are not birds, and the nesting instinct belongs only to pregnant women, provided the blast of missiles (from the command post far away) hasn't forced them to flee and the scum hasn't destroyed all the nests. Because to occupy and inhabit is a privilege of those in power.</p> <p>(magazine publication, <i>Govoriški zapisi</i>, 2022)</p>
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PO MLADOSTI	AFTER YOUTH
<p>Prerojenost sveta je bela. V beli zvok je zlita mnogoterost. Smeh je še mogoč med mladostnimi prijatelji, ko je tako malo našega sveta brez rane. Ko je vsak poseg vanjo medsebojni ugriz. Steklina zastekleni dušo. Kako dolgo se v njej raztaplja led! V osojah ostane. In iščemo druge poti do prisojne lege. Skupaj hodimo in prenavljamo razglede, ki nas vežejo v topel ovoj časa. V belino časa. Iz mnogoterosti naših razpršenih ur.</p>	<p>The rebirth of the world is white. Multiplicity is fused into white reverberation. Laughter is still possible among youthful friends, when so little of our world remains unscathed. When every intervention becomes a mutual incursion. The soul is frosted and glazed. The ice inside is taking forever to melt! It persists in the shade. And we look for other routes to sunny locations. We walk together and restore the views that bind us into a warm cloak of time. Into the whiteness of time. From the multitude of our scattered hours.</p> <p>(from the collection <i>Obrazi</i>, 2020)</p>

Remembering Kim Braithwaite, 1932 – 2022

Liv Bliss

Kim Braithwaite, translator from Russian and Georgian, longtime ATA and SLD member, and occasional contributor to *SlavFile*, passed away in November of last year after a lengthy illness. I was fortunate to be in touch with him by email and phone almost to the end and am honored to be writing this remembrance.



Not being keen on “mob scenes” (read: ATA conferences), Kim may be unfamiliar to many of you. But his lively pieces in *SlavFile* are easily accessed and tell his story better than I ever could. Here they are:

“My Life in Languages: A Translator’s Odyssey,” under the rubric “Translator Profile,” *SlavFile*, Fall 2002 ([here](#))

“The Passing of the Old-Time Translator,” including “The Ballad of John Henry the Translator: A Contest of Man versus MT” First published in the *ATA Chronicle* 1976, reprinted in *SlavFile*’s Spring 2005 issue ([here](#))

“The Unexamined Livelihood: Veteran translator looks back on nearly 40 years of translating,” under the rubric “Lives of the Translators,” *SlavFile*, Spring 2010 ([here](#))

An obituary of Kim first published in *The Salt Lake Tribune* can be found [here](#).

More than a linguist who harbored few, if any, illusions about the glory of our craft, Kim was also an accomplished composer (I have a CD of two of his suites for piano), a brilliant parodist and punster, and an engaging autobiographer whose *A Mormon Boyhood* will forever remain uncompleted. (“You can take the boy out of the Mormon,”

he used to say, “but you can’t take the Mormon out of the boy.”)

But let’s end with a smile (he’d surely prefer that). This is one of my favorite Braithwaite routines, which he updated every year:

Kim to Kindly Lady: It’s my birthday today!

Kindly Lady: And how old are you, little boy?

Kim (holds up 90 fingers): *This* many!