

Interview with Carol Apollonio

SLD's 2023 Greiss Speaker

Interview conducted by Nora Seligman Favorov



Carol Apollonio has been on the faculty of Duke University in various capacities since 1989 and has served as an adjunct faculty member at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (2012-16; 2018). In addition to her experience teaching Russian language and literature and translation theory and practice at Duke for more than two decades, she has interpreted for the U.S. Department of State at high-level arms-control negotiations. Her numerous scholarly publications are primarily related to her two main research interests—Chekhov and Dostoevsky. Her literary translations include three novels by Alisa Ganieva: *Offended Sensibilities*, (Оскорбленные чувства, Deep Vellum, November 2022); *Bride and Groom* (Жених и невеста, shortlisted for the 2015 Russian Booker Prize, Deep Vellum, 2018); *The Mountain and the Wall* (Праздничная гора, Deep Vellum, 2015); and German Sadulaev's *The Maya Pill* (Таблетка, Dalkey Archive, 2013). She will be giving a two-part talk at ATA64 titled “They Have No Idea: Translation Insiders and Outsiders.” Both parts will be delivered Friday, October 27 starting at 2:00 p.m.

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The first ever Greiss lecture was delivered in 1998 by Jonathan Brent, who had spearheaded Northwestern University Press's series on East European and Russian literature but at the time was editorial director of Yale University Press. He devoted some of his talk to the story of how he became interested in Eastern Europe as a child, vividly describing himself listening raptly to rousing Red Army Chorus records. That started a tradition of Greiss speakers (at least the ones who didn't grow up in a Slavic country) relating how they wound up on paths leading to careers in Slavic languages. Can you tell us something about what brought you to Russian language and literature?

Wow, well my first exposure to the Red Army Chorus came later, but I can understand how it could change one's life. For a brief moment recently we had the Russian national police chorus singing Daft Punk's "Get Lucky," but my sense is that now THOSE times are over too. In my case there was a strange matrix of the Cold War, my fascination with language learning, and of course the great wallop of Russian literature with its cursed, unanswerable questions. The idealistic 18-year-old who assumes that there's a Cold War because no one bothers to learn the other guy's language soon grows into an adult with a more nuanced understanding of the forces at work. But let us hope that all of us retain our idealism and that our efforts can make the world just a little bit better. I entered college, and then graduate school, during a fallow time in Russian and Slavic studies (the 1970s-80s), when my study, while touching me deeply, did not seem to offer any hope of practical application, much less a career. So I honed my skills, did some volunteer translation for an émigré publication, and continued to read Russian literature and think deep thoughts in my lonely room. And then, bam, the USSR collapsed, the country opened up, and suddenly there was a lot to do in the real world—outside my own head. There was even demand for people who knew Russian! It has been an exciting ride and I have not looked back (until now). Now, in 2023, we find ourselves in very different and very troubled times. And these times echo in disturbing ways with those in which I began my journey—bringing on a sad sense of déjà vu. I wonder what the 18-year-olds now beginning their odyssey in this strange, troubling world will have to say 40 years from now?

I know you've thought deeply about the question of quality in translation, and I assume interpretation as well. This is a big question, and one I know you'll touch on in your talk, but can you preview your thoughts for us? What, beyond basic accuracy, constitutes quality in translation?

Some of the great artists of translation remain unappreciated. That is because, at least in literary translation, the goal is to convey the work of art, not just the literal meanings of the words amassed in it. And the skills required to get out there and "sell yourself" are quite different from those required to do good translation, sadly. The best translators are not simply those who are fluent in Russian. These are a dime a dozen. Some of my favorite translators were, in

fact, not orally fluent in the language at all, but knew and understood the literature and were able to get it into great English literary language. They had the ear, the sense, the taste, and the necessary sense of measure. I walked the streets of Moscow one time with one of my all-time favorite translators of Chekhov, and realized that the person was unable to carry on the simplest functions in the language. But this does not change the fact that this person remains one of the top translators of Chekhov. Constance Garnett, a language genius who translated some 72 books from Russian, was a book person in a time when one could live in books and not talk. But her readers find themselves in finely crafted works of literature.

All of this is complicated by the market. Obviously publishers need to sell books, and when they commit to a major new translation, they are going to do everything they can to attract readers to it. When there is only one translation, as is usually the case with works by living authors, the question is very different from when a publisher issues a new translation of a classic work of literature. We have been lucky in the 21st century to see many new versions of the Russian 19th-century prose classics. There are at least 13 versions of *Crime and Punishment*, 10 or more *Brothers Karamazov*, at least 10 *Wars and Peaces*, some 12 (?) *Anna Kareninas*, and the list can go on. When it comes to the classics of world drama like Chekhov's plays, it can be hard even to count, as directors, some who know no Russian whatsoever, produce their own translations for performance purposes. But really now, how many translations is too many? Do we need 14 *Crimes and Punishments*? Naturally readers want to know which translation is "the best," because they will be spending their hard-earned money on whichever one they choose. The battlefield is here, where marketers battle for the customer's money. And I'm not convinced that marketing agents really care about some intrinsic excellence of the book they're selling. They just need to convince a customer that their book is the one that they need to buy. The translations I tend to appreciate are not always those that sell. And I think that no, we do not need 14 excellent *Crimes and Punishments*. But we do need at least one excellent one. Like Oliver Ready's for example.

In evaluating translation quality, I am very careful. As a working translator I know how easy it is to find some mistake in a translation, or something that a native speaker might consider a mistake and condemn the whole thing on that basis. I call this form of criticism "ED"—error detection. It is the most primitive, reptilian form of criticism. And yet one deftly placed, primitive ED review can ruin a career. But I do

think there is such a thing as art and craft, it goes well beyond getting the word meanings right.

This is my battlefield. The translations I like offer a finely crafted English-language text that conveys the spirit of the art without violating the content. The differences between Russian and English present a set of predictable challenges to the translator, absolutely rooted in the syntax and grammar. Carrying these over literally into English can be lazy and can produce a clumsy, angular style. Yes, in my talk I will try to give some examples of these kinds of literalisms and offer some solutions. For example, I think that translators too quickly default to verb-adverb combinations (which are common in Russian) rather than sleuthing out the perfect verb that conveys both ("dash" versus "run quickly"—that kind of thing). My ideal translation is one that did not stop at the second or third draft, where you're pretty sure the meaning is correct; it is one that goes through two or three more drafts doing what an author does (word by word, clutching your head in frustration, cursing at the computer, downing coffee after coffee): produce a work of literature.

When translating Russian literature, how do you decide how to handle details in your text that will undoubtedly be confusing to a Western reader with limited knowledge of Russian and/or Caucasian (in the case of Ganieva and Sadulaev) culture and realia. How do you weigh the choice between inserting a footnote, taking a liberty with the text to add clarity, adding explanations to the introduction, or just letting readers figure things out for themselves?

We all grapple with this, of course. I tend to see this as a problem related to editing, rather than translation. A good example is Ganieva's use of vocabulary from the languages of Dagestan (Arabic, Turkic languages, Avar). The easiest part of the translation was simply transcribing these into English! Ganieva provided footnotes with their meanings. But working with the editor, we created a glossary and just presented the words in transcription as they came up. Not a translation problem at all. To me this is kind of funny: you can even do this without knowing what the word means—and it will come across to the Anglophone reader similarly to the way it comes across to the native Russian reader. When dealing with realia, culturally rooted terms, and the like, I often resort to a bit of subtle in-text glossing, a couple words of explanation nested around the word. This is in tune with my own "fluent" translation strategy and indulgence of my reader. Others prefer footnotes and that is a reasonable approach as well, and that is

perfectly legitimate—it depends on what sort of reader the book is being marketed to.

When you teach Russian literature in translation to students who don't know Russian (or know very little), do you bring translation into your discussions, and if so, how?

Most of my classes are taught entirely in English. One of my favorite teaching strategies is to encourage students to read different translations. So except in the case of a few masterpieces (e.g. Rosamund Bartlett's *Anna Karenina*), I tell them to go get whatever translation they want (except for a few on my banned list). It makes for some awkwardness in navigation during class (e.g. you can't just send everyone to the same page when you're discussing a particular passage), but gives enormous payoff in terms of students' understandings of the forces at work in a piece of literature. We do a lot of reading aloud—for example, I will choose a student who is using a translation others are not; they follow along in their text, and hands start shooting up. It's fun, and I will never go back to just using one text. In fact, recently I've been encouraging students who are not native speakers of English to read the text in their own language (this has happened in my classes with Chinese, for example, and Spanish). After all, why foreground an English translation when the original was written in Russian?!? It creates a very nice, level playing field in an environment where non-English speakers often feel insecure. When we're doing close readings, they often have very interesting thoughts to share about how the translator into that language dealt with a particular challenge. I do have to monitor the quality of all the texts students use, though—many online versions are unreliable or abridged. This too becomes a learning experience as they learn to value a book that has been well edited, annotated, scaffolded, and introduced.

I have a view that we can discuss in the hallways or after my talk. This is that a student who has carefully read three translations of a single work will probably have a better sense of that work as literature than a student learner who has worked through the original text, but likely missing entire layers of meaning. And in fact a reader of three translations may have an

advantage over a native-speaker reader for whom some interpretations may be sort of automatic or unreflexive. In short, for those of us here at ATA, this is a very strong message about the value of what we do.

Lastly, as anger toward Russia continues to grow over the violence and misery it has perpetrated through its invasion of Ukraine, how do you see this reflected at the level of higher education? What is happening to enrollment numbers for Russian language courses, including in relation to other Slavic languages? And how often do current geopolitics come into discussions of nineteenth-century Russian literature?

At Duke our enrollments seem pretty stable. I do know that in many institutions they have been fluctuating. So many of us in the field have experienced shock and horror at what we've witnessed in Ukraine; it's been a dreadful time ([here's my statement about the invasion](#)). I think it has affected scholars and professionals in the field more than it has our students, whose attention to current events can be fickle or uninformed. One advantage of being of "a certain age" (which I am) is that we have a lived historical perspective. We have been in a dark period before, that is, the Cold War, with its immanent threat of apocalypse, nuclear war, with its worldwide diaspora of displaced intellectuals and artists. That crisis period (as I said at the outset of our conversation) was what sent me into Russian studies, with a hope of making things better. We're seeing this again, with the added horror of getting daily multimedia feeds of the atrocities going on—in the previous dark period, by comparison, the flow of information was sluggish and limited. Naturally current events affect our discussion of the literary texts we are reading. I am teaching Tolstoy this semester, for example, and we start with *Sevastopol Sketches*—about a Russian war in Crimea. So we do the whole thing: maps, Ukraine, the Black Sea. And ahead looms *War and Peace*, whose treatment of the great Russian people's resistance to the invader reads differently now from when I taught it last time. That said, I die on the hill of literature. If all we do in reading a literary work is find touch points related to current politics, we are missing the main thing—the experience of reading a sublime work of art that, even as it treats such matters, offers a full-body, musical dip into a whole alternative world, a world that is nevertheless the same as the one we live in, but one where we can immerse ourselves in a conversation about human experience, ethics, psychology, philosophy, culture, religion, and the human soul.



Notes from the (Online) Administrative Underground

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya

If you've tried to visit the SLD website in the last few months (and you do visit it occasionally, right?), you may have discovered that the site was down. If after some prematurely celebratory emails from ATA headquarters you tried to visit it again, you may have discovered, once more, that the site was down. Or it didn't look like you expected. Let me assure you: you weren't alone. Not only was it down for everyone; other sites hosted on ATA's servers were down as well.

On behalf of SLD and ATA, I'm sorry. Our primary duty as a division is to connect members and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, and nearly all the ways we accomplish that these days is through an online presence, primarily through our website. The blog was out of commission, there was nowhere to host *SlavFile* or link to the podcast, and past content was unavailable. There was plenty of frustration going around, compounded by a lack of certainty about when functionality would be restored.

So what happened? Suffice it to say that the entire complex structure of ATA-hosted division websites was resting on the shoulders and living inside the brain of one tech-savvy ATA staff member who left in February after around 20 years of service. Twenty years is ample time for website coding to accumulate idiosyncrasies, makeshift solutions, complex work-arounds, and a mountain of technical debt. So when the servers started crashing sometime in March, there was a lot to unravel to find the issue and no one to do the unraveling. The existing hosting service was no help (they provide only hosting), so ATA went back to the web design company that initially set up the websites to sort this out—which they eventually did, but the sorting and resulting solutions took months to complete.

After going through this, and with [the site](#) (mostly) restored, I have a newfound appreciation for the complexity of setting up and maintaining a website, let alone several websites. These are complicated systems with many moving parts, which are often

obscured from view and taken for granted. Using a service like WordPress simplifies some aspects for the users uploading content (like me) but can create a separate set of headaches for the owners and administrators of the entire system. In

the midst of all the server issues, a WordPress plugin particular to our site ran into an error that warped entire pages and even messed with the admin dashboard for the site as a whole. So in the rare moments when the site was loading, it still wasn't functioning properly. It took me hours of poking at it and googling to finally isolate the issue, only to discover that I don't have the permissions to patch the plugin myself. It was only after headquarters finally put everyone in touch directly with Yoko Co, the web design company, that the update went through and pages returned to normal. (Hat tip to Yoko for handling the issue quickly once I raised it and being very pleasant to work with!)

One of the outcomes of this process should be greater stability and faster response times going forward, now that we have professional support and clearer communication between users and system administrators. We should now be safe from another months-long outage. If, however, you run into any further issues, please let me, your SLD webmaster, know right away. And in the meantime, if you have your own website, please consider linking to the SLD home page (or the blog, *SlavFile*, or podcast page). The more websites link to our site, the greater chance the content our members create will come up in searches.

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya has served as administrator since 2019 and stepped down as of the division meeting September 22. She will continue on as the SLD webmaster. She can be reached at eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com



Do you have your own webpage?

Linking to *SlavFile* helps increase the newsletter's visibility and makes it more easily findable by search engines.

As a result, it raises the profile of our contributors and helps others tap into their expertise.

Please consider linking to this issue.



ATA64: Highlights for Slavists

We hope to see many SLD members at ATA64 in Miami. See the [Schedule at a Glance](#) for information about the conference program. Below are some events and presentations we encourage all SLD members to attend. Unfortunately, we have multiple cases where sessions of particular interest to our members conflict with one another. This fact points to the importance of designating your session as belonging to the Slavic Languages track when you submit your proposal.

Wednesday, October 25

Buddies Welcome Newbies

4:45PM - 5:30PM

Welcome Celebration/Opening Remarks

5:30PM - 7:00PM

Division & Special Interest Groups Mix and Mingle

7:00PM - 8:00PM

Thursday, October 26

(041) Two Language Pairs in Time of War: How Two Russian Translators Started Working with Ukrainian

3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Orchard D - Terrace Level

Steven McGrath, CT

Natalia Postrigan

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin began his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Two translators who had been taking a Ukrainian for Russian Speakers class during the pandemic accelerated their studies and began working in the Ukrainian to English language pair. In this session, the speakers will share

their experiences with training to work with two related languages. You may be closer to your next language pair than you think! The speakers will also lead a discussion on the war in Ukraine's linguistic and business consequences for translators of Slavic languages.

Topics: Slavic Languages, Business of T&I

Level : Beginner

Presenting Language: English w/Ukrainian and Russian Examples

(043) Discerning the Meaning of Phrasal Verbs in Poetry Translation

3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Tuttle North - Terrace Level

Martha Kosir

New studies, especially in cognitive linguistics, have demonstrated that the meanings of phrasal verbs are far from arbitrary. What is more, they embody metaphorical meanings that can be quite culture specific. It goes without saying that rendering a text from one language to another requires substantial understanding of the cultural nuances embodied in language. The presentation will begin by sharing several humorous misconstructions of phrasal verbs by non-native English speakers, as they reveal the fascinating aspects of language processing. It will be followed by an analysis of specific examples related to poetry translation from Slavic and Romance languages into English.

Topics: Book and Literary Translation

Level : All Levels

Presenting Language: English

Slavic Languages Division Annual Dinner

6:15 Departure from the lobby of the Hyatt Regency

Come join us for an evening of division camaraderie. Please see announcement on p. X to sign up.

Camila's Restaurant

129 SE 1st Ave, Miami, FL 33131

+1 305-375-0992

<https://www.camilasrestaurant.com/>

After Hours Café

9:30 p.m. – 11:00 p.m

This is an open-mic gathering where translators get to read (and sometimes sing) either their translations or their original works, or simply enjoy the creativity of our many-talented membership. Limited time is allotted for material not in English.

Friday, October 27

(072) They Have No Idea: Translation Insiders and Outsiders, Part I

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Orchard B - Terrace Level

Slavic Languages Division Distinguished Speaker

Carol Apollonio

The speaker will share her thoughts based on over 40 years of experience interpreting, translating, teaching, and writing about translation. She will also reflect on how those outside the industry view translators. Sometimes translators are seen as non-thinking tools, much like computers, and the speaker will share examples of absurdities that can emerge from this mindset. Following these examples, she will discuss how AI tools continue to change the nature of our work, the way AI is perceived by those outside the industry, and how the presentation of our work has been evolving in this strange new world.

Topics: Slavic Languages, Book and Literary Translation, Other T&I Topics

Level : All Levels

Presenting Language: English

(086) They Have No Idea: Translation Insiders and Outsiders, Part II

3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Orchard B - Terrace Level

Slavic Languages Division Distinguished Speaker

Carol Apollonio

The underside of translators' comprehensive knowledge is our awareness of the impossibility of our task. The speaker will discuss features of Russian grammatical, syntactical structure, and stylistic convention that differ significantly from English. A set of specific examples from Russian classic prose and the speaker's own scholarship will be included. When might there be too many versions of a work of classic literature? How can translators overcome the feelings of insecurity that we experience when making impossible word choices? What are our standards for good work? We'll attempt to answer these questions during the session.

Topics: Slavic Languages, Book and Literary Translation, Other T&I Topics

Level : All Levels

Presenting Language: English

Saturday, October 28

(132) Making Coherent English Out of a Pile of Russian Nouns

10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Orchard D - Terrace Level

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya, CT

Russian texts of every register love their nouns, and it can be tempting to recreate them "faithfully" in your translation. But is the resulting noun salad really English? Could there be another way to tackle the onslaught of Russian nouns? In this session, we'll delve into the practical strategies hiding within the fancy term of denominalization, going beyond making verbs out of nouns and taking advantage of all the flexibility and resources offered by English grammar.

Topics: Legal T&I, Slavic Languages

Level : All Levels

Presenting Language: English w/Russian examples

(136) Intrusion. Incursion. Invasion: The Story of a Book Risen from Ashes

10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Tuttle North - Terrace Level

Vladimir Reznikov

Alena Vasilchenko

Intrusion. Incursion. Invasion. Is a book "born, cradled, raised, and brought into adulthood" in the heart of war. Like war itself, it wasn't planned. But the penmanship, the translation, and publication were the speaker's lifesaver of sanity in this sea of fire. The speaker will discuss vital aspects of the publication process, including choosing the right translation team,

working with an English-only editor, meticulous quality control, and getting across the voices of 13 people whose stories are in the book. The speaker will also discuss finding the best agent, doing crazy campaigns to raise awareness, and her mission for writing it!

Topics: Book and Literary Translation, Slavic Languages

Level : All Levels

Presenting Language: English

(188) Handling Foreign Names, Dialects, and Archaic Language in Complex Jobs

4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Tuttle South - Terrace Level

Katarzyna Diehl, CT

The session will focus on handling foreign names, dialects, and archaic language in two specialty books: one focusing on Polish-Jewish relations, Polish-Jewish studies, history, and the economy that will be published in 2023, and another focusing on history, anthropology, and ethnology that has already been published. The speaker will present examples of Polish to English translation and strategies she applied to embrace these labor-intensive fragments.

Topics: Book and Literary Translation, Languages of Limited Diffusion, Slavic Languages

Level : Advanced

Presenting Language: English

A (Semi-) New Team Takes Charge Meet the SLD's New Administrators

Nora Seligman Favorov

After two years as SLD's assistant administrator and four years as administrator, Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya is handing over the reins to Steven McGrath, who has served for the past four years as assistant administrator. I've seen quite a few SLD administrators come and go since I stepped out of that role in 2006 (between 2000 and 2006 I alternated between being administrator and assistant administrator). Eugenia and Steve have been a fabulous team, most importantly by helping our division navigate the ever-shifting social-media waters and maintaining cohesion throughout pandemic-era lockdowns, including via regular Zoom meetups. These virtual gatherings, which were primarily spearheaded by Steve, have proved enjoyable and valuable enough that they are now regular events. In Eugenia's case, she has made contributions to the division extending above and beyond her official duties as administrator.

Perhaps her most time-consuming unofficial contribution was the excellent job she did (together with Maria Guzenko, who first thought up the idea) organizing a set of practice groups for SLD members wishing to work together to prepare to take the ATA Certification Exam. This involved finding a suitable platform for interaction, spreading the word to potential exam candidates working in the Slavic languages, finding passages to work on that met the criteria for actual exam passages (no easy task!), overseeing discussions among prospective exam-takers, and

recruiting graders to answer group members' questions about approaching specific challenges.

Another important contribution—definitely not a duty stipulated in ATA's *Division Handbook*—has been her sharing of her musical talents: in recent years, the mostly dormant SLD tradition of the Slavic Singalong at the ATA Annual Conference has been revived, largely thanks to her (and Larry Bogoslaw's) singing and guitar-playing abilities. Her lovely singing voice and knowledge of Russian campfire classics have definitely been a plus for SLD conference attendees in recent years.

For now, Eugenia has agreed to continue on as SLD's webmaster.

Thank you to Steve McGrath for his willingness to take over from Eugenia and to Natalia Postrigan for joining the ranks of SLD officers by agreeing to serve as assistant administrator. Thanks as well to Tom Fennell and Ana Biskup for serving on the nominating committee, which is tasked with identifying and recruiting suitable candidates for SLD administrator and assistant administrator. As no one else stepped forward to run for those offices, under ATA bylaws, Steve and Natalia have been elected "by acclamation." Their terms began at the SLD Annual Meeting held September 22 via Zoom.

Below, please find Steve and Natalia's candidate statements.



**SLD ADMINISTRATOR:
Steven McGrath**

I am honored to be nominated to serve as administrator of the Slavic Languages Division. The SLD provides an excellent system of collegial support for members, as I have seen as a member and volunteer since 2017. As assistant administrator since 2019, I have worked to continue this fine tradition while helping our administrator to address issues that affect SLD members. I am especially proud of my initiative, starting from the memorable year of 2020, to provide quarterly online networking sessions through the SLD.

My primary goal as administrator will be to engage the SLD's membership to ensure the continuity of volunteer-led resources. It has been our privilege to have hardworking volunteers who offer SLD members the chance to share their experiences, insights and opportunities among colleagues. Our division works best when members are engaged and encouraged to support one another.

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. In 2022, I began working from Ukrainian to English as well. I have translated four books for publication, and my professional interests include journalism and legal translation.

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

Steven McGrath

steven@mcgrathtranslations.com



**ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR:
Natalia Postrigan**

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

I am a linguist, a translation project manager, and an educator who works with the Russian, Ukrainian, and English languages. In addition to translation in the legal and medical fields and interpreting in immigration, family, and criminal courts, I coach and evaluate court interpreters. I also enjoy working with audiovisual content and have recently worked on dailies and documentaries filmed in Ukraine. With an academic background in technology and mathematics, I am keenly interested in computer-assisted translation technologies and machine learning.

For the past five years, I have served as administrator of the New York Circle of Translators, the ATA chapter in the New York area. If elected, I will put my skills to use to support the administrator in growing the impact of the Slavic Languages Division as a go-to place for our multilingual community.

Natalia Postrigan

postrigann09@gmail.com

One Fundamental Flaw of AI

Evgeny Terekhin

When I use machine translation engines like Google Translate or DeepL to save time, I am keenly aware of a question that comes up in my head when I see MT-suggested text: “Hm... it looks sort of okay, but how can I make it passable?” I don’t ask myself, “How can I make it excellent?” Passable seems to be good enough.

To make something passable you don’t need to strive for excellence. If you are just cleaning up after someone else’s work, then obviously, you just improve on what you get. You make it acceptable. But is this “acceptable” acceptable? Does this “passable” even pass?

It depends. If your client just wants to get a feel for the original, then yes, it’s good enough. But will it be good enough, say, for legal, medical, marketing, or literary translations, or any translation at all that aims to be more than “passable”?

With the rise of AI, the internet is flooded with content that is passable but not excellent. What is the difference between passable and excellent?

To answer this question, we need to look at one fundamental flaw of AI that is often ignored. What is it?

Recently, someone sent me AI-generated art and said, “How cool is that?” I looked at it, showed it to my wife, and we both said, “It looks kind of dead.”

It’s so mathematically perfect that there’s no life in it.

I immediately imagined myself seeing that picture in an art gallery hanging next to a Monet. No comparison.

No doubt, AI-generated art is okay in the sense that it looks like art. But it’s not art properly speaking. Because art is not created mathematically. It’s created inspirationally. It has a soul.

AI-generated “art” (or content) may look perfect, but it’s dead because it’s soulless. It cannot have a soul because no one inspired it.

Inspiration is something that comes with having a soul. Furthermore, AI-generated content may seem fine, even perfect, but is it food for the soul? Unless it’s required reading, will any human bother to read it?

I experimented with ChatGPT once, asking it to create a short story based on Russian folklore. It came out fine, readable, passable, and included recognizable



characters that I knew from my childhood, but it was drab and meaningless.

But why? What is the fundamental flaw of AI?

The answer is deeply philosophical, even spiritual—not technical or mathematical.

According to Martin Buber, there are two ways of relating to the world. One is called “I-It,” and the other “I-Thou.”

The “I-It” model involves seeing the world as separate from oneself. It’s literally “I” and “It.” There’s no connection. I am a subject, and the world is an object out there.

I can only observe it from the outside, gather data about it, measure it, and conceptualize it.

In the “I-It” model, we believe we only know something when we have studied it externally by amassing data about it. If I gather all the data about the Sun, I know what the Sun is. If I gather all the data about a person, I know who that person is.

But do I really know that person by collecting data about them? No. I have only created a mental concept of that person based on the data collected and have mistaken that concept for reality.

I have drawn a mental picture based on external data and taken it for reality.

In Martin Buber’s philosophy, this false mode of knowing leads to alienation from the world and from the Self.

The “I-Thou” mode of knowing is not based on collecting data. It’s a relationship. It’s a conscious refusal to objectify anything around me as if it were separate from me. The world is not divided into subjects and objects. It’s one huge Subject. I know everything by relating to everything.

I know my wife by relating to her, not by collecting data about her (although I know quite a bit of data as well, as a side effect). I know my friends by relating to them. I know the subject I am writing about right now by relating to it.

AI is built exactly on the “I-It” assumption. It is data-hungry. It is built on the fundamental human flaw that to collect data means to know. The more data the better. Big data should be Huge Data.

AI mirrors our basic flaw—it objectifies, measures, mathematizes, and conceptualizes. It doesn't deal with Reality. It deals with a concept of Reality. It can't know by relating, and that's why it misses out on life.

AI cannot create life because life is beyond mathematics or statistics. AI can simulate Monet, but there won't be any Monet there. It will be a perfect copy, but the spirit of Monet will be gone.

AI can imitate Russian folk tales or [Tolkien](#), but there won't be any Russian folk tales or Tolkien there. It will be an empty form, a hollow idol. [The form will be there, but the substance will be gone.](#)

Here's what Goethe said in Faust:

The scholars are everywhere believers,
But never succeed in being weavers.
He who would study organic existence,
First drives out the soul with rigid persistence;
Then the parts in his hand he may hold and class,
But the spiritual link is lost, alas!

The "I-It" mode of knowing drives out the spiritual link, and the world becomes [dead, hollow, and meaningless.](#)

Can AI be redeemed?

Not until I drop my "I-It" lens and start relating. AI is our mirror. It will do what we do. If we objectify, mathematize, measure, and predict, it will do the same—ultimately creating a world that only seems full but feels increasingly hollow and meaningless.

If we drop the "I-It" and practice the "I-Thou," eventually, AI will learn to do the same. It will learn to know by relating and grasping the Whole. But at this point, I am not entirely sure if it's capable of that.

Can AI develop a soul? Maybe.

Albert Einstein said:

I think 99 times and I find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me.

If the greatest mind of the 20th century didn't make his ingenious discoveries through the rational process of collecting and analyzing data, how did he make them? He gives his own answer—he stopped thinking, and the truth came to him. I understand it as "I stopped dissecting, analyzing, and mathematizing, and started perceiving (or relating)."

Is it even possible to teach AI to grasp the Whole? We can start with ourselves. Do I believe that to know means to collect data? If so, I will "feed" AI with the same data-hungry philosophy. But if I accept, like Einstein, that true knowledge is revealed, not gained, I will feed AI with inspired texts, inspired art, and inspired science. It seems logical that the more inspired people feed AI with their inspired knowledge, the more AI will become inspired as well (maybe).

Practically speaking, it boils down to this: next time I use AI to create, write, or translate something, what will my goal be? Will I aim at getting a passable text (or image), or will I aim at infusing the piece with a soul?

It's unclear whether a computer program can eventually develop a soul, but it is clear that AI already reflects our present state of consciousness. If I change my mind, it will change its "mind" as well.

Evgeny Terekhin is a Houston-based literary translator, interpreter, and editor specializing in English to Russian and Russian to English literary, IT, medical, and legal translations. He is a member of the Houston Interpreters and Translators Association (HITA), and is ATA-certified for English>Russian. He can be reached at terekhin11@gmail.com.

**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.

Messenger Marketing for Freelance Translators:

How to Leverage it Effectively

Dmitry Beschety

An earlier version of this article appeared in the ATA [Translation Company Division newsletter](#). We thank the TCD for permission to adapt and republish Dmitry's article and encourage you to check out their very interesting newsletter.



Introduction

There are numerous ways to connect with potential translation clients through social media, especially through LinkedIn, Google Business, Facebook or even Instagram. The only problem may be the unavailability of these major platforms in a particular country. That's exactly the case in my home country of Russia, where all these platforms are banned, as well as many VPN services.

And even if I use, say, LinkedIn, accessed via proxy servers as a viable workaround, why should my potential domestic clients have to go through the extra effort involved? Besides, some of my potential clients wouldn't use LinkedIn even if it was available to them. This got me thinking about how else to reach my potential clients via the internet, so I turned to growing messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and others that have become an essential part of the client journey and, in turn, an important channel in both B2C and B2B (business-to-customer and business-to-business) marketing for me as a freelance translator working in the legal field. However, trying to identify potential clients in an ocean of messaging platforms can still feel like looking for a needle in a haystack.

In this article, I will share some simple techniques for translators, whether individuals or companies, to use mobile chat apps to connect with potential clients and promote their translation business. Let's find out!

Do's and Don'ts

While messenger services such as WhatsApp don't offer as many features for promoting translation services as the platforms mentioned above, I don't think an LSP or a freelance translator needs to use all the features of all available tools. Instead, using just a few tools and certain carefully selected features to the fullest can be rewarding in terms of successfully marketing your translation business.

Surprisingly, a messenger can even beat a major platform when it comes to specific features. For example: I don't need to buy a premium subscription to see who has been viewing my status on WhatsApp, so why not update your [WhatsApp status](#) regularly with relevant translation content and then check your viewing stats? (Unlike LinkedIn, WhatsApp doesn't even offer paid services, at least for now.) Your

WhatsApp status update need never be boring, as you can pick a font and a background color, or even record your voice. Both regular WhatsApp and WA Business are good for this, although WA Business is more geared towards working on projects, as it allows you to sort leads and clients according to the status of a project.

In my WhatsApp status, I help potential translation clients by explaining the difference between a translator and an interpreter, a bilingual and a translator, a certified and a notarized translation, etc., and I make suggestions aimed at reducing stress and helping clients get the most out of their translation budget. And, of course, I post my translation credentials and links to my services, explaining their value.

Only people who have saved my number can see my WhatsApp status updates. Satisfied clients quite often do. In my experience, existing clients appreciate such explanations and suggestions, and often reply via direct message asking for more information. They also often return with more jobs or refer me to potential clients who are looking for a legal translator.

In Russia, my first choices among messengers would be WhatsApp and Telegram. Other country-specific messengers may work well too, such as Russia's VKontakte (and possibly WeChat in China, but my Chinese colleagues may have something to say about that).

Both WhatsApp and Telegram allow users to create groups to communicate on particular topics, and the groups where participants may request a translation quote are not necessarily labeled "Legal Translation from English into Russian," which would point to my ideal target audience. However, your target group is just a step away if you use the right keywords to find your clients.

In Telegram, for example, I use the Russian keywords “наши в” (our people in ...) to quickly find Russian immigrant communities in English-speaking countries and specific states or territories. I also looked at Google search data on the most popular destinations for people wanting to move abroad and found that most people planning to leave Russia [aspire to go to the U.S.](#)

Participants in these groups are usually looking for a Russian-to-English translator like me to officially translate the vital records, bank statements, vaccination records, or case descriptions that will be used when consulting a lawyer. And to be found, the translator just has to type a keyword into the search box in the chat list.

My favorite keywords are “перевести” (to translate), “официальный перевод” (official translation), “сертифицированный перевод” (certified translation), “юридический перевод” (legal translation), “переводчик” (translator), “свидетельство о рождении” (birth certificate), and “диплом со вкладышем” (diploma with transcript), which allows me to highlight the chats where a participant might have left their request for Russian-to-English translation services.

Just a few seconds later you’ve got your list of potential customers. Not exactly magic, but it works like clockwork. I go through this procedure twice a day: in the morning in the Moscow time zone, when my hometown wakes up, and in the evening, which is morning in the U.S. Next, I send the people who show up in my search my template messages to introduce myself and offer to look at their source files and provide a quote.

Speaking of don’ts, please follow the group rules and don’t be too “salesy.” Owners create groups for various purposes, offering people the opportunity to discuss and attend exciting events to meet other people, get tips and information about their destination, and do many other things that may have nothing to do with translation services. So be careful what you post and how you word it, otherwise you risk being blacklisted and losing access to potential clients. The right way to communicate is to send a direct message to a potential client, who will usually respond well to a personalized approach. You can also use such groups to promote your services on a (normally) paid basis. What this means is that the owners may use their group as a billboard, especially when they allow participants offering services to pin an advertisement so that everyone in the group can see it. So group owners expect service providers to pay them a reasonable fee when a translation service (or other service) is advertised.

This technique also works in what could be called the reverse direction for translation into Russian. I have recently joined local groups of English-speaking expats and some of the [InterNations Moscow](#) community groups, where I’ve found a number of good clients. They are professionals who have moved to Moscow and need to have the necessary documents translated in order to move their families there as well.

Translation Requests and Sales Funnel Automation

Although I usually check for new translation requests as often as twice a day, the reality is that I sometimes miss the opportunity to provide a quote. Wouldn’t it be great if I could automate this process and continue monitoring even when it’s night in my time zone? If I was able to use the iOS 16.4 settings to automate VPN on/off for LinkedIn and other platforms not available in my country using the local IP address, why wouldn’t I be able to use Python scripts to create a bot to automate checking for new translation requests on chat apps? I think it’s doable, but that would probably be a topic for another article on Messenger Marketing. Or maybe readers of this article could contact me with hints. I would appreciate it.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

The practice of using mobile chat apps to facilitate business and connect with potential clients does pay off, and the technique is easy. First, identify messenger groups where your potential clients hang out. For example, if your target audience is refugees, it would be a good idea to have a clear understanding of their resettlement locations, then use location to search for the local community. Be sure to follow the group rules when advertising your services, then start searching in groups using your selected keywords. Whatever your area of expertise is and whatever your keywords are, just avoid using vague or overly technical words or terms that your potential clients are unlikely to use in describing what you do.

Messenger marketing makes it easier to build a customer base. And messengers have higher open rates, as people are over three times more likely to read a message than to open an email.

Messenger marketing strategies can create meaningful relationships between a translation services provider and clients. However, it is not enough to simply join WhatsApp or Telegram groups and then handle incoming requests. Instead, a translator needs to use messengers intelligently, by identifying the right online communities and creating an effective promotional strategy.

And yes, I completely agree with Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo, the author of *The Online Presence Roadmap – A Practical Guide to Confident Online Marketing for Translators and Interpreters*, who said in a [recent interview](#): “It’s better if it comes from more people than me. Something practical that can help. ... It’s always a good idea to do marketing in different ways!”

Dmitry Beschety is a Moscow-based English-to-Russian translator and interpreter specializing in legal translation and interpreting. He holds master’s degrees in law and in humanities and social sciences, as well as a translation degree. He has experience participating in criminal investigations and prosecutions and has worked as an in-house counsel and legal advisor in law firms. Dmitry’s portfolio includes translation and interpreting work for academia, law firms, and private clients. He has served as a member of the ATA Professional Development Committee and of the ATA Law Division Leadership Council. He can be reached at db@legalxlator.com.

Translating in Time of War

Notes from a Ukrainian Translator

Vatslav Yehurnov

It’s not easy to recall even the most important moments from these 1.5 years of war, but I will try.

On the first morning of the war, I was sitting at my PC, doomscrolling the news, letting friends from all over the internet know that we were more or less safe and OK. My future looked very uncertain for a few hours until morning came to New York. The U.S. news media wanted English subtitles for news footage, and this became a major source of my income for the following months. I warned the agency that I’m not a native speaker of English, but they replied, “Never mind, we’ve got editors for that.” It turned out that knowing Ukrainian, Russian, and our various local vernacular dialects was way more essential for this work than stylistic perfection in English. The footage was mostly interviews with lots of ordinary people from all over Ukraine. The hardest part in an emotional sense was subtitling the videos about Bucha immediately after the town was liberated, especially as I have friends living there.

About a week later, a U.K. agency asked about providing English subtitles for them, so this line of work became even more substantial.

One of my worst fears was that the world would soon forget about our war and move on to some other topics in the news, so I decided to write a sort of diary on Facebook (in English) for a month or so. Eventually I stopped writing, when I saw Ukraine was not going to be forgotten, at least not for the time being.

It was also hard breaking ties with Palex, an international company headquartered in Russia. I had been working for them for 15 long years. Even though they officially proclaimed the company was no longer Russian, the company staff remain in Tomsk, and they



continue to pay wages and taxes there. Knowing that every dollar I earned from them would contribute to the Russian budget was a bit too much for me to continue cooperation.

Still, new clients and new opportunities continued to emerge. In early March of 2022, I was asked to help with Ukrainian translations for the U.K. government, for their Homes for Ukraine visa program. In time, this knowledge helped me find British

sponsors for my wife and two boys. That was a very lucky move, as it spared my family from the electricity blackouts of last winter.

Another thing I got to know during the winter blackouts and power cuts was the amount of work I could do in the four hours when electricity and internet were available. It was like four hours of electricity on and then two or four hours of electricity off. Nevertheless, I managed to survive the winter.

In addition to my regular work, the number of pro bono translations has increased during wartime. At the end of April 2022, our Territorial Defense unit asked me to translate a part of the instruction manual for the famous Javelin anti-tank system. That part was about firing it, so now I know every detail of how to use it.

A good friend of mine asked me to translate FAQ on thermal imaging and night vision devices last summer, as he was tired of explaining the same things over and over. The pan-European [heavy metal fan community](#) has been a highly efficient supply chain for these devices (they’ve sold merchandise, raised money, and sent van-loads of medical supplies, bullet-proof vests, night vision and thermal imaging devices, drones, etc.). The concepts and theory were a bit hard

to grasp at first, but night vision-technology is one of my favorite topics to translate now.

Together with two fellow translators (Mykhailo and Dmytro, thanks for your help!), I also translated some documentation for German and U.S. reconnaissance UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly called drones) last summer. I hear that these same types of UAV are still being used on the front lines. This was a “total recall” experience for me, as many things related to navigation were similar to the topics I studied at the Flight Academy some 25 years ago.

As Western military equipment started to arrive in Ukraine, so did the technical manuals for it. That has brought a lot of paid work to me and the team, but the best part was knowing that my translations would help bring victory closer. Time will tell whether I get to translate manuals for F-16s and ATACMS missiles. The most recent work in this line was *The Ranger's Handbook*. This was the first time my mountain climbing experience came in handy in translation.

I also want to express my warmest gratitude to my professional network of colleagues from all over the world. Thank you, guys, for your support and prayers and for giving a helping hand. Thanks to Sabina, my family is safe from the war in the U.K. Thanks to Daniel I have one of the best clients ever. But if I continued the list of thank yous it would be as long as the rest of the article :) Thank you, everyone!

Now I'm getting ready for winter, and I know it's going to be a tough one. On the other hand, it's much easier knowing that the air defense systems I've translated about are in place.

In closing, I'd like to say just one thing: Keep calm, and please support Ukraine.

Vatslav Yehurnov is a translator from English and Polish into Ukrainian and Russian. Since the war began, he's been providing English subtitles to videos in Ukrainian and Russian for news agencies. He lives in Kropyvnytskyi, a town in the center of Ukraine that sits atop an abandoned uranium mine. He started freelancing during his post-graduate studies at the Flight Academy, became officially registered as a translator in 2007, and passed the ATA Certification exam (English>Ukrainian) in 2014.

SLD's Annual Dinner

Thursday, October 26 | 6:15 p.m.

The SLD plans to continue its tradition of holding an annual dinner at ATA64 in Miami. We hope you can come join us for a Brazilian buffet!

The venue for the dinner is:

Camila's Restaurant

129 SE 1st Ave, Miami, FL 33131

+1 305-375-0992

<https://www.camilasrestaurant.com>

And we plan to leave the conference hotel together on Thursday, October 26 at 6:15 EDT.

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya has graciously agreed to manage ticket sales. Tickets for the buffet will be \$27, which includes tax, gratuity and one free drink. Payments can be sent to Eugenia via PayPal or Zelle using her email:

eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com

Please contact her at that email if you'd prefer to mail a check.

To help prepare an appropriate table, please RSVP by October 23.

Questions and comments are welcome.

POETRY IN TRANSLATION

Lydia Razran Stone



When I was studying for my comprehensive exams in Russian literature in the late 1960s, I encountered a poem by Nikolai Gumilyov called “The Giraffe” that I became so enamored of that I attempted to translate it and actually did so to my own satisfaction. Although I never did take my comps or receive a PhD in Russian literature, I did join ATA and spent a decade translating and abstracting Russian material on space biology and medicine for NASA. During the late 1980s and early '90s I was sent by NASA to Moscow to work with Russian space biologists on joint US/USSR or RF projects. At one point I was riding in a car with Dr. A.M. Genin (the man who had designed the life support systems for Laika) in Moscow and for some reason felt moved to tell him that I had translated this poem and recited it for him. He in turn recited Zakhoder’s “Giraffe” and later gifted me a Russian copy of the poet’s work. I was then hooked on translating a great deal of Zakhoder in my spare time. I discovered and translated a fair number of excellent twentieth-century Russian children’s poems I found online (poems familiar to most *SlavFile* readers). Here are a couple of examples. If you would like to see some more of my translations of Russian children’s poetry, write to me at lydiastone@verizon.net.

Букет котов

Юнна Мориц

У меня уже готов
Для тебя букет котов,
Очень свежие коты!
Они не вянут, как цветы.

Вянут розы и жасмин,
Вянут клумбы георгин,
Вянут цветики в саду,
На лугу и на пруду,

А у меня – букет котов
Изумительной красоты,
И, в отличие от цветов,
Он мяукает в усы.

Что за ушки! Что за лапки!
Всяк потрогать их бежит.
Я несу букет в охапке,
Он дерется и визжит.

Я несу букет котов,
Дай скорее вазу.
Очень свежие коты –
Это видно сразу!

Kitty Cat Bouquet

by Yunna Morits; translated by Lydia Razran Stone

Here’s a kitty-cat bouquet –
Fresh and new, just made today!
I assembled it for you.
Cats won’t wilt as flowers do.

Flowers, I am sad to say,
Tend to wilt and die away.
Roses, jasmine, tulips too
Fade and die; they simply do.

All the cats in my bouquet
Are sweet as blooms in every way,
But, unlike them, cats can purr
And they’ve whiskers, tails and fur,

Fuzzy ears and shiny noses –
Much more patable than roses.
Your bouquet must be held firm
For it’s apt to squeal and squirm:

Sign of freshness, I would say.
Bring a vase, do not delay
Do not let it squirm away,
This amazing cat bouquet.

Носки

Юнна Мориц

Не надо грязные носки
Забрасывать под шкаф!
Они черствеют от тоски,
В такую глушь попав:
Там негде бегать,
В мяч сыграть!
Несчастные носки, –
Потом нельзя их отстирать –
Порвутся на куски!
А надо грязные носки
Бросать, ребята, в таз,
Где скачут
Мыла пузырьки,
Как в лимонаде газ!
А если таза нет –
Под кран!
Нет крана – пустяки!
Ручей годится, океан,
Чтоб выстирать носки!
Годится озеро и пруд,
Вода любой реки,
Ведь благородный это труд –
Стирать свои носки!
И вам поэты не соврут,
И скажут моряки,
Что всенародный это труд –
Стирать свои носки!
И подтвердят вам знатоки
Международных прав:
Нет права грязные носки
Забрасывать под шкаф!
А за подобные броски
Платить обязан штраф
Любитель грязные носки
Забрасывать под шкаф!

Socks

by Yunna Moritz, translated by Lydia Razran Stone

Beneath the bed don't toss soiled socks,
My children, it's not fair.
From grief they'll turn as hard as rocks
To find themselves stuck there.
For in that narrow, dusty space,
Untouched by mama's broom
They can't kick balls or run a race.
There simply isn't room!
And you'll not get them clean again
No matter how you scrub.
Instead remove them one by one
And plunge them in a tub.
Fill it with water to the top
Add soap and marinade.
You'll see soap bubbles swell and pop
Like fizzy lemonade.
"But can I use the sink," you ask,
"If there's no tub around?"
No sink is worthy of this task
A task that's so profound.
A task like washing socks demands
An ocean, lake or bay.
"The noblest task for human hands,"
I heard a poet say.
And legal experts all have said,
And precedents they cite,
To toss soiled socks beneath the bed
There is no civil right.
If this advice you should reject
You would be out of line.
So treat soiled socks with due respect.
Or pay a giant fine.

Lydia Razran Stone, a founding member of ATA's Slavic Languages Division, was the editor of *SlavFile* for 25 years. Now retired, she can be reached at lydiastone@verizon.net.