

НАДЕЖДА ЖАРИНЦОВА

THE RUSSIANS AND THEIR LANGUAGE (1916)

(отрывок из книги)

It may be of interest, perhaps, to say a few words about the manner in which the Russians address each other. Many times I have heard English people say that it seems as if we had ever so many names, and that one could not make out in the translations who was who, for each person was addressed in at least three different ways. The explanation can be made quite easy by a parallel. Suppose English people had, like ourselves, only one name given to them in baptism; and added to it the father's name which in former times was of the nature of a genitive and placed after that the surname, the result would be, for an English brother and sister: Richard Edwardovich Hodgkin and Dorothy Edwardovna Hodgkina. Well, they would still retain their personalities if they were called Dick and Dora by those who addressed them with a 'thou,' or Richard Edwardovich and Dorothy Edwardovna in the customary social manner of all classes, or simply Hodgkin or Hodgkina in the third person. In the same way, the Russian Al'osha, or Alexey Feodorovich, or Karamazov, all stand for the same person in Dostoyevski's great novel. And so it is always. If people have titles you call them: Prince Nikolay Vasil'yevich, or Count Pavel Petrovich, or Princess Ol'ga Alexeyevna, or whatever they are. Old servants, without waiting for any permission, often address their masters as: Barin (master) Vladimir Sergeyevich, or bat'ushka (father) Sergey Vladimirovich, or baryn'a (mistress) Ol'ga Ivanovna, or matushka (mother) Vera Vasil'yevna, or whatever their case may be.

On attaining, with the growth of love or friendship, the intimate state of addressing each other with a 'thou' in the place of 'you' we drop the full Christian name and father's name, and call people by their shortened names, which, it is true, have no end of varieties. The richness in the numerous shades of meaning which the choice of terminations adds to the language is brilliantly illustrated by these various shortened names. You only have to select this or that ending from all those which a certain shortened name possesses, and your feelings, your attitude at the given moment towards the addressed person is sun-clear! Thus, if you usually call a boy (whose Christian name in full is Dmitri) Mit'usha, Mit'ushka, Mit'ik, Mit'en'ka, Mit'unchik, Mit'un'a (or something else in that line, all of it conveying much love and 'caressiveness' through the mere forms of the endings, while simply Mit'a is indifferent) and then he suddenly hears you calling him Mit'ka, he knows that something is wrong! Mit'ka, as well as Kol'ka, Van'ka, Sashka, etc. (instead of the corresponding affectionate forms Kol'usha, Vanichka, Sashurka, etc.), carry in themselves your vexation, even anger, without any further explanation. Only one certain

very Russian intonation of the voice gives them a humorously tolerant aspect: between country boys this aspect is very popular, and the touch of rudeness disappears from those brisk endings; but, when given to girls' names (Natashka, Mashka, Matr'oshka), they invariably convey disrespect. The peasants' various forms of addressing altogether present a feast of colours!

But when we are first introduced to each other, and commence to talk, we immediately ask each other, 'What is your name?' and, on learning the Christian name and father's name, we proceed to address each other by them. It takes away the formality of Mister and Madame So-and-So which we dislike (gospod'in, gospoja), and which we use only in business or at formal introductions (very often employing for it the French 'monsieur' and 'madame'). The essentially Russian manner is universally employed as the most sociable one; therefore the name is often given in full at the first introduction, e.g., Nikolay Petrovich Kolosov, or Elena Nikolayevna Kolosova. A homely, respectful way of addressing each other amongst the peasants is to use the father's name only: Petrovich, or Stepanovna, or Alexeich, or whatever the case may be.

Peter the Great used to call his statesmen in this super-homely way; but all the Tsars' rescripts, whether bringing to the man favour or disgrace, always begin with an address in the universal way: 'Much esteemed Nikolay Ivanovich,' or 'Ivan Nikolayevich,' or whatever the man's name may be.

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We are quite unable to appreciate the English expressions of intimacy: 'Lucky dog! You lucky devil! Dear old duck!' We can hardly discern any sign of friendliness in them. Not because they are slang: some English slang is magnificently expressive, and we regard it with amused admiration; but our sense of humour fails us here, and we should look upon these forms of address as very impolite in fact, quite offensive! Our favourite birds, whose names make very poetic Old Russian terms of admiration and friendliness, are less placid and useful than a duck. They are the 'steel-winged eagle,' 'falcon-bright' and pigeon. The last has entirely lost its connection with the idea of a pigeon, but it still remains the most popular and national term of sociability in Russia. (Pigeon is 'golub'; and this favourite term is 'golubchik'.) I am purposely calling it a term of sociability because that is where its main character lies. It is not by a long way a term of endearment used exclusively by lovers. It comes into any lively conversation, and is used by, and for, man or woman, prince or beggar; what is more, it enters our everyday speech not only as a kindly form of address, but also as a humorous one or one of sympathetic condescension. It is seldom translated correctly, simply because it has so many shades, and because it needs all those numerous intonations with which the Russian speech is permeated. Sweetheart or pigeon, which are mostly used in translations as its equivalent in English, are both of them far too sentimental.

The gravest statesman, discussing and arguing over most serious matters, will now and again put in the 'golubchik' unless the discussion is very formal. Drivers will encouragingly call out, 'Hey, vy (you) golubchiki!' to their horses, when starting them on a quick, long run. A nice, simple old woman will address every gentleman in a respectfully familiar way as 'golubchik barin' practically equivalent to 'darling sir' even if he has merely stopped her to inquire his way. A devoted old servant, as a matter of course, calls her master or mistress golubchik-barin or golubushka-baryn'a. A fair-minded official, when hurriedly dismissing a petitioner whose request he could not grant, would say: 'Well, golubchik, what is to be done? Such is the law!' It is also very often used in a friendly reproof: 'But, golubchik – !'

What is more, it is used without hesitation even in unusual circumstances: when Dmitri Karamazov is being cross-examined, the old colonel of the police, who does not believe that he has killed his father, addresses him with the golubchik in the very midst of the official inquiry.

It is an essentially Russian word.

The way of addressing people as father, brother, and even mother, is another very Russian feature. It is high time to explain that the famous 'Little father' does not mean 'little' father at all! The Old Russian word for father, bat'ushka, does not suggest an atom of the tone in which 'little father,' or the German 'Vaterchen,' is pronounced. This way of translating it is sickly-sentimental! No, bat'ushka is used either in a grave, deferential way and that is how it came first to be applied in the olden days to the Princes and later to the Tsars, and is still the habitual form of addressing the priests; or else it is used in a very argumentative tone, essentially Russian, called up in quick discussion, which one never hears in English society, and therefore is hardly explicable: it carries some familiarity, some respect, some rebuke, some humour, some surprise very often all of them at the same time!

For instance, the simple-minded small landowner Korobochka ('little box') in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, admitting the hero into her cottage on a wretched, stormy night, and seeing him smothered with mud the result of his having been just overturned with his vehicle in a ploughed field asks him, a perfect stranger to her: 'But where didst thou be-filth thyself like a boar, bat'ushka?'

When the investigation lawyer most artfully sounds Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) throughout his Machiavellian diatribe, he constantly addresses him as bat'ushka, or golubchik, although he is sure of his listener's guilt from the commencement.

'Mother' is used in a similar manner, with a similar twist to the word matushka; and, what is very quaint indeed, men sometimes use it in addressing each other, when the tone of the argument gets somewhat hot: 'Well, matushka, that's a bit of that!' which stands for, 'Well, sir, that's a bit far-fetched!'

But here I should add that it would be altogether impossible to converse in Russian, using so few forms of address as are used by the English. On coming to live here, we sometimes feel quite awkward in being spoken to as if we were nonentities, without any names or personalities. With us, the usual form of address is the one just discussed above, or a shortened Christian name in one of its numerous shapes, or *golubchik*, or brother, or father, in one of their previous applications something or other is always there, besprinkling the speech, so that you feel sure that it is you whom the speaker keeps in his mind and not the general public.

‘Ladies and gentlemen’ is used on occasions similar to those in English; only literally it runs ‘gracious sovereigns and gracious sovereignesses’ which sounds still more quaint in English than it does in Russian. It is that same word, *sovereign Gosudar'*, which is a homely-loyal manner of speaking of and to the Tsars, a very ancient word, too, coming from the times when a prince would be regarded as the chief of his land, just as every man was the chief of his household. Therefore, the old expression *Gosudar'-bat'ushka* (*sovereignfather*) would be applied in the olden days equally to a monarch as to a master of any house, conveying an equal amount of respect and of homeliness. Nowadays, of course, it has lost its popularity with the Tsars as well as with ordinary mortals, the equipoise having become less balanced in both cases: the Tsars being now less accessible than the ancient princes, and the modern householder less lord of all he surveys than his ancient prototype.

But ‘gracious sovereigns’ (*milostivyye gosudari i milostivyya gosudaryni*) still is the proper customary official way of addressing a society of men and women, though only at the commencement of a meeting. When the meeting is in full swing, or unofficial, the speaker addresses it with ‘*gospoda*.’ This is a word which formerly was only a plural form of master, but now includes anyone in any company. It means ‘gentry,’ as used by domestic servants about their masters; but it is also the most natural and sociable manner of addressing a company of one's equals, without which we could not live in Russia one single day (unless one was a hermit). With us the conversation is usually a general one, shared by most persons in the room, and one constantly addresses a whole group of people. The only time when one must not address them as ‘*gospoda*’ is when all around you are officially of a much higher rank than yourself, which is rather a contrast to the handling of the same word by servants. But if you regard your audience as ordinary mortals like yourself, you cannot avoid this form of address. Thus, even Dmitri Karamazov, facing the authorities who came to arrest him at his orgy (suspecting him of the murder of his father), adds to every few words of his: ‘Come, *gospoda*, it is a terrible accusation. . . . What a pity, *gospoda* !’ because he speaks sincerely, and the usual way of addressing these people as equals comes naturally to him.

‘Gospoda’ is not exactly ‘gentlemen,’ because students of both sexes, school children, ladies, girls, are all addressed as gospoda in speaking. Al’osha Karamazov uses it even when speaking to small school boys. A girl stretcher-bearer carrying in on her shoulders still another wounded soldier into an already over-filled dressing-station, will call out to the doctors: ‘Gospoda, gospoda, one more; we must make room for him!’

But the wounded men would feel more at home with her if she addressed them as ‘bratzy’. This word is translated usually in that same sentimental manner as ‘little brothers.’ I cannot help putting it in this way, because these English expressions (little father, little brothers, little mother) supposed to be equivalent to the Russian expressions really make us turn up our noses! There is no littleness whatever about bat’ushka, bratzy, or matushka. Big boys do not address their little brothers as bratzy in a patronizing way; on the contrary, it is the small, business-like boys, who will address older fellows as bratzy, when talking in the grave way the Russian mujik has about him from the age of six or seven. By the way, one of the most striking contrasts between the English and the Russian peasant children is this: an English boy seems to me to try to be as funny and rowdy as possible from the age of six up to sixteen, whereas his little Russian confrere of seven or eight presents quite a different picture: he puts on his grandfather's top-boots and old, huge fur gloves, his own sheepskin tulupchik, and walks for days on end at the side of a sledge-load of wood, leading the horse between the house and the forest his sole ambition being to express all the dignity of labour in his mien and gait.

Bratzy, applied by the nurses and officers talking to their men, conveys sociable appreciation. All peasants and workmen address their crowds as bratzy (which is nice and simple) and not bratya (which is biblical and puritan unless it stands for real brother). There is warmth, caress, and respectful comradeship in the expression bratzy. Mrs. Constance Garnett translates bratzy as boys, fellows, or gentlemen. This is better than ‘little’ brothers. It should be made clear that there is no vestige of belittling in these Russian nouns of affinity, despite their seemingly diminutive terminations.

The ‘little father,’ ‘little mother,’ and ‘little brothers’ ought to be banished from the English translations by fire and sword! They are unbearably sentimental. There are no parallel forms in English to the Russian shades of these nouns, so let them, at least, remain simply ‘father’ and ‘brothers.’

As it is, all the varieties of the words son, daughter, and even children, remain necessarily untranslatable. You cannot say anything different in English except adding to them that old, monotonous epithet ‘little,’ while in Russian there is a variety of terminations meaning neither this adjective nor ‘brat’ nor ‘kid.’ For instance, synishche means a big, nice syn (son), with a touch of humour in it; while synishka is exclusively Russian caressive. There is a selection of varieties for words for ‘children’: d’eti

(the plain, original form of the word), d'etki, d'etishki, d'etochki, and d'etvora, the last being a very appreciative collective definition, implying the idea of the little folks with all their own interests included as it were a parallel to molod'oj.

Not that we object to 'kids' or 'brats.' The Russian slang applied to children is equally unique, only we use it with more condescending humour, I think. We call them 'bubbles,' or by a special humorously-caressive word, 'karapuz', which means a round, solid, comically-grave little figure. 'Bubble' – puzyr' – is also very pretty, conveying much love, and should not be translated as 'kid.' I think English readers would appreciate the parallel of a nice, full-cheeked fatty to a bright soap bubble.