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Language and Literary Works of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky

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PÁGINAS DA LITERATURA RUSSA

LANGUAGE AND
LITERARY WORKS
OF FYODOR M.
DOSTOEVSKY

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Very soon – in 2021 – the bicentennial anniversary of Dostoevsky’s birth will be celebrated. The government of the Russian Federation began to prepare various activities dedicated to this event – conferences, exhibitions, etc. – three years ago. And this is probably not because Dostoevsky is one of President Putin’s favorite writers, although that is true. Dostoevsky has become one of the most significant figures of Russian culture, literature and philosophy. Philosophy in Russia has always been literary-centric. Russian philosophers have never invented any new concepts. Even in the heyday of Russian philosophy – in the late XIXth – early XXth century – philosophy in Russia (Solovyov, Berdyaev, Rozanov, Shestov and others) relied on literature and above all – on Dostoevsky

and Tolstoy. Philosophers themselves often expressed their ideas in literary form. And even now it is rare to find an issue of the journal «Problems of philosophy» in which Dostoevsky is not quoted. In fact, Dostoevsky is quoted very often in the mass media, recently it has mainly been in the form of quotes showing how accurately the writer foresaw much of what was happening in Russia in the late XIXth – early XXth century and much of what is happening now, for example, in relations between Russia and Europe. And European philosophy was largely based on the ideas of Dostoevsky, and even more – on the images created by him. Nietzscheanism, existentialism, Freudianism... It was through Dostoevsky’s eyes that Europeans used to view Russia and Russians. And their study of Russia and the Russian people is often based on Dostoevsky’s works. Of

course, they do study Russia and the Russian people through Tolstoy, Chekhov... but first and foremost through Dostoevsky. Here are some examples:

– Ernest Hemingway was ready to give 1 million dollars for the opportunity to read «The Brothers Karamazov» again for the first time.

– The President Bush's advisers before Bush's visit to Russia advised him during the flight – for eight hours – to read «Crime and Punishment» to get to know Russia and the Russian people. Three authors were proposed, but Dostoevsky was chosen, perhaps because Laura Bush had written a master's thesis on «The Brothers Karamazov». I could have showed you comics based on Dostoevsky's works – they do really exist in America. In one of them, a shadow with an axe runs around Petersburg. This would be funny if it were not so sad: one of my students from Germany was really afraid that he would be attacked in a porch with an axe.

– In the course of President Putin's recent visit, Pope Francis said that he considered the understanding of Dostoevsky's books important for every priest of the Catholic Church. Vladimir Putin then spoke about the instruction that Francis always gives to his priests: «I tell my priests that without Dostoevsky's books, without realizing the depth of his philosophy, you can not be a real priest». And this is despite Dostoevsky's complete rejection of Catholicism, the Catholic Church, which assumed the functions of the state.

– Chinese leader Sie Dzing Ping in his speech during a recent visit to Russia also quoted Dostoevsky, using the famous saying «Beauty will save the world». However, the words of the writer were uttered in a rather strange context, which shows complete misunderstanding of this expression: «the preservation of favorable environmental conditions» and supporting «the course of green development in the name of beautiful home building».

– A correspondent from the «New Yorker» magazine compared the Russian tennis player Daniil Medvedev, who brilliantly performed at the US Open, with a revived character from Dostoevsky's books. It is unclear, however, who exactly she meant, most likely, it was Raskolnikov.

Dostoevsky gradually turned into a kind of emblem, a symbol of Russia. And, interestingly, first of all – in the eyes of the West. If you ask a Russian reader, how he finds Dostoevsky, the majority will give the negative assessment: too dark (a lot of deaths), excessively complicated language (we'll speak more about the features of Dostoevsky's language later today), about his deceptive «complexity». I think, however, that the main reason for this dislike of Dostoevsky by many Russian readers is much deeper and more serious than the number of deaths, murders and suicides. By the way, there really are many deaths: in «The Brothers Karamazov» – 43, and from 39 characters in «Demons» every third of the main characters dies. And this fact, first of all suicides, seems very attractive, for example, for Japanese readers. Kenitchi Matsumoto wrote in 1975: «the Japanese are obsessed with Dostoevsky», and Sadayoshi Igeta observed in 2011: «Japanese readers and writers repeat dialogues with Dostoevsky, thinking about themselves or about our society». And he, more than any other author, feeds their concentration on their inner world. There is a word for such acute self-awareness: «tuniebyo» which means «a societal disease among secondary school pupils». I can say that life and death is one of the main concerns for Dostoevsky, but we must not forget that in the writer's texts we also can see sparkling humor, irony, laughter, laughter is in the centre of his worldview, laughter which compensates for all the gloom, but only if the reader sees humor, recognizes the play on words and irony, which are not always reflected in the translated text, and even a Russian reader does not always see it.

When the understanding of a literary work occurs through a translated text it will always be defective to some extent, there have only been a few cases when the target text was better than the source text.

The classical example of this, which has become famous thanks to the film «Autumn marathon», is *obliz'yana zelyonaya*. One of the characters in the film, the Danish professor, translates Dostoevsky's «The Insulted and Injured» («Humillados y Ofendidos») and he says to his colleague, a Russian translator, that Dostoevsky has made a mistake in the sentence *frya ty edakaya, obliz'yana zelyonaya*, he says that Dostoevsky should have written *obez'yana* (without «l» and with an «e»), and the Russian translator objects: «Everything is correct in Dostoevsky's text». Here what we are dealing with is the contamination of the words *monkey* and *mangy* (or perhaps *lick*), which is very difficult to translate into other languages, and it is often translated completely incorrectly as *monkey: you saucy slut, you green monkey*. It is better to translate it as *green mangy monkey*, but this translation would not be accurate – precisely because it does not convey Dostoevsky's humor. No better is the German translation: *du wichtige Person, du grüne Meerkatze* ('marmoset').

We will return to Dostoevsky's laughter later...

The negative, or, more precisely, very ambivalent attitude of the modern Russian reader to Dostoevsky can be explained by different reasons. Firstly, by the tradition, which was established in the early XX century, of assessing Dostoevsky's works from mad love and respect to complete rejection. It was at this time that such a word as *dostoevschina* appeared with the meaning of a negative evaluation of contradictory feelings, mental instability, suffering and hopelessness, all of which are seen as a set of characteristic features of Dostoevsky's characters.

The judgment given to Dostoevsky by Lenin was of great importance for the perception of Russian readers of Soviet epoch (Lenin's directives, including those regarding culture, were critical until the collapse of the USSR, they determined, for example, what work of what writer should be introduced into the school curriculum). Lenin called Dostoevsky «disgusting but genius». He refused to read «Demons»: «Obviously this book is a conservative abomination <...> I have absolutely no wish to read it and to waste time on it. I leafed through the book and chucked it aside. I don't need that kind of literature – what can it give to me? I haven't any time for such dirt». And Lenin's opinion about many other of Dostoevsky's works wasn't much better. He said about «The Brothers Karamazov»: «I started to read it and quickly stopped. I threw up reading the scene in the monastery». But, however, Lenin read the novel «Crime and Punishment» up to the end. «Lenin was very strict with himself. But he hated digging into the human soul and the most painful introspections», – Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, confirmed this attitude of Lenin's. Excessively close attention to the dark sides of the human soul repelled Lenin, in one of his letters he called it an «arch-foul imitation of the arch-foul Dostoevsky» (by the way, it is specifically in Dostoevsky's works that we find an active and very non-standard use of the prefix *arch* which means 'the highest degree of manifestation of any quality': *arch-liked, arch-eagle, arch-alive, arch-urban, arch-rollicking, arch-tabloid*. At the same time, Lenin once remarked: «Do not forget that Dostoevsky was sentenced to death. He was subjected to the barbaric ritual of demotion, and then it was announced that Nicholas I had "pardoned" him and exiled him to hard labor». From all Dostoevsky's works Lenin appreciated most of all «The House of the Dead», calling this novel an «unsurpassed work of Russian and world fiction, that showed so wonderfully not only penal servitude but also «the house of the dead» in which the Russian people lived under the tsars of the

house of Romanov». And finally, in the list of monuments to 20 Russian writers approved by Lenin, which, it had been decided were to be installed after the revolution, we find: «1. Tolstoy; 2. Dostoevsky...».

Secondly, we must bear in mind the following: Russian people show a general tendency towards self-reflection, to the outpouring of their feelings, to complaining to others about their problems, their unhappy fate etc. This distinguishes the Russian from the European, apart from the Poles, of course, who complain even more. Interestingly, Dostoevsky himself had Polish roots, although he most likely did not know about it, this fact was discovered by the researchers of the Dostoevsky family. And yet Dostoevsky made fun, and sometimes quite maliciously, of the Poles, and of the Germans, and of the French, and a little less of the British... There are lots of words insulting towards representatives of other nationalities in Dostoevsky's texts: *polyatchok*, *nemtchurka*, *frantsuzishka*, etc. The only people Dostoevsky never insulted were the Russian people (apart from the liberals and nihilists) and... the Portuguese.

The nouns *Portuguese* and *Portuguesees* are never used by Dostoevsky, once in his article we meet the adjective *Portuguese* (*Portuguese poet*): in the journalistic notes «Some Articles on Russian Literature» (1861), which in many respects became programmatic, when Dostoevsky writes about Voltaire, who responded to the Lisbon earthquake with a «Poem about the Death of Lisbon...» for the first time rebelling against Leibniz's theory of «pre-established harmony». Voltaire's poem had a strong influence on the work of Dostoevsky, and we find its most obvious manifestation in the revolt of Ivan Karamazov. In the same article we find 10 uses of Lisbon in the form of nouns and adjectives. We find *Lisbon earthquake* used once in the story «Uncle's Dream» (1859). The adjective *Lisbon* is used twice in «Crime and Punishment» (1866), in the context of wine at Marmeladov's funeral repast. And once the name of the country – *Portugal* – is used (Ivan Petrovitch and Natasha read «Alphonse and Dalinda» of Countess de Genlis) and the city of *Lisbon* in «The Insulted and Injured» (1861), when Alyosha Valkovsky tells Natasha about his father: «My father never talked to me like that. That is, *Lisbon* would sooner fall than his wish not be realized <...>!» So all cases of «Portuguese vocabulary» occur in a very short period of time, 1859–1866, this period is even shorter, considering that 1866 is the year of the publication of «Crime and Punishment», it was written some years before.

Let's return to the Russian reader of Dostoevsky. When this Russian reader, who is already so strongly inclined towards self-reflection and self-flagellation, plunges into the nature of Dostoevsky's texts, he intensifies in the process all of his fears and doubts. Dostoevsky's characters reveal what the reader has hidden somewhere deep inside himself – passions, sins and most importantly – fear. And it is also in this, to my mind, that is hidden the dislike for the writer. And speaking about Dostoevsky's language... I can say with full confidence, based on concrete facts, concrete linguistic analysis, that his language is not more complex, but simpler, not archaic, but more modern and – more interesting than the language of the most of his contemporaries. The complexity of Dostoevsky's language is a myth, an attempt to find the simplest explanation for rather complex things. And this, I suppose, is the main reason for the rejection of Dostoevsky by many readers. At the same time, as Lenin did, these readers agree that Dostoevsky is a genius writer.

Let us now say a few words about the biography of Dostoevsky, and it would probably be wrong if we were specifically to «tie» biographical facts to the work of the writer. Or, on the contrary, if we were to try to find in the works of Dostoevsky any parallels with the events of his life. Most of the information of this kind, by the way, is drawn from the memoirs of Dostoevsky's contemporaries or of the members of his family – Nikolay Strakhov, Anna Dostoevsky, Apollinariya Suslova and others. Of course, the information presented in these memoirs is often subjective. For example Strakhov, after a quarrel

with Dostoevsky, suddenly decided to remember how Dostoevsky had told him about the seduction of a young girl, that such a case had occurred in his life. Or Anna Dostoevsky, who, and this is rather natural, spoke about Suslova, with whom Dostoevsky was in a love affair for several years, very unflatteringly. Or she deliberately blurred or crossed out many places in Dostoevsky's letters, mostly of an intimate nature, so that it would be impossible to read. Nevertheless, people often «tie» the facts of Dostoevsky's biography to his works, we come across this very often indeed. Here are some examples.

– Dostoevsky was born in a hospital for poor people, where his father worked as a doctor. This, however, does not necessarily have any connection with the title of his first novel, «Poor People», as is sometimes claimed. The word «poor», by the way, does not have the meaning here of 'not having sufficient or necessary means of subsistence; indigent', but it means 'unhappy'.

– The very stressful and ambiguous relationship between Dostoevsky and Apollinariya Suslova is not an argument to suggest that Polina in «The Gambler» is a full copy of her, and in any case we find the features of Suslova in many other female characters – Nastasya Filippovna from «The Idiot», Katerina Ivanovna Verkhovtseva from «The Brothers Karamazov», etc.

– The fact that Dostoevsky after the period of hard labor lived in Tver for two months waiting for permission to live in the capital and gave Tver such epithets as an «ugly» and «dying» city, does not necessarily lead to the fact that specifically this town is shown in the novel «Demons». There are many similarities, of course, but it is unlikely that this topic can serve as a subject of serious scientific research. Although it should be noted that the placenames in Dostoevsky's works are very important, for example, in «Crime and Punishment», where the author deliberately encrypts the names of St. Petersburg bridges, alleys, etc.: «At the beginning of July, during an extremely hot spell, towards evening, a young man left the closet he rented from tenants in **S—u** Lane, walked out on the street, and slowly, as if indecisively, headed for the **K—n** Bridge» (tr. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky). Abbreviations in Dostoevsky's texts occupy a special place, it is a separate case of linguistic play, completely unlike any others, and one which we meet later in the literature of postmodernism. Dostoevsky by means of such abbreviation-riddles encrypts placenames, setting the reader, familiar with St. Petersburg toponymy, up for the process of guessing. And if Dostoevsky writes that there are 730 steps from Raskolnikov's house to the house of the old woman-usurer, then this number is not accidental, it is important that it is such. Although there may be different and often fantastic interpretations, for example, the steps in the Main engineering school, where Dostoevsky studied, were measured in pairs, and if you divide 730 by 2, you get the number of days in the year.

– The parricide in «The Brothers Karamazov» is not necessarily connected with the legends of the Mikhailovsky castle, where the Main engineering school was located, according to which among the murderers of Paul I was his son Alexander.

Nevertheless there are some facts of Dostoevsky's life which undoubtedly came through the writer's works. Let's say a few words about them.

– This is first and foremost the key point of Dostoevsky's life, which is called «the imitation of execution» and which came through the novel «The Idiot», where Dostoevsky describes in detail the simulation of the death penalty, which was made against him and other members of the group of M.V. Butashevitch-Petrashevsky:

This man had once been led to a scaffold, along with others, and a sentence of death by firing squad was read out to him, for a political crime. After about twenty minutes a pardon was read out to him, and he was given a lesser degree of punishment; nevertheless, for the

space between the two sentences, for twenty minutes, or a quarter of an hour at the least, he lived under the certain conviction that in a few minutes he would suddenly die. I wanted terribly much to listen when he sometimes recalled his impressions of it, and several times I began questioning him further. He remembered everything with extraordinary clarity and used to say he would never forget anything from those minutes. About twenty paces from the scaffold, around which people and soldiers were standing, three posts had been dug into the ground, since there were several criminals. The first three were led to the posts, tied to them, dressed in death robes (long white smocks), and had long white caps pulled down over their eyes so that they would not see the guns; then a squad of several soldiers lined up facing each post. My acquaintance was eighth in line, which meant he would go to the posts in the third round. A priest went up to each of them with a cross. Consequently, he had about five minutes left to live, not more. He said those five minutes seemed like an endless time to him, an enormous wealth. It seemed to him that in those five minutes he would live so many lives that there was no point yet in thinking about his last moment, so that he even made various arrangements: he reckoned up the time for bidding his comrades farewell and allotted two minutes to that, then allotted two more minutes to thinking about himself for the last time, and then to looking around for the last time. He remembered very well that he made precisely those three arrangements, and reckoned them up in precisely that way. He was dying at the age of twenty-seven, healthy and strong; bidding farewell to his comrades, he remembered asking one of them a rather irrelevant question and even being very interested in the answer. Then, after he had bidden his comrades farewell, the two minutes came that he had allotted to *thinking about himself*. He knew beforehand what he was going to think about: he kept wanting to picture to himself as quickly and vividly as possible how it could be like this: now he exists and lives, and in three minutes there would be something, some person or thing – but who? and where? He wanted to resolve it all in those two minutes! There was a church nearby, and the top of the cathedral with its gilded dome shone in the bright sun. He remembered gazing with terrible fixity at that dome and the rays shining from it: it seemed to him that those rays were his new nature and in three minutes he would somehow merge with them. The ignorance of and loathing for this new thing that would be and would come presently were terrible; yet he said that nothing was more oppressive for him at that moment than the constant thought: «What if I were not to die! What if life were given back to me – what infinity! And it would all be mine! Then I'd turn each minute into a whole age, I'd lose nothing, I'd reckon up every minute separately, I'd let nothing be wasted!» He said that in the end this thought turned into such anger in him that he wished they would hurry up and shoot him» (tr. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky).

In the 1840s Dostoevsky joined the group of Butashevitch-Petrashkevsky's utopian revolutionaries. He visited the radical wing of this group, consisting of 7 men, which was run by S.F. Durov. There he met N.A. Speshnev, who later became one of the prototypes of Nikolay Stavrogin (the novel «Demons»). These seven people planned to organize an underground printing house (this episode is described in the novel), but petrashevists were arrested not for that, but for the distribution of Belinsky's letter to N.V. Gogol, which was read by Dostoyevsky at meetings of the group. By the way, this letter is now being studied in Russian schools. What was there in the letter that could have led to the arrest and death sentence of these men? It should be noted that the death penalty in XIX century Russia was almost never used, except for serious state crimes aimed at overthrowing the government, such as the Decembrist Uprising of 1825. Belinsky wrote that Russia needs not sermons, not prayers, but the awakening of human dignity in the people. This was taken by the authorities as a call for the overthrow of the state system. And the members of Petrashevsky's group were sentenced to death by firing squad execution, and on the 22 of December, 1849, they were taken to the Semenovskiy parade-ground, where about 3000 people gathered to watch this «show». They were divided in groups of three people (Dostoevsky was in the second of three), the swords were broken over their heads, that

symbolized the divestment of the nobility, the priest read the memorial prayer, bags were put on the heads of the first three petrashevists, the soldiers were ordered to aim... One of the petrashevists, Nikolay Grigoriev, lost his mind. And at the last moment the penalty was canceled, instead of it – 4 years of hard labor, for Dostoevsky this was to be in Omsk. Just these 45 minutes on the scaffold awaiting death, and even worse, months of waiting for the verdict in the Peter and Paul fortress are described in Dostoevsky's novel «The Idiot», Dostoevsky describes what he went through himself – the expectation of punishment that is worse than the punishment itself. And – the inability to change anything. Dostoevsky is probably the only writer who outlived his own death. And the four years of hard labor are described in detail in «The House of the Dead».

– Of course, constant financial difficulties, Dostoevsky's numerous debts could not but affect the fact that the theme of money becomes one of the main in his works. The phenomenon of money itself is interpreted:

[Goryanchikov] Money is minted freedom, and that is why a human being, completely deprived of freedom, values money ten times more («The House of the Dead»); [Makar Ivanovitch] Though money is not God, it is all the same half of a God, the great temptation <...> («A Raw Youth»).

One shouldn't nevertheless think that Dostoevsky was poor, that he starved... For the translation of Balzac's «Eugenia Grande» (Dostoevsky had not yet started his independent literary work), he received 1000 rubles – a huge sum of money at the time. The houses and apartments he rented, including those abroad, were not for the poor. Although, indeed, he only bought his own first house at the end of his life, in the city of Staraya Russa.

– Dostoevsky's passion for the game of roulette, of course, is shown primarily in the novel «The Gambler».

– Dostoevsky's epileptic attacks, first of foremost in descriptions of the state before a seizure, could not but find reflection in his works, first of all in the novel «The Idiot».

However, it is not knowledge of Dostoevsky's biography, but the study of his language that allows us to understand the author's works. Let us dwell on a few points: (1) some key words in the language of Dostoevsky's linguasphere («toska» – agony, «nadyv» – strain and «poshlyi» – banal); (2) words used in a symbolic meaning («banya» – village bathhouse, murder weapons, green drap de dames scarf, yellow); (3) some of the writer's aphoristic remarks.

(1)

Let's start with the word that many linguists have written about and continue to write about as a key concept of Russian culture – the word «toska». In Russian there is a group of words whose meanings are very difficult to distinguish – 'grust', toska, pechal', skuka, khandra, splin, unyniye, depressiya, apatiya, melankholiya, nostalgiya' (like similar English words *sadness, melancholy, boredom, depression, apathy, nostalgia*). And the most difficult to understand among these words is «toska».

In the complete works of Dostoevsky «toska» is used 579 times, 370 times – in fiction. This is a very high frequency, for comparison: the word «grust'» (*sadness*) is used 121 times, and «lubov'» (*love*) – a little bit more than 1000. Empirically, during the construction of Dostoevsky's language dictionary, it was found that if the frequency exceeds 100 times then this word is worth paying attention to, it could be important for the language of Dostoevsky's world, or linguistic worldview, or linguasphere.

Russian-English dictionaries offer various translations of the word «toska»: *melancholy, sadness, grief, sorrow, angst, anguish, misery*. Of the group of words mentioned

above «toska» is very close to «unyniye», which can be translated into English as *despondency, dejection, gloom, discouragement, despair*. The easiest for understanding and translating is the word combination «toska po rodine» (*homesickness*) which we often find in Dostoevsky's texts, especially in his letters.

Richard Pevear and Volokhonsky propose to translate Mariya Lebyadkina's phrase «Toska ne skuka» («Demons») as *Sorrow is not boredom*. The word «toska» may have the meaning 'boredom' in Russian, and such a word combination as «Toska zelyonaya» (*green*) can only be used in the meaning of 'boredom', but it is not used in this meaning when Lebyadkina says only a page later: *And every earthly sorrow and every earthly tear is a joy for us*. The same word is chosen for «toska» – *sorrow*. But here one may well doubt the accuracy of the translation, for sorrow is too «weak» in this context, it's more like Russian «petchal'» and «grust'». An analysis of the compatibility of the word «toska» with adjectives can help to ascertain the word's meaning in Dostoevsky's texts: «bezyskhodnaya, beznadyozhnaya, beskonetchnaya, bespredelnaya, glubokaya, strashnaya, podavlyayushchaya, mutchitel'naya, nesterpimaya, kholodnaya, mertvyashchaya» (*hopeless, infinite, boundless, deep, terrible, overwhelming, painful, unbearable, cold, deadening, etc.*) as well as the fact that «toska» is associatively connected with «muka, stradaniye, gore, trevoga, otchayanie, zhel'tch', uzhas, dusha; nevozmozhnost' opredelit', tchego khotchu» (*torment, suffering, grief, anxiety, despair, bile, horror, soul; the inability to determine what one wants*). This makes it possible to define «toska» as 'deep spiritual anxiety, delivering torment; despondency, despair' and in this sense the semantic content of «toska» is close to what we find in English word *agony*, for example, in Samuel Coleridge's «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner»: *Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide, wide sea; / And never a saint took pity on / My soul in agony*.

Let us turn to another word which is specific to Dostoevsky, a word which is a kind of emblem of the writer himself – the word «nadryv», the meaning of which is even more difficult to convey in other languages than the meaning of «toska». While «nadryv» is used very infrequently, only 30 times, 23 of which – in literary texts, and it is almost always associated with a morbid state. An analysis of the contexts in which «nadryv» is used allows us to conclude that this word means 'morbidly, exaltation, unnaturalness in the manifestation of any feelings, emotions or when committing an act'. And in «The Brothers Karamazov» the word «nadryv» acquires a special meaning, which is uncovered in a broad context; this meaning is: 'unnaturally exaggerated, distorted feelings and emotions, bordering on lies, as well as arising from anger or from the desire to take revenge':

The word «**strain**», just uttered by Madame Khokhlakov, made him [A. Karamazov] almost jump, because precisely that night, half-awake at dawn, probably in response to a dream, he had suddenly said: «**Strain, strain!**» He had been dreaming all night about yesterday's scene at Katerina Ivanovna's. Now suddenly the direct and persistent assurance of Madame Khokhlakov that Katerina Ivanovna loved his brother Ivan, and deliberately, out of some kind of play, out of «**strain**», was deceiving herself and tormenting herself with her affected love for Dmitri, out of some kind of supposed gratitude – struck Alyosha: «Yes, perhaps the whole truth indeed is precisely in those words!» <...> «**Strain**» had just been uttered! But what could he understand even of this **strain**?

[A. Karamazov to Katerina Ivanovna] «<...> you are tormenting him because you love Dmitri from **strain**... not in truth... because you've convinced yourself of it...» (tr. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky).

It was the use of the word «nadryv» in these and similar contexts that became associated with Dostoevsky's idiosyncrasy and with his works as a whole. And this word began to perform an emblematic function. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky translated «na-

dryv» as *strain* that is mostly connected with ‘pulling, stretching, deformation’. The meaning is close, but nevertheless does not convey the meaning of Dostoevsky’s «nadryv», especially in the context of «The Brothers Karamazov»: *strain* is hardly associated with such semantic components as ‘disease, lies, exaltation’, it is necessary to give an extended commentary to this translation.

And let’s turn to another conceptual word that is important both for the Russian linguasphere generally and for Dostoevsky’s views on the world and on man, to a word that poses great problems for any translator – «poshlost’» and «poshlyi». The same word-formation paradigm includes «poshlo», «poshlyak», «oposhlit’», «poshlenkiy», «poshlovatyi», which are most commonly are translated as *vulgar*.

In the Russian language the range of meanings of the word «poshlyi» is very wide and it is rather difficult to determine what meaning is realized in a particular context. «Poshlyi» is *mediocre, banal, base, immoral, tasteless, hackneyed, trivial, formulaic, hackneyed, ordinary, vulgar, obscene*, etc. It would be possible to assume that Dostoevsky’s «poshlyi» is used mostly in the meaning of ‘low moral standards’ as the theme of morality is one of the writer’s main themes. However, of all the 61 uses of the word «poshlyi» there is only one context where it’s safe to assume that this meaning is revealed – «The Brothers Karamazov»:

It is impossible even to imagine all the shame and moral degradation with which a jealous man can live without remorse. And it’s not that they were all *immoral and dirty souls*. On the contrary, with a high heart, with a pure love, full of self-sacrifice <...>.

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky translated «poshlyi» as *trite and dirty souls*, although *trite* is ‘banal, trivial, formulaic, hackneyed, very usual’. To my mind more correct variants of the translation of «poshlyi» in this context would be such equivalents as *immoral, amoral, unmoral, licentious*.

All other uses of the word «poshlyi» in Dostoevsky’s works are associated with the ‘banal, trivial, ordinary, very usual’, as in modern Russian, but without such shades of meaning, as ‘obscene, indecent, bawdy’. For example, «poshlyi durak» (*a vulgar fool*) is not someone who uses obscene words, but an excessively ordinary person. Or «poshleyshaya spletnya» (*the most vulgar gossip*) means ‘ordinary, standard’. In the same meaning «poshlyi» is used in the following context:

I think that when a man laughs it most often becomes disgusting to watch. More often there is something *banal* in the laugh, something that seems to humiliate a laughing man, although a laughing man himself almost always knows nothing about the impression he makes («A Raw Youth»).

The collocations with the word «poshlyi» in Dostoevsky’s works are very interesting: there are almost no repetitions (except for the *banal fool(s)* used 3 times, and *banal word* – 2 times):

accusation, allegory, boasting, business, calendar life, care, composition, entertainment light, example, excuses, expression, face, fool, foolishness, Frenchman (with disregard), ideas, idiot, incompetence, intrigue, man, manifestation, meaning, method, naive and pastoral, ordinary, pedantry, plantation vengeance, politeness, prose and boredom, resentment, rhymers, road, routine, rumor, schedule, sizes, slaves, something, soul, stupid, the order [of things], thoughts, trifle, value, wisdom.

As for the noun «poshlost’» (used 25 times), Dostoevsky used it only in the sense of ‘banality, triviality, mediocrity’:

Quick understanding is only a sign of the *banality* of what has been understood («A Raw Youth»).

The fact that the words «poshlyi» and «poshlost'» are mainly used by Dostoevsky in this meaning, and with high frequency in «The Notes from Underground» and in «A Raw Youth» cannot be considered a coincidence: the writer did not agree with anything standard, formulaic, mediocre, he did not agree with any finished formulas which did not allow exceptions.

(2)

Dostoevsky's predilection for symbolization has been noted by many researchers. This interest in symbolization is explained by many reasons, the most obvious of which is the author's desire to reflect the world in all its opposites, to oppose the image given by a symbol to the logical «consciousness». Besides, one should note such a function of the symbol in Dostoevsky's works as the coding of meaning, the creation of a certain encryption, a riddle that a reader has to unravel, and after that – to come to an understanding of the idea of the whole work.

We can give different groups of symbol (words with concrete meaning used in an abstract sense):

(1) denotative symbols (*green dradedam scarf, clock, threshold, square, gate, hem, corner, hole, shell, pawn, louse, spider, fly, hare, little red spider, etc.*);

(2) situational (*dropping a handkerchief, kissing the ground, kissing a bowl, bowing to the ground, refusing to give a hand, refusing to kiss a hand*);

(3) sensual (*a fly beating against the window glass, oblique rays of the setting sun, green adhesive leaves, etc.*) and

(4) eventual (1861), which are more common in journalistic texts.

The first group of symbols includes such subgroups as number-symbols, name-symbols (*Sonya, Lazarus, Stepan Trofimovitch, Lev Myshkin, Raskolnikov*), toponym-symbols (*Boulogne, America, Skotoprigonyevsk*), primary element-symbols (*fire, earth, water, air*), colour-symbols, the names of insects, animals, etc.

There is a very important opportunity for us to group Dostoevsky's symbols on the basis of a common – symbolized – meaning, to combine them into symbolic paradigms. Here are some examples.

'FEAR' – *hook, latch*

'CRIME, MURDER' – murder weapons

The symbols with the common meaning of 'murder weapons' are *axe, knife, revolver, razor, pounder, paperweights; loop, a spare nail, a piece of soap and a silk string*. There is a certain and significant relationship between the author's choice of the murder weapon and the character who committed it, which becomes a kind of differential sign of the meanings of the corresponding symbols. Each of the murder weapons has its own symbolic meaning. In «Crime and Punishment» it must be the *axe*, symbolizing punishment-retribution; Rogozhin kills Nastasya Filippovna with a knife, so the family name of Nastasya Filippovna – Barashkova (from «barashek» – *a lamb*) becomes symbolic too, and the knife is perceived as a ritual weapon of sacrifice; Kirillov and Svidrigaylov could only shoot themselves, and it is important that Kirillov's colt is *American*, Rogozhin covered the dead Nastasya Filippovna with *American oilcloth*; for Svidrigaylov's suicide – *America / American* also have the symbolic meaning, which is most clearly realized in the «Demons» («demons» brought their ideas from America); for Stavrogin and Smerdyakov, who committed mortal sins (seduction of a child and murdering of own father), could only be a loop. Another murder weapon in Dostoevsky's works is a

razor, and not just a razor, but a razor wrapped in silk, which is found three times – in the «The Idiot», in the «Eternal Husband» and in the «A Writer's Diary».

So then if symbols are extremely compressed coded meanings, then it seems quite logical to build the author's thesaurus on the basis of groups of symbols united by a common meaning. Study of the lexical structure of Dostoevsky's idiolect shows that the core of the author's thesaurus is MAN represented in such aspects as 'life', 'time', 'death', 'love', 'illness', 'fear' and 'laughter' (these are meanings which are symbolized by the writer most often; but the 'laughter', because of its concrete and special, compensatory function, is not symbolized).

[Kirillov] «Life is pain, life is fear, and a man is unhappy». Which, interestingly, is almost the very same thing we find in modern psychiatry.

There is a very famous phrase from Dostoevsky's early 1839 letter to his brother, these words are quoted by absolutely all the lecturers who speak about the life and work of the writer: «Man is a mystery. This mystery must be solved, and if you are going to be solving it for your whole life, do not say that you have wasted your time. I study this mystery, for I want to be a man...». Dostoevsky, when he was still in his senior year of Engineering school, had the following hobby – he would leave his apartment, chose a person as an object and would keep an eye on him as much as he could, sometimes for the whole day, observing as he did the slightest details of this person's behavior. What shop this person went into, how he pulled out his wallet, money, the way he spoke, paid, etc. After that Dostoevsky would «complete» this man, proposing that it was from these details that the person's image is constructed. And at that point Dostoevsky was not yet a writer.

However, a man is a mystery, an object for study and an image for most writers. A man for Dostoevsky, as we have shown above, is always a man who doubts, a man who suffers, a man who seeks, above all, seeks God in himself. And for Dostoevsky's man there is nothing unambiguous, the mathematical formula two times two equals four can't be applied to him.

(3)

As we have already mentioned, Dostoevsky is quoted very often, more often than any other Russian writer. Such writers as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, of course, were well aware of their prophetic role, which was reflected in the globality of the plans of their works, in which the brilliant foresight of these authors was subsequently confirmed by history (for example, from the novel «Demons»), and in such a way of forming thoughts as an aphorism in its didactic orientation. And it is no accident that aphorism is one of the main features of Russian philosophy of the second half of the XIX – early XX century and modern Western philosophy, which in large part learned from Dostoevsky.

There are more than a thousand aphorisms accredited to Dostoevsky, which are used in speech, in various types of communication, including scientific and political contexts. Nevertheless, participants of communication acts often use Dostoevsky's aphorisms, absolutely without thinking about the meaning of these sayings, which the writer himself had put into them, taking them out of context, forgetting that the quoted words may not refer to Dostoevsky, but to a specific character of a particular work. To establish contact, to decorate the speech, to prove the correctness of the thought, finally, just to seem knowledgeable and intelligent... But... this is no longer Dostoevsky, not his world, the author disappears in these misunderstood and decorative phrases. The same phrase that we mentioned: «Beauty will save the world». In order to understand the meaning that

Dostoevsky had put into this phrase it is necessary to remember that this phrase, or rather – «The world will be saved by beauty» – is from the novel «The Idiot», it is attributed to Prince Myshkin. Then by «beauty» we must understand what is beautiful for Myshkin, and not some abstract and incomprehensible essence. And for Myshkin it is Nastasya Filippovna who is beautiful, and this is a «special, suffering beauty». So... beauty means suffering. Who suffered the most? Christ. And who then will save the world? We must also not forget that Dostoevsky's beauty is not only salvation, but also, in «The Brothers Karamazov», destruction: «Beauty is a terrible force». Or another famous example of a very nice phrase: «All the harmony of the world is not worth one little tear of a child». If we forget that these words are uttered by Ivan Karamazov and uttered in order to prove that there is no God, the meaning of this phrase will be completely distorted.

Here are some examples of Dostoevsky's aphorisms related to some of the ideas mentioned above.

[Goryantchikov] Man is a creature that gets used to everything, and I think this is the best definition of him («The House of the Dead»); [I. Karamazov to A. Karamazov] Absurdities are too necessary on earth. The world is based on them, and without them, perhaps, nothing would happen in the world («The Brothers Karamazov»); A man must love life more than the meaning of life (from «Unknown Dostoevsky»); [Paradoxalist] <...> man is sometimes terribly fond of suffering, to a passionate degree, and that's a fact («The Notes from Underground»); [Raskolnikov] Suffering and pain are always obligatory for broad consciousness and a deep heart («Crime and Punishment»); [Paradoxalist] <...> one can survive with love and without happiness («The Notes from Underground»); [from a letter of Nastasya Filippovna to Aglaya] Is it possible to love all, all people? Of course not, and that would even be unnatural. In abstract love of humanity you almost always love only yourself («The Idiot»); [I. Karamazov to A. Karamazov] In an abstract way one can love one's neighbor and sometimes even from afar, but up close it is almost always impossible («The Brothers Karamazov»); [Versilov to Arkady] People by nature are low and love to love out of fear («A Raw Youth»); [Funny man] On our earth we can truly love only with pain and only through pain! («The Dream of a Funny Man») Perhaps the only love of Russian people is Christ, and Russian people love the image of Christ in their own way, that is, to the point of suffering («A Writer's Diary»); [D. Karamazov to A. Karamazov] But falling in love does not mean loving. It is possible both to love and to hate («The Brothers Karamazov»); [Prince Myshkin] You know in my opinion being funny is sometimes even good, and better still: you can forgive each other sooner and humble yourselves («The Idiot»); [Arkady] If a man laughs well it means he is a good man («A Raw Youth»); [Dobrosyolova] Misfortune is a contagious disease. Miserable and poor people need to avoid each other, so as not to get further infected («The Poor People»); [Kirillov to Stavrogin] A man is unhappy because he doesn't know that he's happy; that is the only reason why («The Devils»); [to S. Ivanova] You cannot understand happiness without suffering (from letters); [Staretz Zosima] <...>fear is merely the result of any kind of lie («The Brothers Karamazov»); [Raskolnikov] Truly great people <...> must feel great sorrow in the world <...> («Crime and Punishment»); [from reflections of Prince Myshkin] Compassion is the main and maybe the only law of life of all mankind («The Idiot»); [Chronicler] <...> the misfortune of someone close never fails to amuse a foreign eye <...> («Demons»); [Stavrogin] <...> in the suffering of the others there is always something good for us («At Tikhon»); [I. Karamazov] <...> the beast can never be as cruel as a man, so artistically, so creatively cruel («The Brothers Karamazov»); Many misfortunes have happened in the world as a result of perplexities and unspoken words. The unspoken word harms and has always harmed (from journalistic article).

Is Dostoevsky's language difficult? Can we call his works «dark and gloomy»? Fairy tales, for example, are often much more cruel and dark than Dostoevsky's works. Let's remember for example «The Little Mermaid» or «Shadow» of Andersen. And the language of fairy tales is more difficult than Dostoevsky's language. But the fact that Dostoevsky makes his reader suffer is indisputable. As the author himself writes in

the «A Writer's Diary»: «Every great happiness carries with it some suffering, since it evokes in us a higher consciousness». Or: «Generally, man was created in such a way that he loves the suffering that he has lived through». And, of course, laughter, which Sonya Shatalova, an autistic girl, at the age of eight years old called «the doctor for a sorrowing soul» – this laughter is both the «cure» for fear of death, and a way to cope with suffering and illness, including mental illness.

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