

ELEMENTARY RUSSIAN OBSCENITY

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This article will concern itself with the pedagogical problems encountered in attempting to introduce the basic concepts of Russian obscenity (*mat*) to English-speaking first-year students at the college level. The essential problem is the fact that Russian obscenity is primarily derivational while English (i.e., in this context, American) obscenity is analytic. Thus when Russians wish to express themselves obscenely they will derive the necessary words on the basis of obscene stems, usually *xuj*- 'prick', *pizd*- 'cunt', or *eb*- 'fuck.' Americans, however, will insert an obscene word functioning virtually as a particle, usually *fuck* or *fucking*, but also sometimes *shit* as well as the milder *hell* and *damn*. Compare the following examples:

- (1) **Ja nixujá ne znáju.** *I don't know a fucking thing. Or, I don't know shit.*
- (2) **On egó spízdil.** *He fucking stole it.*
- (3) **Zakrój ebálo!** *Shut the fuck up! Shut your fucking mouth!*
- (4) **Otpízdit' / otxujárit'** *To beat the shit out of.*

In example (1), the obscenity in Russian is carried by *nixujá* 'nothing', which is derived from *xuj* 'prick', while in English the insertion of *fucking* before *thing* renders the sentence obscene. The same general explanation applies to the remaining examples.

Related to this difficulty is the fact that when English does employ derivational processes in the production of obscenity, the stems used generally differ from those used in Russian; cf. the alternative translation of (1):

(5) **Xujnjá / pizděž** *Bullshit*

(6) **Pizdovátyj** *Fucked up*, in the sense of "strange, weird."

(7) **Xujevátyj** *Sort of crappy.*

A third aspect of the lack of isomorphism between the two approaches to obscenity consists of the fact that the derivational nature of Russian obscenity permits the creation of obscene lexical items which cannot be translated into English without additional contextual explanation:

(8) **Ebál'nik** *Face, nose*; cf. *mug, snout*, also the epithet *cuntmouth*.

(9) **Pizdobrátija** *A group of buddies*; cf. *a fine bunch of fuckers*.

(10) **Naxujárit'sja** *To drink too much*; cf. *to get fucked up*.

A conceptually related phenomenon in English is the insertion of *fucking* immediately before the stressed syllable in polysyllabic words, e.g. *fan-fucking-tastic, il-fucking-literate*, etc.

Thus the first difficulty to be faced in the teaching of Russian obscenity to American students is the fact that the two languages rely on significantly different processes for the rendition of obscenity, and the resultant lack of isomorphism is not readily grasped by the elementary student without a great deal of explanation.

The second problem which must be taken into account is that of active vs. passive mastery. In general, first-year Russian students are significantly more concerned with developing their own ability to express themselves obscenely in Russian than with learning to understand Russians expressing themselves obscenely. Thus while it is possible to explain the complexities of Russian obscene usage vis-à-vis English to such students, these explanations are of far less interest to them than basic equivalencies which do not require additional elucidation, e.g. *pososí xuj* 'suck (my) cock.'

One other factor which must be noted is the need for more adequate dictionaries of Russian obscenity. It is unfortunate that the dictionaries currently available do not differentiate among archaisms (cf. Eng. *swive*, *jazz* 'fuck'), regionalisms (cf. Eng. *stump-sucker* 'faggot', *juke* 'fuck'), uncommon forms (cf. Eng. *tube steak* 'cock', *furburger* 'cunt'), double entendres (cf. Eng. *pole* 'prick', *box* 'cunt'), expressions which are possible but not fixed (cf. Eng. *Go take a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut!*), and standard, common usage (cf. Eng. *prick*, *cunt*, *fuck you*, *eat shit*). Admittedly, such a task is an extremely difficult one, especially due to the difficulty in obtaining concurring judgments from native speakers. Although the efforts which have been published to date are quite important, the beginning Russian student, and even the more advanced student, would have difficulties in attempting to use the currently available dictionaries for any but passive purposes.

The following annotated list, thematically organized, is intended to serve as the basis for a single introductory lecture on Russian obscenity. In view of the various problems elucidated above, it is primarily limited to those expressions which are relatively common in Russian while still being relatively isomorphic with their English equivalents. Certain phrases and proverbial expressions which do require more clarification than mere translation comprise a notable exception to this principle. They are included because they were quite popular with students. The current list has been tested repeatedly in the classroom and is intended to fill a single fifty-minute class period. While this list will certainly appear somewhat random and incomplete to native speakers of Russian, and while there may be some disagreement regarding translations, given the intent and limitations of the list, i.e. the introduction of Russian obscenity to American students with only one year of Russian in a single class period, it is hoped that it will prove useful in the advancement of knowledge. In a lecture based on this list, it is suggested that the instructor combine an attitude of dry pedantry with one of light-hearted prurience, as this has proven to be most effective in communicating the material to students.

THE LIST

I. Body Parts

Xúj Prick**Naxújnik Rubber****Pososí xuj! Suck (my) cock!****Xuesós Cocksucker.** Used to mean "idiot."**Xuj na kolēsax! Prick on wheels!** An abusive vocative.**Xuj moržóvyj! Walrus-prick!** An abusive vocative for a dirty old man.**Xuj tebé v glaz / rot! A prick in your eye / mouth!** Note dative pronoun and accusative of motion.**Xuë-moë!** An exclamation. Cf. Eng. "Fuck-a-duck!"**Ploxómu xúju i volósiki mešájut.** *Even the short hairs get in the way of a bad prick.* Cf. Eng. "The poor workman blames his tools."(!)**Xúem grúši okoláčivaju.** *I'm whacking pears with my prick.* Used to mean "I'm not doing a fucking thing" or "I'm doing something useless."**Sto xúev v žópu – ne tésno?** *A hundred pricks up the ass – isn't it a bit tight?* : "Aren't you overdoing it?"**Jajcó** (nom. pl. *jájca*, gen. pl. *jaíc*) *Balls.* Lit. 'eggs'; cf. also Eng. "nuts."**Emú tol'ko slónu jájca kačat'.** *All he's good for is swinging an elephant's balls.* Cf. Eng. "He's only fit for shoveling shit." *Idí!* 'Go!' can be substituted for *emú tol'ko* to give the expression a meaning like "Fuck off!"**Pizdá Cunt****Pizdënka Pussy****Pizdostrádanie Horniness****Idí v pizdú! Go up a cunt!** : "Fuck off!"**Pizdá vonjúčaja! Stinking cunt!** An abusive vocative.**Pizdá mókraja Wet / juicy cunt** : "hot, horny."**Pizdá s ušámi A cunt with ears** : something ridiculous.**K pizdé rukáv A sleeve for a cunt** : something unnecessary; cf. "Coals to Newcastle."**Mandavóška Crab louse.** From *mandá* 'cunt' and *voš* 'louse.'**Tít'ka Tit**

Žópa *Ass*

Žopolíz *Ass-licker*

Žóp(oč)nik *Buttfucker*

Idí v žópu! *Go up my ass!* Used to mean "Kiss my ass!"

II. Bodily Functions

1. Excretory

(Na)bzdét' (3 pl. *bzdjat*) *To fart silently.* Cf. S(ilent) B(ut) D(eadly).

Perdét' (3 pl. *perdját*; pf. *pěrdnut'*) *To fart with a noise*

On ljápnul, kak v lúžu pěrdnul. *He blurted it out as if he'd farted in a puddle.* Used to mean "He stuck his foot in his mouth." Note that the *d* in *pěrdnul* is not pronounced.

(Na)srát' (3 pl. *srut/serút/sérjut*) *To shit*

Srányj *Shitty*

Sráka *Asshole* : "shitchute." No longer common except in the expression *Pocelúj menjá v sráku!* "Kiss my ass!"

Čto ja v boršč nasrál, čto li? *What did I do, shit in the soup or something?* Used when someone is extremely angry at the speaker.

Govnó *Shit*

Gověnnij *Shitty, full of shit*

Govnjuk' *Shithead*

On nastojáščee govno. *He's a real shit.*

Èto stoprocěntnoe govno. *That's 100% shit.*

Svoě govno ne vonjáet. *He thinks his shit doesn't stink.*

Used of critical people unaware of their own faults.

On (inženér) kak iz govna púlja. *He's an (engineer) like a bullet made of shit.* Used of anyone who is bad at his/her job, the appropriate profession being inserted where there are parentheses.

Govno sobáč'e *Dog shit.* Used in a public statement by N. S. Khrushchev; it can be an abusive vocative as well as a descriptive term.

(Po)scát' (3 pl. *scat*; the letters *sc* are pronounced *ss*) *To piss*

Prótiv vétra ne sci. *Don't piss into the wind.*

Scat' ja na negó xotél. *Piss on him.* Lit. 'I would piss on

him.' Note that in both these expressions the key word may be spelled with a double *ss*, viz. *ssy* and *ssat*'.

Písat' (3 pl. *písajut*) *To pee*. This verb is especially useful in demonstrating the importance of stress and conjugation, since those are the only two factors differentiating this verb from *pisát'* (3 pl. *píšut*) 'write.'

Núžnik *Can, crapper*. Cf. *núžnyj* 'necessary.'

Pipí; Káka *Wee-wee* and *doo-doo* (*poo-poo*), respectively. While not, strictly speaking, obscene, they do serve as the functional equivalent in nursery language. *Pipí* appears to have been borrowed from French.

2. Sexual

Dróčit' (3 pl. *dróčát*) *To jack off*

Dročíla An epicoenal noun; when masc., it means "a jack-off"; when fem., it means "a prick-teaser."

Káždyj dróčit } *Everyone jacks off as he pleases :*

Kak on xóčet } "Different strokes for different folks."

Minét *Blow job*. From the French *faire minette* "to eat pussy."

(S)délat' komú-to minét *To give someone a blow job*

Ebát' *Fuck*. The older forms of the infinitive are *etí* and *et'*.

The 3 pl. is *ebút*. The past tense is *ëb*, *eblá* or *ebál*, *ebála*. The perfective can be formed with a wide variety of prefixes, such as the common *vy-* and *ot-*.

Ebát' rákom *To fuck dog-fashion*. Lit. 'crab fashion.'

Raz"ebát' *To fuck over*

Eblívyj *Hot, horny*

Ebúčij Same as *eblívyj* but stronger. Note that this is an old native (as opposed to Church Slavic) present active participle.

Ěbannyj *Fucked / fucking*. Similar to idiomatic English.

Idí k ěbannoj / eběnoj / ebéne máteri! *Go to your fucked mother!* A functional equivalent of "Go fuck your mother!"

Ěb tvojú mat'! *Fuck your mother!* Lit. 'Fucked (masc.) your mother.' This is the most popular of all Russian obscenities. In Polish and Ukrainian it is referred to as "the Russian curse," while in Yiddish, with char-

acteristic irony, it is known as "a Russian blessing." In the modern language, it is generally assumed that the subject is the speaker, but Isačenko has cogently argued that in earlier times the subject was *pēs* 'a dog.' It can also be used as an interjection as in *Peredáj, ěb tvojú mat', sol'!* 'Pass, fuck your mother, the salt!': "Pass the fucking salt!"

Ebí tja v rot! *Fuck you in the mouth!*

Ěj ty ěbanaja v rot bljad'! *Hey you fucked-in-the-mouth whore!* Note that the noun and participial phrase can be inverted for a heightened effect.

Končát' (3 pl. *končájut*; pf. *kónčit'*, 3 pl. *kónčat*) *To come.* Lit. 'to finish.'

III. Social Institutions and Other Expressions

Kúrva *Whore.* This word is not as common as the following word, but it has been borrowed into so many East European languages that it is now understood by most people from Estonia to Albania. The Russian form was evidently borrowed from Polish.

Bljad' *Whore.* Also used as an interjection. It is frequently used to refer to a man or woman who cooperates with the Soviet system.

Bljadun' *Whoremonger; pimp*

Bardak' *Whorehouse*

Požár v bardaké vo vrémja zemletresénija. *A fire in a whorehouse during an earthquake.* A description of utter chaos.

Súka *Bitch.* Also used as an interjection.

Súkin syn *Son of a bitch*

Svóloč' This word is extremely difficult to translate, but is so abusive that it is worth including. The verb *svolóč'* means 'to drag.' The noun *svóloč'* implies someone who has been dragged through something extremely unpleasant, e.g. feces. One attempted definition runs "Lower than a duck's feet."

U negó stoít. *He has a hard-on.* Lit. 'By him it stands', or 'he has one that stands.'

V rot brat' *To take it in the mouth*

Sjad' na moj, da poezžáj domój! *Sit on mine, and ride home!*

Idí k čórtu! *Go to the devil!*

Idí v ad! *Go to hell!*

Prokljátj *Damned*. Used as an interjection and adjective.

SOURCES

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