NONTRADITIONAL PRESENTATION OF ENTRIES

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If defined as the production of traditional dictionaries, lexicography is a dying profession. Dictionaries are losing out to other tools because:

- They insist on creating detailed and precise classifications of material that, by its very nature, defies such classification.
- They seem unable to shake off organizational structures that are rooted in the economies of printing.

The lexicographer as word sleuth, surgeon, and alphabetizer is being replaced by machines. My students use Google before they resort to a dictionary. And they are right to do so.

Our physical selves are examined by cardiologists, dermatologists, and neurologists, our social selves by sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. I would rather be examined once a year by a single humanologist who studies all those areas together. I don't see how the functioning of my liver can be separated from the flukes of the culture I live in.

So, too, our verbal lives are not distinct series of events in syntax, morphology, semantics, and phraseology. That would be most unnatural. How can the versions of the phrases I use be separated from the rest of my behavior, or from the behavior of their component words and morphemes, or their components' components? Or, come to think of it, from the functioning of my liver?

The top-notch *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms* by Sophia Lubensky (2013) – the first of its kind – will probably also be the last to appear in print. I keep it on my desk and advise my students to use it for reference. But I don't tell them to use it to learn Russian. For that, I tell them, go swimming with a search engine. And I teach them how to stay afloat. And if my wish comes true (below), they will occasionally land on Lubensky shores.

As a lexicographer dissects his native tongue in order to fit pieces of it into a particular kind of dictionary entry, he resorts to all kinds of surgery. The author of a phraseological dictionary is spared much of the gore, but still must decide where a phrase begins and ends, and whether it belongs in the dictionary or not. These are artificial decisions that distort the life of the phrase. A phraseological dictionary is better than other dictionaries because it usually includes at least a sentence, and sometimes even two. But that is still a biopsy. The patient doesn't live in that sentence, it lives in the paragraph, in the chapter, and possibly in the entire book. And the book lives in a culture.

The sentence *Партия не дремлет* (lit. 'The Party never sleeps') reads differently depending on its geopolitical situation. Is it 'the Party' or 'a party'? Does *never sleeps* mean 'is awake' or 'is vigilant'? Is *не дремлет* an idiom? Can a different subject be substituted? Is its meaning reversed if you remove the negative particle? Can it be used in a different tense or aspect? Can you turn it into a participle? We use various litmus tests to decide whether a phrase belongs in a phraseological dictionary, but the only reason we have to consider the question is our strange desire to compile (and use) dictionaries – dictionaries whose every bit of information has been honed to perfection and placed, most unnaturally, in its precise spot.

I use dictionaries all the time. And every time, I am depressed by their artificial representation of the language. Paper dictionaries are the worst, but most electronic dictionaries go the same route. A dictionary of idioms is better than most and is almost acceptable, but I prefer a collocational dictionary.[1] And my favorite dictionary is not a dictionary at all, it is *Nacional'nyj korpus russkogo jazyka* (Russian National Corpus – RNC). That's where I tell my students to hang out. It is free of the descriptive and prescriptive pretensions of lexicography, and it is open-ended.[2] Another great hangout for context lovers is the bilingual Linguee at http://www.linguee.ru.

It doesn't matter where *не дремлет* belongs. Let all dictionaries be phraseological dictionaries, a collection of small portions of the RNC. Let all Russian sentences in Lubensky's *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms* be included in it, along with all the other sentences in the RNC. And let my phrase be presented to the learner as it is used in *Партия не дремлет. | А партия не дремлет! | Однако партия не дремлет!* or even better, *Однако партия не дремлет: она всё видит, замечает и наносит ответный удар* ('The Party never sleeps' or 'But the Party never sleeps!' or 'However, the Party never sleeps!' or, better yet, 'However, the Party never sleeps: it sees everything, pays attention to everything, and strikes back'). If you need to bring the sea to the learner in a drinking glass, give her as much context as you can.

In my dictionary for English-speaking learners of Russian, *The Russian Dictionary Tree*[3], entries are offered as follows (somewhat modified for this publication[4]):

Брать

- *as in* я брал деньги у родителей I used to get money from my parents [details➜]
- *as in* Он брал карандаш и задумчиво смотрел на лист бумаги. He would pick up his pencil and gaze thoughtfully at the sheet of paper. [details➜]
- *as in* брать портфель на работу to bring a briefcase to the office, брать с собой детей to bring the children along [details➜]

- *as in* армия брала один город за другим the army took one town after another [details➜]
- *as in* вы слишком много берёте за свои помидоры you charge too much for your tomatoes [details➜]
- *as in* брать билеты в театр *Colloquial* to buy theater tickets, брать молоко в гастрономе *Colloquial* to get milk at the grocery store [details➜]
- *as in* брать садовника на лето *Informal* to hire/take on a gardener for the summer [details➜]
- *as in* брать номер в гостинице *Colloquial* to take a room in a hotel [details➜]
- *as in* брать тему для статьи to choose a theme for an essay [details➜]
- *as in* брать хитростью to succeed through cunning, брать терпением to succeed through patience [details➜]
- *as in* меня брала тоска I used to become depressed, меня брал страх I used to be overcome by fear [details➜]
- *as in* эти ножницы картон не берут these scissors don't work on (don't grip) cardboard [details➜]
- *as in* брать (курс) на юг *Informal when* курс *is omitted* to turn south брать (курс) на деревню to head for the village [details➜]
- *used as a semi-auxiliary verb in the general meaning of* to gain possession of something, permanently or temporarily, *as in* брать напрокат to rent, to borrow, брать в аренду to lease, to rent [details➜]
- *as in* их всегда брали ночью *Colloquial* they were always arrested at night, жандармы брали всех заговорщиков вместе *Colloquial* the police arrested all conspirators together [details➜]
- *as in* брать под стражу *Old-fashioned* to place someone under guard, брать под арест *Formal* to arrest someone, to take someone into custody
- *as in* брать магазин под охрану *Formal* to place the store under guard, to install security guards at the store [details➜]
- *as in* она брала пример с сестры she followed her sister's example (*always with the word* пример) [details➜]
- *as in* не много ли вы на себя берёте? aren't you taking on more than you can handle? [details➜]

The reader uses this list to select the item that interests her. Once she clicks 'details➜' she can read the entire entry, including a more traditional definition and glosses, e.g. 'to overstep one's authority, to take on more than one can deal with, to assume more power than one is entitled to' for the last item, above.

This list for *брать* is not complete. Dozens more entries should be added, especially of the kind that involve severe combinatorial restrictions like those towards the end of the list (Lubensky includes more than eighty). Some instantiations of *брать* are idiomatic, some are borderline idiomatic,

and in some phrases, it serves as a semi-auxiliary verb.[5] Some could probably be collapsed: *брать* as in *полиция брала всех подряд* can be seen as a special case of *брать под арест*. The boundaries between most of the items in this list are fuzzy: such is the nature of language.

I often find myself explaining to my students that the dissection of a word into numbered meanings or usage cases is largely the lexicographer's invention. I encourage them to see words as chameleonic beings that can only be learned in their polymorphous polysemanticity. Words change their message depending on the environment, yet mostly stay true to their core nature. By offering these carefully constructed bits of context, *The Russian Dictionary Tree* (RDT) invites a holistic approach to the study of the word. For many students, *The Russian Dictionary Tree* (RDT) is easier to use than RNC, but its purpose is still to prepare the language learner to swim in a sea of words that is swarming with life.

Another aspect of the presentation in the RDT is its reliance on the English speaker's instant comprehension of the translations. A more traditional dictionary might offer the following glosses for the top two items in my listing: *брать* 1) to take, to get, to take possession of; 2) to pick up, to take, to get, to grasp. It takes most readers longer than a New York minute to figure out what the glosses in 1) and 2) have in common and how they are different. I want the reader to rely on her native speaker's intuition (in English) rather than analysis. Printed dictionaries conserve space by combining two very different functions of an entry: a) to help the reader choose the right meaning/usage and b) to offer glosses for use in translation. This is a bad practice that, surprisingly, is being transferred to electronic dictionaries, where space is much cheaper. The RTD separates these two functions: glosses and explanations are presented after the reader clicks for the details, i.e. after she has chosen her hero.

A similar presentation for an English speaker who is searching for an appropriate Russian word would look like this:

View

- *as in* the view from my window вид из моего окна [details➜]
- *as in* she shared her views with the audience: она поделилась своими взглядами с аудиторией [details➜]
- *as in* let me offer my view of this issue позвольте мне предложить свое мнение по этому вопросу [details➜]

etc.

Such display is more effective than a list of glosses in helping the learner choose a good Russian equivalent of the English word.

Clicking the 'details➜' link for one of the *брать* items allows the user to drill down to a display like this:

брать.

to succeed by virtue of something, *as in* to succeed through cunning

Morphology

ЕМ берут; intransitive; Impf. (Pf. взять)

Non-past Sg.	non-past Pl.	Imper.	Past	Pres.deverb.	Past deverb.
беру	берём	бери	брал	беря	
берёшь	берёте	берите	брала	берущий	бравший
берёт	берут		брали/о	——	——

Examples and Notes on Usage and Style.

брать хитростью (Inst.) to succeed through cunning

In many entries the detail display includes notes on pronunciation, synonyms, antonyms, style, an occasional cultural comment, and other useful items. For example, a usage comment may explain the difference between *брать напрокат* 'to rent, to lease' and *брать в аренду* 'to rent, to lease', where the English glosses are not helpful. The structure of the entries makes them easy to expand. This dictionary is called *The Tree* because it keeps growing. Some day I may start adding Melchukian [Mel'čukian] lexical functions, in one format or another.

Because each 'details' link takes the reader to a display that is specific to the item she has selected, the information she sees there is tailored to her interest: no irrelevant inflected forms, aspect partners, or comments clutter the screen. Compared to the more traditional grouping of meanings or usages, this allows me to write cleaner entries.

Consider, for example, the top two items in the list for *брать*. Most Russian-English dictionaries would group them together because both can be glossed as 'get; take', and indeed the two usage cases are close. However, their government patterns are different (*взять X в руки* vs. *взять X у мамы* 'take X in your hand' vs. 'take X from Mom') and that difference cannot be cleanly presented in the combined entry. Their combinatorial properties and lexical functions are also different: you might hear someone say *беспардонно брать деньги у мамы* 'shamelessly take money from Mom' but I doubt you will hear people say *беспардонно брать в руку карандаш* 'shamelessly pick up a pencil'. Okay, perhaps one can shamelessly

pick up a pencil and use it to draw something outrageous. If so, here is perhaps a more convincing example: *the opposite* of taking money from Mom is giving her money (thus the verbs *давать* 'to give' and *возвращать* 'to return' should be listed in the entry), but the opposite of picking up a pencil is *класть* 'to put, to place'. Therefore, two entries are better than one. In some cases, the set of usable inflected forms can be different, as well. In other words, my guiding principle in defining an entry is that any difference should lead to separation.

Accordingly, in the RDT, if one instantiation of a word differs from another in some detail, such as a different value of a lexical function, government pattern, set of synonyms, etc., those two cases are presented separately. This sets the RDT apart from the excellent project called *Викисловарь* (Wiktionary).[6] Wiktionaries take full advantage of unlimited electronic storage and display space, and include all kinds of information, potentially combining morphological, phraseological, semantic, cultural, and other types of dictionaries in one portal. I like this approach for its philosophical and practical advantages: it paints an exhaustive portrait of a word, which I find very appealing; and it spares the learner a search for a specialized dictionary for her every need (a search that most learners simply won't undertake). However, the clarity of the presentation is greatly hampered by grouping all incarnations of a word together. When investigating a particular usage of the word, the reader has to sift through many bits of irrelevant information and is expected to be able to cope with that. In the RDT, if a certain inflected form, government pattern, or synonym is not relevant for the selected usage, it is not shown.

The long list of items shown above for the verb *брать* is complemented by an entirely separate list for *взять*, its perfective counterpart. The two lists are not quite parallel because some usages are unique to one aspect or the other. For example, this context for взять rarely appears for *брать*:

Взять

- ....
- *as in* дети уже ждали наследства, а он взял да и женился *Informal* his children were expecting an inheritance any day now, but he up/went and got married (*when followed by* и/да + *perfective verb*) [details➜]

The detail display for the above entry states that this use of the imperfective partner is rare, but not impossible, e.g. *Ужасный был хулиган. Как увидит знак «Не курить», так нарочно берёт и закуривает.* 'He was an inveterate contrarian. He would deliberately light up whenever he saw a no-smoking sign'.

By isolating each aspect partner into its own entry, the RDT resolves some of the difficulties of the more traditional combined presentation of perfective verbs and their imperfective partners:

- English equivalents are much easier to present when they do not have to fit both aspects.
- Sentential examples (for government patterns and other illustration) can be compiled to fit the relevant aspect. This often requires entirely different sentences and is especially important for presenting idiomatic/phraseological usage.
- The display of inflected forms is greatly streamlined.
- A list of the verb's aspect partners can be offered without complicating the display, e.g. for the imperfective verb *играть* as in *играть гаммы на рояле* 'to play scales on a piano', the aspect notation is Pf-begin[7]: *заиграть*, Pf-awhile: *поиграть*, Pf: *сыграть* and *проиграть*. This information would be less readable if both aspectual variants were presented in one entry.

I teach Russian language and produce documentaries that I use in my courses. That's where words really live an exciting life, complete with intonations, facial expressions, and gestures. Not all language is speech, yet speech is where it all begins. Cognition by analysis has its place in language learning, but more and more frequently I see my colleagues turn away from rules and dictionary entries. And I see students achieving greater success with search engines than with specialized dictionaries. Given what I said at the beginning, should I continue cultivating my *Tree*?

A dictionary serves three functions:

- for a learner, an array of entry points into the language
- for a proficient speaker, a reference tool
- for the lexicographer, an object of love and attention.

I think the first two functions could be better served by advanced searching and presentation technologies. The third one cannot be replicated by any other means, so I guess I'll stick around – hoping to nudge lexicographers gently away from producing traditional dictionaries.

Notes

1 A few examples of collocational dictionaries are: (Iordanskaja and Paperno 1996), (Mel'čuk et al. 1984-1999), (Mel'čuk and Polguère 2007), and the father of them all (Mel'čuk and Žolkovskij 1984). I also must mention my long-time favorite (Denisov and Morkovkin 1978). That edition is a monolingual resource.

2 The main part of the RNC (*Russian National Corpus – Nacional'nyj korpus russ-kogo jazyka*) is a monolingual resource; the RNC also includes several parallel corpora, a valuable bilingual tool. The titles of the dictionaries I cite indicate whether they are mono- or bilingual.

3 *The Russian Dictionary Tree* (RDT) by Slava Paperno and Richard L. Leed can be used at http://russian.cornell.edu/rdt/ and, with a slightly more sophisticated interface, http://lexiconbridge.com/cloud/.

4 One of the modifications that were necessary because of the technology of this publication is the removal of accent marks. In the RDT, word stress (principal and secondary) is marked for all words that bear it, including the stressed monosyllabic words like но (secondary stress) and он (primary) because, of course, the vowel in these two words does not sound the same (nor is it the same as the vowel in the unstressed *во*), which is useful information for the learner.

5 A 'semi-auxiliary' verb may not be a widely accepted label or category, but I find it very useful in teaching. The concept contributes to the learner's understanding that all incarnations of a word are mutually related.

6 In many ways similar to Wikipedia, Wiktionaries exist for several languages. The Russian-language Wiktionary can be used at https://ru.wiktionary.org/. Like *The Russian Dictionary Tree,* it will probably always be a work in progress. I would like to see articles on individual culturally significant words/concepts included in Wiktionary, e.g. the wonderful collection published in (Zaliznjak et al. 2005).

7 As far as I know, the practice of labeling *aktionsart* as Pf-begin, Pf-awhile, and Pf-once was first introduced in (Leed and Paperno 1987).

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