# Rhymed Talk and Ideophones: Recovering Extinct Discourse Practices from Russian Realist Fiction

**Boris Maslov,** *University of Oslo, Norway*
**Tatiana Nikitina,** *CNRS-LACITO, France*

**ABSTRACT**

This article presents a case for approaching works of nineteenth-century realist fiction as proto-ethnographic documents that contain unique evidence for reconstructing extinct discourse practices. We focus on two previously undescribed phenomena: improvised rhyming in sparring dialogue, and the use of ideophones in oral storytelling.

Fictional texts, including nineteenth-century realist texts, are recognized as an important source for historically minded anthropology.[1] Nevertheless, approaches that mine literary works for historical evidence have long been treated with caution. While literary scholars have often claimed an autonomy, and an immanent poetics, for aesthetic artifacts, linguists, preoccupied with issues of grammar and grammaticality, have prioritized spontaneous data of oral speech, largely overlooking written registers or genres.[2] Recent advances

1. See, e.g., Friedrich (2003); Drechsel (2007); Lucey and McEnaney (2017); Schwab (2020).

2. The one major exception is research by historians of pragmatics that often relies on literary evidence, e.g., Friedrich (1979) and Linfoot-Ham (2005); see Fitzmaurice (2010) for an overview. See also the use of

in linguistic anthropology, as well as theoretical developments in literary studies (cf. Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000; Jameson 2013; Kliger and Maslov 2015), invite us to reassess the relationship between fiction and language-in-use.

As many linguistic anthropologists would now agree, language consists of more than grammar, and perhaps not even primarily of grammar. Speakers construe their own language as a set of discourse practices, foremost among which are practices of verbal narrative art; the decline of such practices can be perceived as language loss, even if—judged quantitatively by the number of speakers who use the same grammar—the language is not considered endangered (Henne-Ochoa 2018; Nikitina 2018). In much the same way as in predominantly oral cultures studied by field anthropologists, the spread of literacy and socioeconomic changes have led to the extinction of discourse practices based on oral performance in major modern European languages. In some cases, it is only thanks to the sociographic agenda of realist fiction that these practices can be reconstructed in the first place. The method of such reconstruction, however, involves considerable risks.

The task is not simply to uncover a pragmatic dimension of language-in-use in documents of the past. In this area of study, much has been achieved. Building on the precedent of pragmaphilology, scholars of historical pragmatics have focused on earlier forms of linguistic features that depend on register and context of use, such as politeness markers and discourse particles.[3] This work mostly has to be pursued from the bottom up, based on corpora of texts, as explicit data on protocols of linguistic interaction are only very occasionally extant, for example, in colonial records or early descriptions (Drechsel 1983; Hanks 1987; Bartelt 2010).

Historical ethnography of speaking, which aspires to analyze extinct discourse practices or "patterns of speech behavior" (Collins 2001, xvi), poses still greater challenges, because in this case scholars cannot even be sure what to look for.[4] Based on comparative ethnographic evidence, we can infer that discourse practices evolve distinct, formal properties and are sensitive to distinctions of class, gender, and age; they may be restricted to particular social groups, as in, for example, formulaic rhymed insults among Turkish boys (Dundes et al.

folklore narratives in Applegate (1975), fiction in Bax (1981), and semifictional sources in Drechsel (2007). The separation of literature from language history is, however, perpetuated in work on "pragmatics of fiction" (Locher and Jucker 2017).

3. Jacobs and Jucker (1995) provide a survey of earlier work; for a sample of ongoing research see Arnovick (1999); Biber (2004); Jucker (2008); Jucker and Taavitsainen (2010).

4. The existing studies focus largely on documentation of discourse practices that are on the brink of extinction in communities undergoing social change (Sherzer 1983; Kroskrity 1993). For path-breaking studies of historical ethnographies of speaking in an extinct language, see Martin (1989) and Kurke (2013).

1972) or "playing the dozens" among African-American men.[5] In other words, historical ethnography of speaking must rest on a diachronically extended "variational pragmatics" (Barron and Schneider 2009), which would seek to excavate the panoply of situationally varied means of linguistic interaction.

Lived, contextualized experience of language-in-use in past epochs is lost for good unless it is represented in narrative sources; fictional narratives, however, do not as a rule aim at ethnographic documentation but have their own protocols of genre conformance as well as individual, innovatory agendas within the literary field. Admittedly, thanks to advances in both linguistic anthropology and literary studies, the distinction between natural and literary uses of language now appears far less univocal than it did when Leonard Bloomfield (1944) saw fit to dismiss "style" as merely a "tertiary" linguistic phenomenon, provoking a maverick riposte from Leo Spitzer (1944).

On the one hand, linguistic anthropologists have come to appreciate how pervasive the covert workings of indexicality are, bringing an awareness of the multiplicity of codes, levels of metasemiosis, and polyglossia into the study of everyday language;[6] in this light, Roman Jakobson's "poetic function" could be reinterpreted as an explication of how discourse is regimented more generally (Silverstein 1993, 50). Different literary genres can now be approached as sets of metapragmatic operations upon generic (i.e., implicitly regimented as *typical*) tokens of language use.[7]

On the other hand, literary scholars have become more attentive to ways in which a variety of speech genres are embedded and played upon in verbal art. A major influence on both literary studies and linguistic anthropology, Mikhail Bakhtin has identified the novel as a genre that incorporates and hybridizes a wide variety of kinds of discourse, noting that other literary forms, such as the novella, the short story, or the long poem, can be subjected to a process of "novelization" that endows them with the same openness to nonliterary uses of language.[8]

Some kinds of narrative fiction embed representations of everyday speech situations not incidentally but because they are stipulated to do so by the logic of the culturally specific literary field. In particular, the Russian realist novel as a genre is strongly committed to constructing a variational pragmatics

5. Abrahams (1970, 47–58); Labov (1972); Kochman (1983); cf. Rizza (2012).
6. Silverstein (1976, 30–36); Silverstein and Urban (1996); Silverstein (2003); Agha (2005).
7. For recent engagements with literature from a viewpoint informed by Silversteinian linguistic anthropology, see Lucey (2015); Maslov (2015); Lucey and McEnaney (2017).
8. See Bakhtin's work collected in the English volume *Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and his study of Dostoevsky (1984).

of language-in-use, treating linguistic features as social indexes. Rather than merely archiving speech situations, however, literary texts often take a meta-semiotic position toward them, in the shape of explicit comments by the narrator or the author's representational choices (scene setting, characterization, plot construction). In other words, in contrast to etiquette guides or ceremonial protocols, literature provides *implicit* metapragmatic description of language use.[9]

In sum, dealing with literature as a source of ethno- and sociolinguistic evidence presents a number of methodological challenges. The object of study is necessarily a culture-specific and artistically skewed *representation* of discourse. Any analysis of such representations should take into account genre-specific conventions, language ideologies, and the attitude of the particular author who may sometimes appear to be a field linguist avant la lettre, but whose ultimate allegiance is to the literary field. Literary representations of spoken discourse must be interpreted as *typified tokens* of human interaction that are constructed, based on actual usage, by speakers ("writers") who not only claim a high level of linguistic competence but are engaged in competitive display of their poetic skill within a separate domain of cultural practice.

Since we are interested primarily in demonstrating the utility of the literary archive for the study of discourse practices, we abstract away from phenomena that belong to grammar and lexicon (*langue* in the Saussurean sense), focusing instead on structural principles that operate across different languages. One, commonly but erroneously regarded as an exclusive feature of poetic language, is the end rhyme: in certain social contexts, speakers may adopt an additional level of structural organization of discourse, using words that include a similar stressed syllable. The other is the use of indexical gesture words, which do not predicate events of individuals as regular verbs do but rather point directly to specific instances of events, or *demonstrate* them. We begin with a general overview of meta-linguistic elements in the Russian realist novel.

## Gender, Class, Ideology: Social Indexicals in the Russian Realist Novel

While all literary texts reflect or conserve actually occurring forms of discourse and can thus be approached as evidence of the history of language use, reliability of reconstructing particular discourse practices is contingent on the text's realist *orientation*.[10] In the nineteenth century, as realism broke with romanticism,

9. For examples of explicit metapragmatic description, see etiquette guides on the use of *tu* vs. *vous* in French (Agha 2005, 51) or protocols for greetings (Drechsel 1983; Hübler 2007).

10. The Russian formalist notion of "set" or "orientation" (*ustanovka*) as a basic parameter of literary discourse is discussed in Tynianov (2019, 277).

literature shifted its attention away from the individual (often cast as being at odds with society) to the social milieu in which different agents interact, as well as away from the (more or less idealized) national past to the sociopolitical actuality of the present. Literary discourse sought "spontaneous, unstylized contact with reality" (Ginzburg 2001, 23), brazenly describing phenomena not periphrastically but "by [using their] own name" (Jakobson 1987, 22) and saturating narrative with seemingly extraneous detail to gain what Roland Barthes termed the "effect of the real" (1989). At the same time, realism remained committed to psychologically enriched representation of individual characters, anchoring their internal complexity in interpersonal ties and sociopolitical investments. In some ways anticipating the academic fields of psychology and the social sciences, realist fiction's descriptive depth and analytic stance assured its long-term influence on intellectual engagements with socially variable modalities of language use.

One particularly telling case is *Notes of a Hunter*, the 1852 collection of short stories by Ivan Turgenev, one of the most influential European realist writers of the second half of the nineteenth century. Detailing an aristocrat's encounters with the everyday life of Russian peasants, this work is widely regarded as having had a significant impact on the public sensibilities in the period leading up to the liberation of the serfs in 1861, as well as on various projects of "literary ethnography" funded by the Imperial Russian Naval Ministry and involving major realist writers such as Ivan Goncharov and Alexei Pisemsky (Clay 1995, 51, 59; cf. Vdovin 2015).

The first story in the cycle, "Khor and Kalinych," begins with a description of differences between peasants residing in the neighboring Orlov and Kaluga provinces, detailing their physical appearance, habitat, social mores, and eating and clothing habits (1978–86, 3:6). Turgenev's interest extends to language, prompting him to footnote dialectal features (3:8). Khor, whose appearance reminds the narrator of Socrates, is credited with having introduced the narrator to "the simple, sharp speech of a Russian peasant" (3:17).[11] An example of such pointed use of language is Khor's interaction with his son whom he chides for spending too much time in the company of serf girls at the master's house:

(1) "Now then, you . . . ah, I know you! All those silver rings of yours. . . .
    The only thing you care about is sniffing around the girls up at the manor

11. Socrates's speech, as it is represented by Plato, was notably colloquial and down-to-earth.

house. . . . 'Stop it! Shame on you!' [Polnote, besstydniki], the old man went on, mimicking the servant girls. 'I know you well, you lazy bum!'"[12]

The embedded outburst of a maid is implicitly regimented: it is marked not by a verb-of-speech frame, but by intonation and pitch (the reader assumes) as well as by a lexical item that is alien to the villagers' idiom. A borrowing from the language of the masters, *polnote* is formed by combining *polno* 'it is enough' (corresponding to French *ça suffit*) with the second person plural ending *-te* deriving formal (*vy/vous*) forms of the verb. The polite use of the second person plural, itself a practice borrowed from French, has entered the speech of household servants who could use these forms also when addressing their peers (cf. Gogol, *Gamblers*, scene 7). In Turgenev's time, the masters would address peasants with singular *ty* forms (and older peasants, like Khor, would reciprocate); at the end of the nineteenth century, as can be gathered from the usage in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (pt. 1, chap. 27), masters could also address their servants with polite plural forms. The best and perhaps only way to reconstruct the evolution of this usage in detail is by attending to literary sources.[13]

By quoting the maids' discourse in this dismissive fashion, Khor is both indexing women's inferior status (a token of this character's otherwise patent misogynism) and *enregistering* the language of peasants who are mixing too much with the masters. Khor himself is prosperous and relatively independent of the estate owner but curiously (for the narrator) uninterested in purchasing his freedom. Referring to himself in the third person, a discourse strategy that belongs to the peasant sociolect, he says:

(2)  "If Khor were thrown among free men," he continued in an undertone, as though to himself, "everyone without a beard is superior to Khor."[14]

The boundaries between social classes, Khor believes, would prove more repressive once he is released from a master whom he happens to find agreeable. Committed to the status quo, in which he was able to carve out a dignified position, Khor is not even teaching his children to read and write—the only exception being the son chided for lusting after house maids in example 1.

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12. Translation by Constance Garnett, revised by Elizabeth Cheresh Allen, and further amended here (Turgenev 1994, 12).

13. Paul Friedrich's 1979 analysis of the distinctions between *ty* and *vy* forms rests on the evidence of literary texts from Gogol to Gorky; it does not, however, attempt to trace their evolution over time. Documentary sources, such as letters, that record scenes of language-in-use are much less plentiful.

14. Translation by Constance Garnett, revised by Elizabeth Cheresh Allen (Turgenev 1994, 11).

In this larger narrative context, carefully constructed by Turgenev, Khor's parodic use of *polnote* is not simply a marker of the difference between registers within peasant speech; it is a token of his principled dismissal of a social dynamic that draws peasants away from their traditional occupations. The author, here closely aligned with the narrator, calibrates Khor's discourse with minimal interference, *nomically* (Silverstein 1993), seeking to maintain a balance between empathy for the character and disagreement with his views.

A parallel example is found in a work that marks a late high point of realist representation of nonurban language, Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* (1925–40). Here patriarchal *ressentiment* is revealed in an aggressive appropriation of female language that, at a deeper level of ideological representation, casts denial of rural life as prostitution. The Cossack Emelian comments on a seemingly minor lexical choice of the novel's chief female character, Aksinya, now a maid (pt. 4, chap. 7):

(3) "It is cold here [*zdes'*]," giving a slight shudder to her shoulders, Aksinya said and went out.

   Pouring himself an eighth cup of tea, Emelian watched her go and, placing his words slowly, as a blind man places his feet, said:

   "The stinking, dirty bag! Rotten as they come she is! Used to be running about the village in farm boots, and now she would not say *tut* [here], but *zdesja* [here]. . . . I can't stand women like her, the bitches. I'd have 'em all. . . . The creeping, slimy snake! Like them she goes 'It's cold in here [*zdesja*].' . . . Mare's snot, that's what she is."[15]

While Emelian vents his anger on the educated form of the spatial marker *here*, the narrator's attitude is that of a distanced observer, less sympathetic than that of Turgenev's hunter: notably, Aksinya's *zdes'* is quoted by Emelian in a distorted form, *zdesja*, showing both that the system includes a third, middleway term and that the character is incapable of enregistering the form correctly.

While peasant speech is the focus of the two case studies presented below, Russian realism's commitment to representation of the sociopragmatic minutiae of language use extends to other linguistic domains, including phenomena of multilingualism. In Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat* (1896–1904), a work by a "masterful anthropologist" (Friedrich 2003, 115), characters switch between Russian, Chechen, and Tatar, and use Arabic words as well, attesting to the complex sociolinguistic situation characteristic of northern Caucasian communities in the

15. Translation by Robert Daglish, revised and edited by Brian Murphy, omits all the details of the linguistic usage (Sholokhov 1996, 388).

middle of the nineteenth century.[16] By contrast, in his novels *War and Peace* (1863–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1873–77), Tolstoy explores the combined use of Russian and French by the Russian nobility; for example, secret lovers would shift to French (and use *vous* forms) because the intimate Russian *ty* forms would be too indiscreet and *vy* forms too official (Tolstoj 1960–63, 8:221). Turgenev shows an interest in the difference between Russian and non-Russian varieties of French; a character in *Still Waters* (1854) immediately identifies a Pole who speaks French "very politely and with a non-Russian accent" (Turgenev 1978–86, 4:426). Conversely, the protagonist in *Smoke* (1867) identifies his compatriots in Baden-Baden based on their distinctive French; as the narrator comments, "extensions of stressed vowels, intolerable to the French ear, constitute the peculiarity of the Russian accent" (Turgenev 1978–86, 7:300).

Beyond bilingualism and class markers, realist authors draw on indexicals in the speech of nobility to explore ideological fissures. Turgenev is particularly attentive to metasemantic and metapragmatic dimensions of speech. In an early scene in his best known work, *Fathers and Sons* (1861), the intergenerational conflict is enacted on the phonological level: what is at issue are two variant pronunciations of the word *principle*, one imitative of the French source word ([*prʲinsíp*]), the other a Russification of the borrowing that uses the vowel [ɨ] and shifts the stress to the first syllable ([*prínc̱ɨp*]):

(4)  "A nihilist is a person who bows down before no authority, accepts no principle on faith, no matter how much respect surrounds that principle."

"And is that a good thing?" Pavel Petrovich interrupted.

"That depends, dear uncle. For some people, it's good, for others, it's very bad."

"Oh I see. Then it's obviously not our cup of tea. We're people of another age, we assume that without *princíples* (Pavel Petrovich pronounced that word with palatalization, in the French manner; Arkady, on the contrary, said *pryntsip*, laying stress on the first syllable), without *princíples* accepted, as you say, on faith, it's impossible to take a step, to draw a breath."[17]

The characters use the word *principle* in two meanings ('rationally pursued objectives' versus 'ideals'), which, however, are not defined. Pavel Petrovich's

16. Tolstoy had control of Arabic and Kumyk, and his own recordings of Chechen folklore, made in 1851, "are among the earliest recordings of Chechen oral literature" (Friedrich 2003, 116, citing Mal'sagova 1989).

17. This is an amended version of the translation by Michael Katz (Turgenev 1996, 18).

statement is implicitly metasemantic: the difference in meaning is suggested by his distinctive pronunciation. The disagreement on *principles* is, in turn, metasemantic with respect to the new concept, *nihilism*, which owes its popularity to Turgenev's novel and which Arkady, this time in an explicitly metasemantic statement, equates with the overcoming of prejudices. Pavel Petrovich's decision to interrupt Arkady and then modify his pronunciation, adds a metapragmatic aspect to this exchange between "fathers" and "sons": what is being contested is the right to introduce new concepts.

Adding further levels of interpretation, the narrator details two different pronunciations of the same word, thereby both adopting a scientific stance and endowing the text with "the effect of the real," while the author, by placing this scene early in the novel and choosing to dramatize the conflict in the relatively safe zone of linguistic practice, is preparing the readers for later, less guarded intergenerational collisions. This metasemiotic nexus gives the reader a striking insight into the natural life of discourse in the epoch of Great Reforms in Russia.

In the following sections, we present two case studies of seemingly exotic representations of peasant speech in Russian realism. In both cases, supplementary evidence confirms that fictional texts attest to currently extinct discourse practices.

## Rhymed Talk

### Spontaneous Rhymers in Literary Sources

In contrast to rhythm and meter, rhyme has received scant attention from linguists, and its use in everyday discourse has generally gone unnoticed. The closest parallel to the phenomenon that we refer to as *rhymed talk* in Russian is the extensive use of rhyme in African-American dueling dialogue (also known as "playing the dozens" or "sounding"), which apparently can include improvised, rather than memorized rhyming couplets.[18] From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries (and, very likely, in the earlier periods as well), impromptu rhyming could also be employed in sparring dialogue in Russian. Inasmuch as our main record for this discourse practice is supplied by literary sources, however, it is easy to mistake it for a poetic device.

A case in point is Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* (1825), where rhymed talk occurs in the scene, set to music in Mussorgsky's opera, where Grigory (pretender

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18. In his path-breaking description of African American folklore in Philadelphia, Roger D. Abrahams notes "the strong reliance" of his informants "on rhyme as a device of wit, both in everyday speech and in their narratives" (1970, 175). Recorded instances of spontaneous, nonformulaic rhyming are difficult to come by (cf., however, the conversations quoted in Abrahams [1970, 45]).

to the throne) quarrels with his two companions, runaway monks Varlaam and Misail. Varlaam's ability to rhyme is essential to his public persona, as confirmed by Misail's repeated endorsements of his verbal performance; the laudatory adverb is *skladno* 'rhymed' or 'neatly phrased, well-turned'. Rhymed talk, as it is presented in this scene, straddles the border between everyday communication and a genre of verbal art that invites audience participation; responses are expected to conform to the same rules of "well-turned" speech: parallelism, rhyming, use of the coordinating conjunction *da*. This is demonstrated by Grigory's retort: "Swill if you will, but for God's sake, be still (*pej da pro sebja razumej*). You see, Father Varlaam, I, too, can put things deftly (*skladno*) at times" (Pushkin 2007, 29–31). The first, rhymed part of Grigory's reply is both competitive and contemptuous, as it serves to claim control of the verbal skill in which Varlaam excels. The second part, in its very rejection of rhyming, is plainly dismissive of this kind of proficiency. The failure to rhyme not only shifts the mode of interaction away from artfully constructed dialogue—jocular, yet licensing verbal aggression—to unmarked everyday discourse, but allows the speaker to quit the conversation altogether. Having dismissed Varlaam's invitation to join him for a drink, Grigory is free to use the time before the arrival of the border patrol to make inquiries about a secret path across the Lithuanian border. The pretender's ability to enter and exit rhymed talk is crucial to Pushkin's plot: without his metapragmatic trick, he would not have been able to escape, and consequently to return to Moscow as a new tsar.

Scenes with rhymed talk also occur in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian prose drama. In Denis Fonvizin's *The Minor* (*Nedorosl'*, 1782), the protagonist's two teachers begin speaking in rhymes; notably, the exchange is initiated by the less educated teacher of peasant background (act 3, scene 6). Similarly, two characters in Gogol's *Wedding* (1833–35) improvise a rhymed exchange at a point when their conversation turns particularly unfriendly (scene 17); in this case, one of the occasional rhymers is a low-rank member of the landowning class.

In all these cases poetic stylization may be suspected. It is when we turn to realist authors that the evidence seems to be firmly in favor of considering rhymed talk as a fully fledged discourse practice. One of the stories Turgenev included in the 1874 edition of *Notes of a Hunter*, "Clatter of Wheels," recounts how the narrator was stopped in the middle of the night by a gang of robbers. Both the narrator and his carriage driver expect to part with their lives, and are astonished to hear a seemingly innocuous and partially rhymed request for a small donation:

(5) The giant placed both his hands on the doors of the carriage and, leaning his tousled head forward and grinning, uttered in a soft, level voice and factory worker's patter: "Guv'ner sir, we're on our way from an honest feast, a wedding party. We've <u>married off</u> one of our mates, you know, really <u>put him to bed</u> [*ženili/uložili*]. We're all <u>young</u> lads, <u>reckless</u> heads [*molodye/udalye*]—we've downed a lot, but haven't got nothing for the hair of the dog. . . ." "What's this?" I asked myself. "A joke? A jeer?"[19]

As the narrator later learns, on that night a merchant had been robbed and murdered on the same road. The rhymer was indeed amusing himself with a travestied allegorical reference to a wedding. A further case of a criminal rhymer is the thief Efrem in an earlier story by Turgenev, "A Visit to Polesia" (1857), who addresses an indigent acquaintance with the words "Egor, God's soul worth one-and-a-half penny" (Bož'ja duša v poltora groša; Turgenev 1978–86, 5:141).

Another pioneer of Russian realism, Alexei Pisemsky included a rhymer peasant among the characters of his short story "The Carpenters' Artel" (1855), a work praised for the veracity of its representation of the peasant vernacular by figures such as Nikolai Nekrasov and Maxim Gorky.[20] Upon making acquaintance, the narrator asks the peasant "Why do you always speak in rhyme?" "'From young age, my dear sir,' he responded, 'that's how I talk; I don't remember where I got my tongue so fitted to this. I guess it all began with choral dancing and songs; occasionally I also served as best man (*družka*) at weddings'" (Pisemskij 1959, 300).

Sergeich's speech patterns derive, in part, from his occupation as a *družka* whose ritually prescribed utterances included plenty of rhymes and, very likely, left room for some improvisation. Pisemsky thus both captures the social conditioning of Sergeich's penchant for rhyming and signals the aberrancy of his case: his character rhymes outside of proper ritual or social context. In the following example, the character is inspired by a rhyming proverb to produce a follow-up improvised couplet:

(6) There is a saying about this: "The devil has <u>willed this</u>, so the two brothers <u>are moving apart</u> [*zaxotel/razdel*]." You see, they wanted <u>to earn</u> millions, and became <u>beggars</u> [*nažit'/xodit'*]. (317)

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19. The translation is based on renditions by Constance Garnett (Turgenev 1920, 268–69) and Richard Freeborn (Turgenev 1967, 241). Russian original: Turgenev (1978–86, 3:350–51).
20. See commentary by V. A. Malkin in Pisemskij (1959, 559).

The curiosity of the narrator of Pisemsky's story is piqued when he learns of Sergeich's background as a professional best man; what follows is a lengthy description of the peasant wedding ritual, delivered by Sergeich. Here the realist narrator poses as a proto-ethnographer inquiring into the origins of a bizarre discursive practice. Following his lead, we turn to supporting evidence for rhymed talk from outside the literary corpus.

## Supporting Evidence: Rhyme in Everyday Russian

Jakobson drew attention to the similarity of spoken rhymed verse delivered by best men at weddings across the Slavic world, which suggests the genre's considerable antiquity (Jakobson 1966, 455–59; Propp 1993, 19–20; cf. Jakobson 1979, 151). Among Eastern Slavs, wedding rituals as well as typologically related spring choral songs also included rhymed exchanges of rebukes (*koril'nye repliki*) between representatives of the bride and the bridegroom (Agapkina 2000, 191–92). It is thus not incidental that references to weddings are used to characterize the rhymers in both Turgenev and Pisemsky.

The most substantial description of rhymed talk known to us, which confirms that it continued as a discourse practice among Russian peasants well into the twentieth century, comes from a rather unexpected source—a description of life in Uskovo, a village in the Vologda region, by the Soviet poet Bella Akhmadulina based on her visits in the late 1970s and 1980s. Initially drawn to the region by the state of preservation of peasant speech (cf. Axmadulina 2005, 669), Akhmadulina forged a friendship with the central figure of the memoir, Evdokija (Djunja), born in 1899, who often talked in rhymes. Akhmadulina avers that, while in some cases Djunja might have been citing established (proverb-like) collocations, in others she would compose on the spot (669, 693). Nor was Djunja the only rhymer in the community.

> (7) On the evening of the day of the funeral Shurka showed up late, forgivably merry: "Hello, <u>old lady</u>, I came by to <u>mourn</u> [*mat'/pominat'*]." Diunya responded: "Coming straight from a <u>funeral party</u>, why don't you go <u>your own way</u> [*pomina/pomimo*]?" They often and easily spoke in rhyme, for fun, and sometimes I would adapt to them.

Akhmadulina, a poet and a casual observer, proved more attentive to rhymed talk than folklorists and field linguists working in the Russian countryside, in part because the study of discourse practices falls between the domains of folklore recording and dialectology. It is likely that Akhmadulina's extended report includes embellishments, but given the parallel scenes of confrontational

rhymed talk in nineteenth-century literature, her evidence appears compelling. Russian peasant speech could include the extra-grammatical component of rhyming, which had the pragmatic function of display of authority, particularly in contexts of jocular sparring.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, if Fonvizin's and Gogol's evidence is to be trusted, rhymed talk could also be part of the speech of lower nobility; by the early twenty-first century, it was in all likelihood extinct. In everyday speech, rhyme can still occur in jocular set expressions, most commonly in responses to particular questions. Examples of such "comical doublets" (Blažes 2000, 192–94) include:

(8) "Чего купила?" "Купила бы, да купило притупило."
"What have you [fem.] <u>bought</u>?" "I [fem.] would have bought it, but my buying thing got <u>blunted</u>." [*kupila/pritupilo*]

(9) "Как дела?" "Как сажа бела."
"How are <u>things</u>?" "[They are] as soot [is] <u>white</u>." [*dela/bela*]

In these examples, the response, derisive or mildly aggressive, rhymes with the last word of the question. Clearly long established in colloquial usage (ex. [9] occurs in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Dead House*), such doublets are particularly widespread in contemporary child language, for example, "Почему?" "По кочану," "Why?" "Based on a cabbage" (*počemu/kočanu*), "Где?" "В Караганде?," "Where?" "In Karaganda" (*gde/v Karagande*). In the case of *priskazki*, lit. 'add-on sayings', also frequent in adult speech, the statement is situationally motivated and represents a rhyming couplet, for example: Опять двадцать пять, 'Again, twenty-five' (*opjat'/pjat'*), with the meaning 'Not again'; Сто лет в обед, 'Hundred years at lunch time' (*let/obed*), in the meaning 'Of very old age'. Such locutions, which find parallels in African-American English ("See you later, alligator," "After 'while, crocodile," "'Nough said, Ted" [Abrahams 1970, 43–44]) seem to represent remnants of more robust, improvised colloquial rhyming in dialogue.[21]

Beyond everyday language, the significance of rhyme in Russian is evidenced by its centrality to *govornoj stix* 'spoken verse', based exclusively on rhyme and syntactic parallelism, found in proverbs and earlier improvised in folk theatrical performance. Furthermore, in contrast to other European languages in which

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21. The use of such couplets, as well as proverbs, had strong low-class associations. In the nineteenth century, children of nobility could even be expressly told to avoid them. In Pogorelsky's classic work for children *A Town in a Snuff-Box* (1834), the protagonist mentions that his father taught him not to "speak in proverbs"; the moral of the narrative disproves this advice.

"international free verse" came to be the dominant form of versification (Gasparov 1996, 273–92), rhyme also proved remarkably resilient in twentieth-century Russian literary verse, where the destabilization or dissolution of meter, even in the practice of major innovators of poetic prosody (Vladimir Mayakovsky, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Joseph Brodsky), went along with cultivation of rhyme.

## Ideophones in Vivid Narrative

### Russian Ideophones

Our second case study focuses on fictional representations of oral storytelling that employ ideophones at narrative climaxes. An average modern speaker of Russian has only passive knowledge of this discourse practice, and that knowledge comes mostly from literary texts.

Russian verbal ideophones are also known as exclamative verb forms (Karcevski 1927, 142), verbal interjections (Šaxmatov 1941, 472), reduced verb forms (Potebnja 1941, 191), interjection verbs (Karcevski 1941, 65), ultra-punctual verb forms (Peškovskij 1927, 200), sound gestures (Isačenko 1975, 319), and verboids (Nikitina 2012). The diversity of treatments is due to the highly peculiar properties of such words: on the one hand, they belong to a special morphosyntactic class of ideophones, widely attested across languages, on the other hand, in the perception of speakers, they are closely related to corresponding regular verbs. Nevertheless, they are not derived from these verbs in any regular way, and they do not carry any inflectional markers.

Despite their similarity to the roots of specific verbs, ideophones lack verbal morphology and cannot inflect for grammatical categories such as tense, person or mood (see Nikitina 2012 for details). In spoken discourse, they are typically pronounced with emphasis. Crucially, unlike regular words, which denote classes of objects, events, or qualities, ideophones are used in an indexical function and point directly to specific instances of events, *demonstrating* rather than describing them.

While speakers of modern Russian tend to find ideophones slightly comical, that perception hardly does justice to their earlier usage. Cross-linguistically, ideophones are a powerful means of expression in oral storytelling (Finnegan 2007, 45); as practices of oral storytelling become obsolete, the use of ideophones is declining in traditionally oral cultural areas, such as West Africa. While a similar fate befell verboids in modern colloquial Russian, literary sources enable us to reconstruct their earlier functions.

## Ideophones in Nineteenth-Century Literary Texts

Up to the 1830s, Russian authors were notably reluctant to take advantage of ideophones as a narrative device. Pushkin uses them almost exclusively in verse, where he feels more comfortable imitating spoken syntax; we were able to find only two examples of ideophones in his prose, one in a transcription of an oral folktale (an ethnographic document), the other in a letter to his wife describing his daily routine.[22] In Pushkin, as well as in later authors, ideophones are associated with two major functions. On the one hand, they point directly to an event, re-enacting it and effectively synchronizing perception of the text with the moment when the narrated event takes place. On the other hand, they index colloquial discourse, and so appear in characters' direct speech or in stories told by highly dramatized narrators.

Late romantic authors Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (1797–1837) and Ivan Lazhechnikov (1792–1869) were already comfortable using ideophones in their novels. In Mikhail Lermontov's prose, ideophones appear only at the most emotionally charged moments of the narrative (twice in *A Hero of Our Time* [1840], one of these occurrences is example 10, and once in *Ashik-kerib*) and emphasize the narrator's involvement in the action.

(10) "What's the meaning of this?" I demanded angrily. "The meaning is," she replied, sitting me down on the bench and twining her arms round me, "the meaning is that I love you." And her cheek pressed against mine, and I felt her burning breath on my face. Suddenly something fell into the water with a loud splash; I grabbed for [*xvat'*] my belt—my pistol was gone.[23]

While in Lermontov ideophones are still infrequent, they become a major stylistic device in Gogol, in whose prose *xvat'* (from *xvatat'* 'grasp' or *xvatit'sja* 'reach for, look for a missing item') and *gljad'* (from *gljadet'* 'watch, glance') are used to mark the intrusion of supernatural or demonic forces:

(11) He grasped his axe and chopped it into pieces; lo and behold [*gljad'*]—one piece drags itself onto another one, and the caftan is complete again.

(12) Waking up and accidentally glimpsing himself in the mirror what did he see but—a nose! He seized hold of it [*xvat'*]—that's what it is, the nose! 'Ha!' exclaimed Kovalyov.[24]

22. Letter to N. N. Pushkina, May 6, 1836; "Recordings of folktales" in Pushkin (1977–79, 3:407).
23. Translation by Nicolas Pasternak Slater (Lermontov 2013, 59).
24. Translation by Christopher English, amended (Gogol 1995, 58–59).

In Turgenev, ideophones are fully incorporated into the narrative texture, particularly in works using a first-person dramatized narrator and aiming at a literary style that displays an affinity with the language of the common people.

In this section, for the sake of illustration we turn to another major Russian realist author, Leo Tolstoy, whose narrative poetics in general does not permit the familiar and conversational tone of Turgenev's narrators. In his sparing use of ideophones, Tolstoy is closer to Lermontov and Gogol; in Tolstoy's major fictional works, we were able to find 10 instances of these forms, which all occur in characters' speech. The serene omniscient narrator of Tolstoy's longer works does not directly participate in the discourse practice of vivid storytelling.

In *War and Peace*, this construction is apparently used only once, in a direct speech report that describes the Moscow fire following Napoleon's entry into the city (bk. 11, chap. 33; ex. 13).

(13) "The maid shouted 'Fire!' and we rushed to collect our things. We ran out just as we were. . . . That's all we could bring. . . . The icon and my dowry bed. Everything else has gone. <u>Then we frantically looked for</u> [*xvat'*] the children: little Katya was not there. Oh Lord! Oh-oh-oh!" and again she began to sob. "My child, my dear one! She's burnt to death! Burnt to death!"[25]

The lament is overhead by one of the novel's main characters, Pierre, who is inspired to rescue the girl left behind in the burning house.

In general, Tolstoy reserves the use of ideophones to mark the most dramatic moments in the narrative. In "Notes of a Marker" (1855) (ex. 14) and "Polikushka" (1863), *gljad'* is used to capture the moment the dead body of the protagonist who committed suicide is first sighted. The former story is remarkable for its imitation of spoken discourse, but shuns folkloristic stylization that is usually associated with skaz; here spoken discourse is employed to represent reality in its ruthless immediacy, as in the horror-induced extension of the vowel in *ve-es'* (*a-all*), paralleled by the howl 'oh-oh-oh' in example 13.

(14) <u>I took a look</u> [*gljad'*], and saw him on the floor, a-all covered in blood, and his pistol lying next to him.

25. Translation by Anthony Briggs, amended (Tolstoy 2006, 1026). Characteristically, the meaning of the ideophone *xvat'* (here derived from *xvatit'sja* 'to look for a missing item', not *xvatat'* 'to grab') is misunderstood by translators (Briggs's translation: "We grabbed the children too, but not Katechka"; Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude translate this as "We seized the children. But not Katie!" [Tolstoy 1990, 529]).

Similarly, there is just one use of ideophones in the cycle of stories dedicated to the siege of Sebastopol during the Crimean war; it occurs in an account given by the emblematically persevering defender of the city who has lost a limb (but denies that it caused him pain or discomfort). The whole story is dominated by an urge to visualize, its narrator posing as a guide who walks the reader through the besieged city. Language is seemingly incapable of mediating reality; instead, the extraordinary sights of heroism must be experienced directly. The unpretentious statement "I look and the leg is gone" (*Gljad', a nogi net*)[26] indexes both the violent abruptness of dismemberment and the humble simplicity of a man who suffered, witnessed, and is now enunciating it. The virtue of unpretentiousness or simplicity, *prostota*, is identified by the narrator as one of the quintessential qualities of peasant soldiers; the ideophone *gljad'* serves to enregister this simplicity as a linguistic phenomenon.

In current everyday usage, ideophones are on the brink of extinction (Nikitina 2012, 168), and are retained as part of the passive lexicon of speakers of modern Russian thanks to literary sources. The loss of ideophones is part of a more general process of the decline of techniques of oral narration, as city-dwellers no longer rely on storytelling for sharing of experience, entertainment, or transmission of knowledge.

## Conclusion: Literature as Metapragmatics

Representations of spoken discourse in literary sources may take the form of characters' speech, interactions between characters, or, less commonly, a dramatized narrator enacting a persona different from that of the text's author. In all these contexts, realist literature can preserve aspects of contemporary language use that seemed remarkable and worthy of record (in part because they were alien to the writer's own speech community).

Reported speech emerges as a locus of experimentation that allows for expressive elements not otherwise freely used. This observation also applies to literary discourse, which can be conceived in toto as reported and which includes multiple levels of metalinguistic reflection. Unlike a linguist who abstracts away from particular speech situations to create a general model of language use, a realist writer constructs fictionalized tokens of speech situations. Instead of a synoptic view of language as grammar, literature, through this kind of mimetic engagement, can capture it as a holistic sociopragmatic phenomenon.

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26. Translation of this sentence by Michael Katz (Tolstoy 1991, 6).

Although literary data have long been mined by linguists as a source for the history of the lexicon, morphology, and syntax, their relevance to the study of extinct discourse practices has remained largely unexplored. While proto-ethnographic in some ways, the evidence of realist literature is not simply a poor substitute for scholarly description; rather, it is a metapragmatic discourse that obeys its own protocols. In the case of the use of rhyme and ideophones, literary sources accurately capture metasemiotic intricacies of language-in-use, providing a sharp analysis of its social efficacy.

While influenced by Western European counterparts such as Dickens and Balzac, nineteenth-century Russian authors drew on linguistic elements that have no parallel in other major European languages. This conclusion under-mines the notion that the global spread of literary "forms" went along with their adaptation to national or epichoric "content" (cf. Moretti 2000). Instead, literary texts synthesize indigenous and imported elements of style and narrative poet-ics, as well as merge long-established and newly borrowed symbolic forms (af-fects, plots, and ideologies), subsumed under the naive metasemantic construct of *content.* By integrating rhymed talk or ideophones into their texts, nineteenth-century Russian authors followed an international sociographic and "dialecto-logical" agenda, in part anticipated by the romantics (Walter Scott, Alexander Pushkin). In the twentieth century, that agenda was taken on by writers both loyal to realism, such as Mikhail Sholokhov, and quite distant from its premises, such as Marcel Proust (cf. Lucey 2015).

Approached as a distinct mode of metapragmatics, literary fiction harbors not only a wealth of new data but also theoretical insights into the mechanisms of the making-of-text, or entextualization, of social reality. Combining analysis of language-in-use with attention to culture-specific expectations associated with particular genres of discourse, a historically inflected metapragmatic approach to narrative texts renews the Jakobsonian challenge (1960) of uniting the study of language and literature—no longer demoting the latter to a subspecies of the former, but viewing it as a realization of that very unity.

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