

Monks, P. (2004). Tronenko, Natalia (2003). Regularities in the Behaviour of Russian Phrasal Idioms. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 2, 128-129.

<https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2004.818>

This article is publish under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International* (CC BY):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



© Pieta Monks, 2004

Tronenko, Natalia (2003). *Regularities in the Behaviour of Russian Phrasal Idioms*. Oxford: Peter Lang

Spoken Russian often reveals the relative closeness of most Russians to their peasant past: until the 1930`s the majority of the country still lived in rural areas and this is apparent in the vivid imagery and figurative language still in use in every-day speech. Why peasant communities use more figurative language than urban ones is puzzling, but is an undoubted fact. And, even though Moscow is as big as London, Muscovites, especially the older generation, use language peppered with idioms, metaphors, similes and proverbs. This can cause irritation: proverbs especially are normally smug and scolding platitudes, such as "*Tishe edesh', dal'she budesh*" (*you'll get further if you slow down/slow and steady wins the race, etc..*), and idioms can be impossible to decipher without help. What does "*In my garden there grows an elder tree and my cousin lives in Kiev*" actually mean? Well, it turns out that it means: *the one thing has absolutely nothing to do with the other*. Fairly logical, when you think of it, but impossible to decode on ones own. Even though, semantically, this idiom is categorised in Natalia Tronenko's, in her excellent, but challenging book for those without training in linguistics, as a *motivated* idiom: "The motivatedness of an idiom is the extent to which a plausible relation can be found between the figurative meaning of the whole phrase and the literal meaning of its parts." (76). It also falls into the category of isomorphic idioms: "...the isomorphicity of an idiom is the extent to which its figurative meaning can be distributed over its parts" (76). This is relevant to translators, especially those translating into Russian, because Dr. Tronenko then goes on to establish links between the frozenness of an idiom – i.e. the extent to which its meaning is not transparent – and the lack of syntactical and morphological flexibility. "...it was established that of two phrasal idioms including verbs with similar sets of constraints, idioms with the accessible situation type are less frozen than the ones with inaccessible aspectual semantics."

Natalya Tronenko's book does not offer a universal panacea for hard-pressed translators working against the clock and searching desperately for solutions to obscure, incomprehensible phrases suddenly appearing in a hitherto logical text, but she does ask some very interesting questions about idioms in general and draws even more interesting conclusions with regard to the relationship between the inflectional morphology of the Russian verb and the interpretation of the idiom. Her main claim is that idioms are compositional with regard to morphosyntactic features. For Russian linguists, even those without a background in linguistics, it is a fascinating book that, in its study of phrasal idioms, approaches the question of aspect of Russian verbs from a new direction. It also has an excellent appendix of Russian idioms together with their literal translation and their figurative meaning. Russian idioms are

a vital and rich part of the Russian language – this is a timely and welcome study.

Pieta Monks
London Metropolitan University