

15th St. Jerome Translation Contest

2020 EDITION

Remarks by the judges

Russian

Remarks by Alexander Fedorchenko

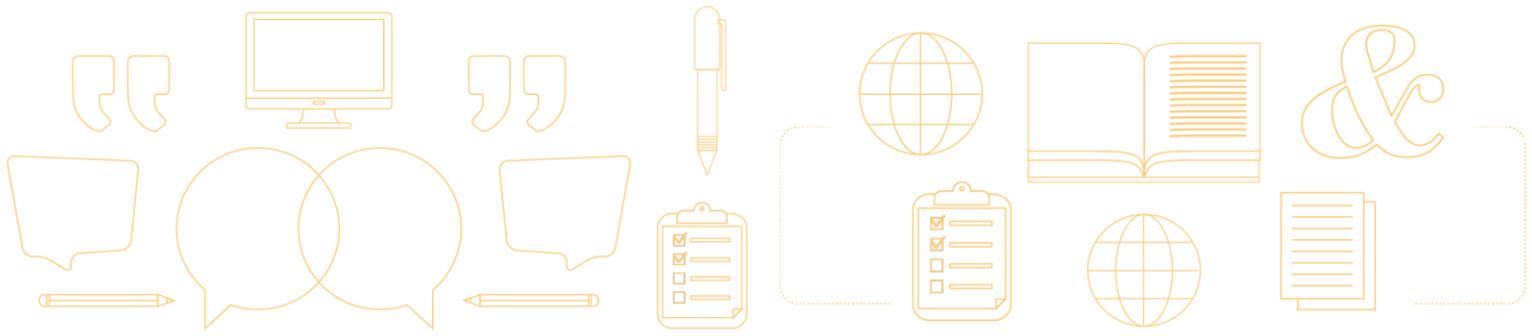
Last year, Pope Francis risked the wrath of traditionalists by approving a change to the wording of the Lord's Prayer. According to the Guardian, the Pope believed the wording should be altered because it was not a good translation. So, instead of saying "lead us not into temptation", the centuries-old Prayer will say "do not let us fall into temptation".

Did the Pope hear the voice of St Jerome, one of the most important early scholars whose translation of the Bible became the standard edition throughout the Middle Ages, or did he act on a contemporary professional advice of a skilled translator? In either case, this is a clear sign that the fine art of translation is ever developing and that there is always room for improvement.

At the United Nations, with its huge translation workloads, the application of computer-assisted translation tools helps with statistical output. However, contrary to what some may be tempted to think, those are just tools, which are in no way a substitute for the intellectual components of the fine art of translation and the talents of translators.

Here, we must take our collective hats off to the organizers of this year's St Jerome contest for giving a chance to both budding and experienced translators to show their talents and artistry. The text about Tina Turner's golden days was chosen very thoughtfully and professionally. With its various linguistic pitfalls and stylistic stumbling blocks, it really serves as a litmus test for general knowledge, wit and translation talent.

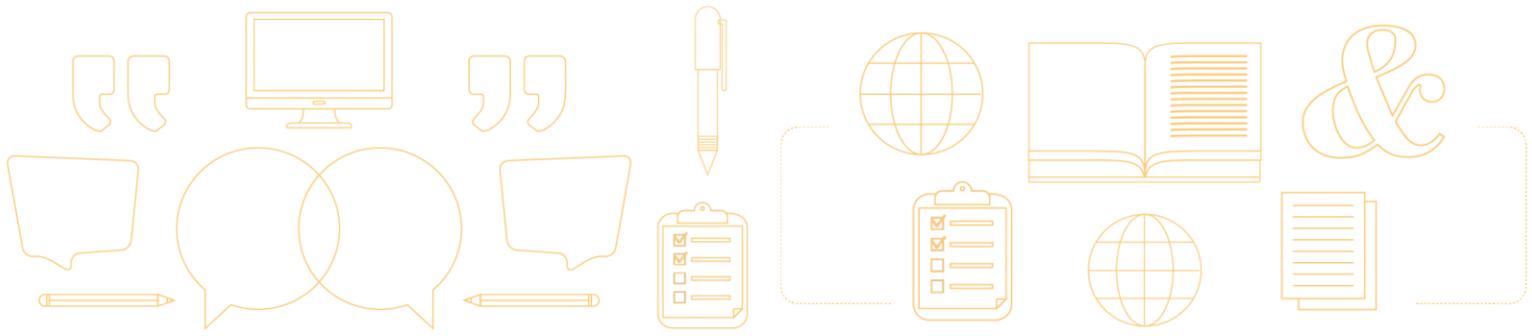
In general, all submissions into Russian were quite solid and very politically correct - some even more so than Ms Turner herself. Most did their "homework" well, and translators' notes, when used, provided additional information clarifying certain notions (e.g. Motown, Coldplay) for the reader. Many, though, translated the "two-legged horse" under the dome as "rearing" or "rising up on the hind legs". The celebrated wig relaxing into a "saucy shag" and "in-ground" pool were also difficult for some contestants, with the wig-into-shag often mistranslated, if not omitted completely or partially, and with the pool moving underground. The phrase "in her 20s, 30s ... through her 60s" needs to be rendered carefully into Russian, because Russian normally uses a different way to express these notions, something that not all could do. And of course, it was surprising that translators would fail to differentiate shades of meaning in similar looking words (e.g. подразнивать – поддразнивать).



Amid the gloom and doom of the current COVID crisis, I enjoyed immensely the students' submissions, with their sparkling imagination and impressive mastery of the two languages. Of course, some apprentices of the art try to "improve" the text in such a way that their translation reads better than the article from the New York Times itself. Others "appropriate" the ideas from the author and spin their own wonderful tales, which are grammatically and stylistically perfect in Russian.

The entries in general category, on the other hand, treated the original in a more respectful way. Most demonstrated a mature and developed hand of professional translators. There are real gems to be found in these entries. However, some translators lower the style to almost vernacular, while others condescendingly tell the reader that they use "эквиритмический перевод" or "equirythmic" translation, the very concept of which needs to be explained separately to the reader. Moreover, it was most disappointing that some did not bother to verify the gender of the author, thus making easily avoidable amateurish mistakes.

Wishing the St Jerome Contest all the best in discovering new translation talent.



Remarks by Anatoly Tchadliev

This year, the first line in every official statement is about the Coronavirus, economic turmoil, isolation and loneliness and the Russian judges will not depart from this trend.

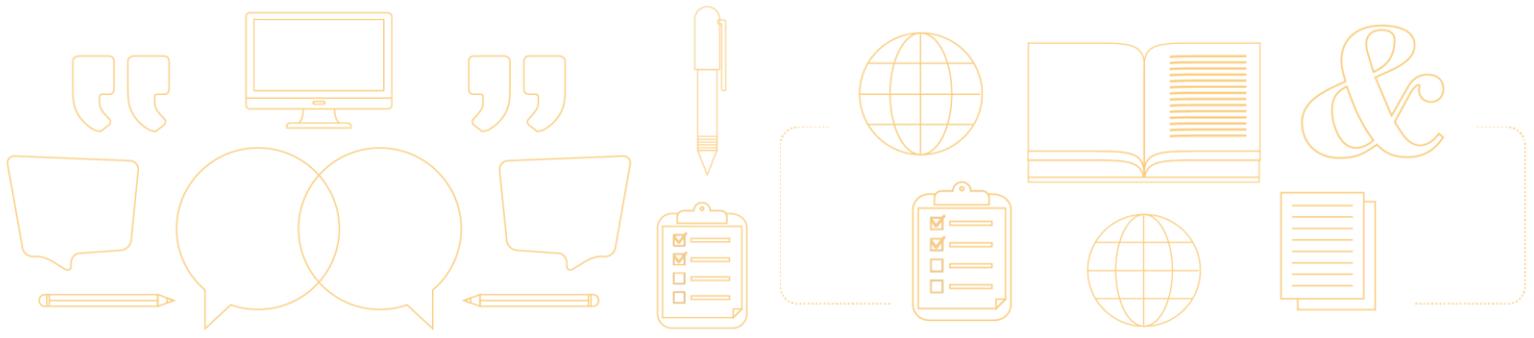
Notwithstanding the world-wide pandemic, economic hardships and political turmoil in many parts of the world, the 15th St. Jerome Contest did happen and went smoothly. We would like to express our appreciation to our colleagues, the Contest organizers at ESCWA. This time, the Russian judges had to evaluate almost the same number of entries as in previous years – 11 translations from professional and 11 from students.

To choose the best was not an easy job as at least five entries in each category were good or very good, even though the original text presented many difficulties for translators whose cultural code is not Anglo-American. To make translation even more challenging, the original contained song titles and names of singers some translators had never heard of, and had to do extensive research to familiarize themselves with the cultural phenomenon or icon, if you will, Tina Turner. To be honest, the judges had to do a good deal of research too, listening to songs mentioned in the original text and even trying to like them, as the author of the text presumes you should.

Literary translation is an extremely complex genre and a thankless occupation. It requires talent, on the one hand, and uncompromising self-control, on the other, as the translation should accurately convey the exact meaning of the author's message and distinct style. A translator should be able to cross the cultural boundaries to be able to fully appreciate a literary piece he or she is translating in all its dimensions, and at the same time reproduce it in the cultural context of the potential reader.

Judging the Contest is another thankless and frustrating job as you can make only two translators happy out of dozens of ambitious contestants. It would have been nice to recognize their effort, their pencil-chewing search for the right word and their throes of creation but this is beyond our powers. Anyway, the Russian judges are proud of the Russian translators who managed to overcome those difficulties and produce good professional-grade translations.

As mentioned earlier, it was hard to choose the best translations, but we did it and we congratulate the winners and thank those who participated. It would however have been nice to meet and greet those talented translators and shake their hands, rather than knowing them only as faceless reference numbers.



Judging the Contest has always been a challenge and a pleasure as it gives the judge a chance to discover new talents, and to encourage them to pursue and enjoy literary translation.