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# On the Style of A Story for the People

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Some twenty-five years ago I wrote a dissertation (Jahn 1972) on the subject of Leo Tolstoy's *Narodnye rasskazy* (*Stories for the People*); part of the research involved an attempt to determine the identifying characteristics of these stories as a definable genre within Tolstoy's *oeuvre* as a whole. I subsequently published an account of these findings (Jahn 1977).

Some of my published conclusions may be said to be demonstrable and objective. For example, I noted that each of the stories was told by a third-person narrator; that the characters in the stories were drawn, with rare exceptions, from among the common people; that fantastic elements were commonly found in the stories; and that the setting of the stories was usually "popular" and Russian. The method of characterization used in the stories depended almost exclusively on the simple description of the actions and words of the characters; there was virtually no resort to Tolstoy's familiar method of "interior monologue." Finally, the stories are openly didactic and illustrate certain precepts of the author's understanding of the Christian teaching.

At the same time I offered some conclusions which, while probably correct, were not apparent or readily demonstrable in the same sense. Thus, for example, I said that the narrative voice was normally given a "popular" colouring (a comment based on my "ear" for the difference between "popular" colouring and some other kind). In the same vein, I presented a series of general conclusions respecting the language of the stories. Here I based my comments on expert opinions as published by Soviet scholars, some of whom stated that the language of the stories was "popular," others that it was "folkish," while still others

noted a strong presence of "Biblical" or "proverbial" language (Jahn 1977). While there was no absolute consensus among these scholars in providing a positive definition of the language and style of the stories, there was at least agreement that the style of the stories differed very perceptibly from that of Tolstoy's earlier works (e.g., *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*). I assembled a catalogue of characteristics which I and others felt (again, relying upon our "ears") were responsible for producing the peculiar style of the *Stories for the People*. This catalogue included the following items.

1. The simple sentence is the norm for the narrative.
2. Besides being comparatively short, sentences are often elliptical (=syntactically deponent in some respect, usually missing one of the normal lead elements, a subject or a verb).
3. In longer sentences there is a strong tendency toward a simple linking of independent clauses rather than a resort to subordinate constructions.
4. There is a strong tendency toward the inversion of the standard order of elements within clauses—*mutatis mutandis*, the standard order of sentence elements in contemporary standard Russian (CSR) is subject-verb-object, while these stories show a frequent displacement of the subject.
5. The stories frequently display lexical material and syntactic patterns which are characteristic of popular speech (marked in dictionaries as "folkish" [*prostonarodnyi*] or "regional" [*oblastnyi*]).
6. Related to item five, there is the use of directly allusive language material (quotations from the Bible, interpolation of proverbs, use of collocations typical of folktales or religious legends).
7. The narrative voice has a popular colouration.

One reason that my first set of conclusions seems better demonstrated than the second is that they are generalizations from a relatively small number of cases. For example, the assertion that the setting of a story for the people is "popular and Russian" is a generalization from about 20

cases (the total number of purported stories for the people). The second set of conclusions, on the other hand, involves generalizations from a vastly larger set of cases (the total number of sentences, clauses, words in all of the stories purported to be stories for the people). Now it is *probably* the case that the “ear” of the careful reader will have led her or him to a correct conclusion on this matter, but it is *certainly* the case that the entire set of conclusions, as I offered them, depends for its validation on the quality of my “ear” and on my ear being “in tune” with the ears of other competent observers.

I have since wondered whether the results of my earlier work could be re-examined and improved upon by the application of a more rigorous and complete consideration of the language of the stories. To this end I devised a database for the story *Gde liubov', tam i Bog* (*Where Love Is, There God Is Also* 1885), an undisputed example of Tolstoy's *Narodnye rasskazy*. The data collected include various pieces of information about each word in the text of the story, as illustrated below.

**Table 1: Data Collected**

<i>Narrator/Character:</i>	N
<i>Russian form:</i>	bolee
<i>English equivalent:</i>	more
<i>Word type:</i>	dependent
<i>Part of speech:</i>	adv
<i>POS qualifier:</i>	how many, much
<i>Function in sentence:</i>	adverbial
<i>Root:</i>	bol'sh-
<i>Speech level:</i>	standard

Thus, each word in the story (given both as a Russian form and its English equivalent) is identified by attributing it to either the narrator or one of the characters; by identifying its word type as leading (e.g., nouns and verbs), dependent (e.g., adjectives and adverbs), or functional (e.g., conjunctions, prepositions); by defining its function in the sentence (e.g., subject, direct object, des-

criptor, adverbial) and its part of speech, and by qualifying its part of speech from the lexical point of view; by indicating its etymological root; and by identifying the level of speech or diction (e.g., literary standard, colloquial, folkish, archaic, Biblical) to which the word in its context belongs. Table 2 shows a specimen page of entries from the database.

These data represent a relatively complete and systematic description of the language of the story. With such information it is possible to conduct a more thorough analysis of the text from the point of view of the particular characteristics which the “ear” has noted.

It is true that the results of such analysis will be much more comprehensive than that of the unaided “ear.” It is also true, however, that the analysis will be of limited value in itself. Its full usefulness will become apparent only in the context of comparative measures. In the case I have been discussing, the term of comparison would be the style more generally associated with Tolstoy, that is, the style of such works as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. At a minimum, then, we must also collect data (using the same set of variables) for at least one comparative text. One must bear in mind, of course, that the concept of a “style more generally associated with Tolstoy” is also entirely dependent upon the “ears” of competent observers and the mutual attunement of those ears.

### ***Where Love Is, There God Is Also***

As I looked for a particular place to begin work on this topic, it was clear that the question of relevant comparisons to the text being analyzed would be especially important. Of course, any of the stories for the people could be compared against a sample of Tolstoy's writing in earlier works like *War and Peace*. As it happens, though, *Gde liubov', tam i Bog* (hereafter *GLB*) can be compared to other works as well. A number of the stories for the people have identifiable models from which Tolstoy's versions were elaborated. Mainly these models were of folk origin, but the source for *Where Love Is, There God Is Also* was literary.

*Table 2*

<b>Russian form</b>	<b>English equivalent</b>	<b>Part of speech name</b>	<b>Function in sentence</b>
Zhil	Lived	verb	verb pers
v	in	prep	adverbial
gorode	city	noun	obj prep
sapozhnik	cobbler	noun	subject
Martyn Avdeich.	Martyn Avdeich.	noun	appositive
\Zhil	\Lived	verb	verb pers
on	he	pron	subject
v	in	prep	adverbial
podvale,	cellar,	noun	obj prep
v	in	prep	adverbial
gorenke	room	noun	obj prep
ob	with	prep	descriptor
odnom	one	adj	descriptor
okne.	window.	noun	obj prep
\Okno	\Window	noun	subject
bylo	was	verb	verb pers
na	onto	prep	adverbial
ulitsu.	street.	noun	obj prep
\V	\In	prep	adverbial
okno	window	noun	obj prep
vidno	visible	adj	descriptor
bylo,	was	verb	verb impers
kak	how	conj	link
proxodili	passed by	verb	verb pers
liudi;	people;	noun	subject
xot'	although	conj	link
vidny	visible	adj	descriptor
byli	were	verb	verb pers
tol'ko	only	adv	adverbial
nogi,	feet,	noun	subject
no	but	conj	link
Martyn Avdeich	Martyn Avdeich	noun	subject
po	by	prep	adverbial
sapogam	[their] boots	noun	obj prep
uznaval	recognized	verb	verb pers
liudei.	people.	noun	dir obj
\Martyn Avdeich	\Martyn Avdeich	noun	subject
zhil	lived	verb	verb pers
davno	long time	adverb	adverbial
na	in	prep	adverbial
odnom	one	adj	descriptor
meste,	place,	noun	obj prep
i	and	conj	link
znakomstva	acquaintances	noun	subject
mnogo	many	adv	adverbial
bylo.	were	verb	verb pers
\Redkaia	\Rare	adj	descriptor
para	pair	noun	subject
sapog	of boots	noun	number comp
v	in	prep	adverbial
okolodke	district	noun	obj prep
ne	not	particle	other
pobyvala	been	verb	verb pers
i	both	conj	link

*Table 2*

<b>Word type name</b>	<b>POS qualifier name</b>	<b>Root</b>	<b>Speech level</b>
lead	prep/manner	zhi-	standard
function	where		standard
lead	place	gorod-	standard
lead	person	sapog-	standard
dependent	name		standard
lead	past state impfv	zhi-	standard
lead	personal		standard
function	where		standard
lead	place	val-	standard
function	where		standard
lead	place		folkish
function	size		folkish
dependent	number	odn-	standard
lead	thing	ok-	standard
lead	thing	ok-	standard
lead	past state impfv	bud-	standard
function	where to/from		standard
lead	place	ulic-	standard
function	where		standard
lead	thing	ok-	standard
dependent	sf miscellaneous qualities	vid-	standard
lead	past state impfv	bud-	standard
function	simple conjunctions		standard
lead	past motion impfv	xod-	standard
lead	person	liud-	standard
function	simple conjunctions		standard
dependent	sf miscellaneous qualities	vid-	standard
lead	past state impfv	bud-	standard
dependent	how many, much		standard
lead	thing	nog-	standard
function	simple conjunctions		standard
lead	name		standard
function	how		standard
lead	thing	sapog-	standard
lead	past action impfv	zna-	standard
lead	person	liud-	standard
lead	name		standard
lead	past state impfv	zhi-	standard
dependent	how long (time)	davn-	standard
function	where		standard
dependent	number	odn-	standard
lead	place	mest-	standard
function	simple conjunctions		standard
dependent	person	zna-	standard
lead	how many, much	mnog-	standard
lead	past state impfv	bud-	standard
dependent	miscellaneous qualities	redk-	standard
lead	quantity	foreign	standard
dependent	thing	sapog-	standard
function	where		standard
lead	place	kol-	archaic
function	negative		standard
lead	past state pfv	bud-	standard
function	simple conjunctions		standard

In 1882 a Marseilles journal published a story, *Le Père Martin*, by a then well-known evangelist named Reuben Saillens. Early in 1884 an adaptation of this story appeared in the periodical *The Russian Worker* (*Russkii rabochii*); the title of this version of the story was *Diadia Martyn* (*Uncle Martin*; hereafter *DM*), but it was published with no indication that the story was a translation and without attribution to its original author. The story itself was largely unchanged, save for the alterations in names and settings needed to adapt it to Russian life. *DM* served as Tolstoy's source. He was quite unaware of the existence of the French original until some years later, when its author, Saillens, recognized the lineaments of his own *Père Martin* in a French translation of Tolstoy's story, and hastened to write Tolstoy a few lines of complaint. Tolstoy replied, contritely begging the Frenchman's pardon for his "unintentional plagiarism" (Sreznevskii 1928-58).

Thus, the style of *Where Love Is, There God Is Also* can be compared not only with Tolstoy's "usual" style but also with the style of another story involving the same characters and events by a different writer, but one whose authorial intentions were roughly parallel to Tolstoy's. The entire text of Tolstoy's story was coded in the manner described earlier. In order to carry out this comparison, samples from the Russian "original" (*DM*; approximately a one-word-in-five sample), from *Voina i mir* (hereafter *VM*; three small samples of continuous text), and from folklore (a brief tale, hereafter *S*, as recorded by Afanas'ev in *Narodnye russkie skazki v trekh tomakh*) were coded to the same parameters. A variety of analytic comparisons respecting the style of *GLB* can be based on these data:

1. comparison with the descriptive findings of the "ear" of competent observers;
2. comparison with the style of the first Russian version of the story (the translation/adaptation of the French original which appeared in *The Russian Workman*);
3. comparison with Tolstoy's "normal" style as illustrated by a sample taken from *War and Peace*;
4. comparison with the style of an authentic folk narrative.

Table 3 summarizes the findings of this research.

If we now return to the particular points that my initial (1978) analysis of the style of the stories for the people addressed we will be in a position to see whether the opinions given there are substantiated by these data.

1. *The simple sentence as the norm for the narrative.*

A relative paucity of dependent clauses in *GLB* is suggested by the brevity of the average sentence in *GLB* (11 words) by comparison with the significantly greater average of the sample from *VM* (14 words).<sup>1</sup> One would expect one-clause sentences to be considerably shorter, on average, than multi-clause sentences. One would also expect shorter sentences to be less likely to contain multiple clauses than longer sentences.<sup>2</sup> The finding is further confirmed by the near identity in average sentence length between *GLB* and *DM*, which was also evidently written with the uneducated reader in mind. The finding is corroborated by the still shorter mean sentence length of the folk story.

2. *Besides being comparatively short, sentences are often elliptical (=syntactically dependent in some respect, usually missing one of the normal lead elements, a subject or a verb).*

*GLB* shows a significant (verging on 25%) presence of clauses which lack a subject and are not, at the same time, impersonal in structure. This finding is the more striking in that neither *DM* or *VM* showed any deponence of this type. In the folk tale, however, deponent sentences were extraordinarily common, showing a frequency twice that of *GLB*. This finding suggests very strongly that syntax plays a particularly important role in the creation of a folkish or popular style. As we shall see, the role played by syntax exceeds that played by lexical selection.

3. *In longer sentences there is a strong tendency toward a simple linking of independent clauses rather than a resort to subordinate constructions.*

Independent clauses are most commonly connected by the conjunctions "i" and "a." Therefore, the frequency of these two conjunctions relative to the total number of conjunctions in a given text will provide an index of the degree to which the concatenation of clauses in longer sentences involves the simple linking of independent clauses (a higher frequency) or the subordination of

*Table 3: Summary data from “Gde liubov’, tam i Bog”*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>GLB</b>	<b>DM</b>	<b>VM</b>	<b>S</b>
# of words in sample	3346	504	2965	163
# of sentences in sample	301	42	210	19
# of clauses in sample	510	72	383	24
mean words per sentence	11	12	14	9
mean clauses per sentence	1.69	1.71	1.82	1.26
<i>% word type</i>				
lead	56	47	44	57
dependent	18	22	35	21
function	25	22	22	21
<i>% part of speech</i>				
verb	26	20	15	23
adjective	6	7	15	9
adverb	7	7	8	6
pronoun	9	11	16	12
participle	0	1	1	0
verbal adverb	0	0	2	0
conjunction	11	7	9	5
preposition	10	7	9	10
noun	23	21	19	27
<i>% noun qualifiers</i>				
thing	40	23	0	17
person	24	18	6	48
name	20	21	6	2
abstraction	5	8	71	10
place	4	23	0	7
time unit	3	6	12	0
action	2	1	6	5
quantity	0	0	0	12
<i>% function in sentence</i>				
verb personal	22	17	14	20
verb impersonal	1	2	0	0
subject	13	12	13	11
descriptor	8	10	20	11
adverbial	18	16	14	14
link	10	7	12	5
<i>% level of speech</i>				
literary standard	85	82	97	89
colloquial	5	5	0	2
Biblical	7	3	0	0
folkish	2	1	0	9
archaic	1	0	3	0
technical	1	0	0	0
<i>% order of elements in sentence</i>				
subject-verb (raw)	27	66	92	46
verb-subject (raw)	52	34	8	18
deponent (raw)	21	0	0	35
subject-verb (adjusted)	27	89	100	48[43]
verb-subject (adjusted)	52	11	0	16
deponent (adjusted)	21	0	0	35[41]

**KEY:** *GLB* = “Gde liubov’, tam i Bog”; *DM* = “Diadia Martyn”; *VM* = *Voina i mir*; *S* = untitled skazka

**Notes to Table:** (1) the notations “raw” and “adjusted” in the last set of figures presented in the table alert the reader to the fact that to deal adequately with this variable it is necessary to bear in mind that in some general instances in Russian the “inverted” order of these elements is “normal.” For example, in a sentence or clause beginning with an interrogatory word the “normal” word order is verb-subject if the subject is a noun. Likewise, it is conventional in the attribution of a quotation to place the subject after the verb, if the attribution is placed after the quotation. The “adjusted” figures here represent the subtraction of all examples of the “normal” inverted order from the inverted category and their addition to the non-inverted category. (2) The figures in square brackets under the “S” column are the adjusted results obtained if such normally deponent items as imperatives or third-plural verbs with out subject pronoun are counted as “deponent” rather than as “standard.”

dependent clauses (a lower frequency). In this respect *GLB* and *S* have high frequency indices (44% and 40%, respectively), while the indices for *DM* and *VM* are much lower (23% and 30%, respectively). This pronounced syntactic rhythm, if one may call it so, marks another primary characteristic of the popular style.

4. *There is a strong tendency toward the inversion of the standard order of elements within clauses—the standard order (characteristic of CSR) is subject-verb-object, while these stories show a marked displacement of the subject.*

Study of the order of elements in the sentence shows a marked preference (verging on 100%) for the subject-verb order in Tolstoy's "literary" style and a preference for the reversed order in his "popular" style. *DM* seems at first to show a similar tendency, but when the figures are adjusted to take the Russian conventions for word order in clauses initiated by an interrogatory word and in those appended to direct quotations for attribution, the apparent similarity disappears and *DM* becomes virtually indistinguishable from *VM* in this respect. Like *VM* it offers a sharp contrast to *GLB*. Surprisingly, however, in the folk tale reversed order of sentence parts was less common than I would have supposed. The frequency of reversed order in the folk tale is much more comparable to that in *DM* (which strikes the ear as less folkish) than to that of *GLB* (which strikes the ear as more folkish). However, the findings presented here suggest that my original understanding of the essentials of "popular colouration" needs revision. I would now say something like: "Tolstoy seems to have isolated the inverted sentence as a characteristic feature of the style of folk narrative and to have employed this feature, presumably for the effect of creating a marked difference with *CSR*, in a proportion even larger than that found in an actual folk tale."

5. *The stories frequently display lexical material which is characteristic of popular speech (marked in dictionaries as "folkish" [prostonarodnyi] or "regional" [oblastnyi]);*

The data suggest that my earlier conclusion here was problematical at best. Folkish lexical material is actually quite rare in *GLB*, accounting for only two percent of the words of the text. The folktale, meanwhile, shows a presence of folkish lexical material four times greater than that found

in *GLB*. This may suggest that the collective ear of the commentators on the style of the stories for the people wrongly attributed the folkish tinge of the texts to the relatively scarce but easily visible lexical material when in fact other factors (perhaps syntactic inversion or deponence) play a greater role. *DM* contains a roughly similar amount of folkish lexical material but strikes my ear, at least, as distinctly less "popular" than *GLB*.

On the other hand, the data for *VM* show a total absence of folkish lexical material, and this may suggest that the inclusion of *any* folkish material was so rare as to be sure to produce a striking impression even in a small quantity. Finally, it doesn't do to forget that *GLB* was modelled on a literary source; research may show that the stories for the people which had folklore prototypes (*Chem liudi zhivy* and *Dva starika*, for example) contain a more significant presence of folkish lexical material.

6. *Related to item five, there is the use of directly allusive language material (quotations from the Bible, interpolation of proverbs, use of collocations typical of folktales or religious legends).*

The data for *GLB* and *DM* show a significant presence of Biblical material. This presence is the result of the interpolation of scriptural quotations, offered as such, into the text of the story. *GLB* also contains an instance of the interpolation of proverbial material into the text (Martin's visitor declaims: "Ne nashim umom, a bozh'im sudom" ["Not as we would, but as God decides we should"]). Both of these types of verbal allusion will show up in the data as relatively long consecutive strings of items all marked as "folkish" or "Biblical" in the speech-level field and will be relatively easy to recognize as allusions or outright quotations.

The folktale shows no such presence of Biblical language so that we may not account for its presence in *GLB* as a further attempt to emulate folkish style. Various explanations are possible for this phenomenon. One may be that some other types of folk work (the so-called "religious legends," for example) may in fact contain Biblical elements in their stylistic composition. A second possibility (since Tolstoy was fond of including Biblical allusions, quotations, and epigraphs in many other of his later works besides the "stories

for the people”) may be that he wanted to invoke the authority of scripture in order to strengthen the message which he was presenting in the story. Finally, we should not forget that in this particular story the Biblical element was not added by Tolstoy but was inherited by him from the prototype upon which his own story was based.<sup>3</sup>

7. *The narrative voice has a popular coloration.*

The data show that there is little distinction between the speech of characters and the speech of the narrator in *GLB*. Both share about equally in those factors which seem central to the creation of the popular coloration of the style of the story. The speech of the characters is more marked by folkish lexical content (3.7%) than the speech of the narrator (1.1%), and the narrator’s speech shows a correspondingly greater proportion of colloquial words.

## Conclusion

Of the seven points that were re-investigated, it proved possible to substantiate five of them (items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) with a level of precision which was not achieved formerly. In addition, the availability of material for comparison provides a context for the conclusions which lends them greater persuasiveness than my former complete reliance on the quality of the “ear” of experienced observers. With respect to item 7 it emerged that the speech of the narrator is marginally distinct from the speech of the characters in that it contains a lesser quantity of folkish words. At the same time, the narrator’s speech resembles the speech of the characters closely in the amount of inversion and deponence to be observed in it. It is especially interesting to note that the narrator’s speech makes liberal use of the anaphoric repetition of the conjunction “i” just as does the material quoted from Scripture, perhaps investing the narrator with some measure of scriptural authority.

Finally, the data suggest that my earlier conclusion with respect to item five ought to be rather dramatically revised—it seems that the use of folkish lexical material is actually much less important in the creation of the folkish coloration of the story than I (and many other commentators) had thought.<sup>4</sup> The syntactic features of deponence

and inversion of typical sentence order, together with the syntactic rhythm created by the steady succession of short sentences and independent clauses, were proved to be much more important factors in this respect.

## Notes

1. If one excludes the speech of characters from this calculation, the average sentence length in *GLB* is 10.2 words/sentence as compared to an average length of 18.8 words/sentence in *VM*.
2. Yet the data show that the average number of clauses per sentence varies little across these samples (*GLB*=1.69; *DM*=1.71; *VM*=1; *S*=1.26). A partial explanation may be found in the relative proportions of the various word types. The texts with longer average sentences show larger numbers of dependent words (adjectives, adverbs) than those with shorter average sentence length.
3. It is interesting to note that while he maintained the Biblical element in the language of the story he changed the content by using Biblical passages and allusions different from those found in the prototype. Saillens’s original story, as well as its adaption/translation in *The Russian Workman*, are both Christmas stories and allude to the advent story as presented in the Gospels. Tolstoy excluded the Christmas story completely from his version, turning instead to the story of the woman who anoints Jesus’ feet with costly oil and dries them with her hair.
4. It is possible, of course (as suggested to me by Professor Donna Orwin), that, in the context of the standard literary language, folkish language is so potent that a very small quantity of it can produce a notable effect.

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