Chapter 9: The Proposal

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Exercise 9.1 — Thinking about the Text

Q1 What does Chubukov at first suspect that Lomov has come for? Is he sincere when he later says "And I've always loved you, my angel, as if you were my own son"? Find reasons for your answer from the play.

SOLUTION

When Lomov arrives in a dress-jacket and white gloves and says he has come "to trouble you with a request," Chubukov jumps to a conclusion in an aside: "He's come to borrow money. Shan't give him any!"

So at first Chubukov suspects that Lomov has come to borrow money from him.

His later declaration of love is not entirely sincere. The moment he learns Lomov actually wants to marry Natalya, he is overjoyed and gushes: "I've been hoping for it for a long time... And I've always loved you, my angel, as if you were my own son." His joy is really about the economic advantage of joining two wealthy estates through marriage.

This is shown by how quickly his affection vanishes: the moment they quarrel over Oxen Meadows, he calls Lomov a "pettifogger," a "grabber," and abuses his whole family. His "love" lasts only as long as the marriage looks likely.

Answer: Chubukov first suspects Lomov has come to borrow money; his professed "love" is insincere, driven by the economic gain of the marriage, as his instant abuse during the quarrel shows.

Q2 Chubukov says of Natalya: "... as if she won't consent! She's in love; egad, she's like a lovesick cat..." Would you agree? Find reasons for your answer.

SOLUTION

One can agree that Natalya is eager to marry Lomov, even though she does not admit it openly during the play.

Evidence comes at the end. As soon as she learns that Lomov had actually come to propose, she reacts with hysterics: "Bring him back! Back! Ah! Bring him here," and cries "Quick, quick! I'm ill! Fetch him!" She is desperate not to lose the proposal.

However, her behaviour also contradicts the phrase "lovesick." She quarrels furiously with Lomov over the Oxen Meadows and over whose dog is better, insulting him repeatedly. She does not behave like a gentle, love-struck woman.

So it is fairer to say she is anxious to get married and does not want to miss the chance, rather than being softly "in love" like a lovesick cat.

Answer: Partly agree — Natalya is desperate not to lose the proposal (her hysterics prove it), but her constant quarrelling shows she is more keen to marry than tenderly "lovesick."

Q3 (i) Find all the words and expressions in the play that the characters use to speak about each other, and the accusations and insults they hurl at each other. (For example, Lomov in the end calls Chubukov an intriguer; but earlier, Chubukov has himself called Lomov a "malicious, doublefaced intriguer." Again, Lomov begins by describing Natalya as "an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated.") (ii) Then think of five adjectives or adjectival expressions of your own to describe each character in the play. (iii) Can you now imagine what these characters will quarrel about next?

SOLUTION

(i) Insults and expressions the characters use about each other:

Chubukov about Lomov: "pettifogger," "grabber," "malicious, doublefaced intriguer," "blind hen," "turnip-ghost," "stuffed sausage," "wizen-faced frump," "scarecrow," "villain," "Boy!," "Pup!," "Milksop!," "Fool!" He also says the Lomovs have "lunacy" in the family and that Lomov's grandfather was a drunkard.

Lomov about Chubukov: "grabber," "intriguer," "Old rat!," "Jesuit!"; he says Chubukov's grandfather was tried for embezzlement, his mother was hump-backed, and his late wife used to beat him.

Lomov about Natalya (approving): "an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated."

Natalya about Lomov: she calls him "impudent," a "rascal," a "monster," and says his behaviour is "low," "dishonest" and "mean."

(ii) Five adjectives for each character (model answer):
Lomov: nervous, hypochondriac (obsessed with his health), argumentative, suspicious, hasty.
Natalya: quarrelsome, stubborn, sharp-tongued, eager to marry, quick-tempered.
Chubukov: greedy, hot-tempered, insincere, excitable, interfering.

(iii) They are so quarrelsome by nature that they will surely quarrel again after the marriage — for example, over household matters, over money and property, over whose dog or servants are better, or over trivial family issues. The play ends with them already arguing whether Guess or Squeezer is the better dog, so the quarrelling clearly continues.

Answer: The characters hurl insults like "intriguer," "pettifogger," "grabber," "Old rat," and "stuffed sausage"; all three are quarrelsome, so they will keep fighting over trivial matters (property, dogs, household affairs) even after the marriage.

Exercise 9.2 — Thinking about Language

Q1 This play has been translated into English from the Russian original. Are there any expressions or ways of speaking that strike you as more Russian than English? For example, would an adult man be addressed by an older man as my darling or my treasure in an English play? Read through the play carefully, and find expressions that you think are not used in contemporary English, and contrast these with idiomatic modern English expressions that also occur in the play.

SOLUTION

Yes, several expressions sound more Russian than contemporary English, especially the affectionate forms of address Chubukov uses for another grown man, which would be unusual in an English play.

Expressions that are not used in modern English (they sound Russian / old-fashioned):
"my darling," "my treasure," "my angel," "my precious," "my beauty," "my dear fellow," "my beloved," "my darling" (used repeatedly), "and so on" / "and all that" (constantly repeated as a verbal tic), "By Jove!," "egad," "a lovesick cat."

Idiomatic modern English expressions that also occur in the play (still used today):
"How do you do?," "I've made up my mind," "Spit it out!," "I can't make head or tail of it," "Hear me out," "neck-and-neck," "my foot's gone to sleep," "lose my temper," "an open secret."

So the mixture of quaint Russian-sounding endearments with familiar English idioms is a good clue that the play is a translation.

Answer: Yes — endearments like "my darling," "my treasure," "my angel," "my precious," and fillers like "and so on" sound Russian/old-fashioned, contrasting with modern idioms in the play such as "neck-and-neck," "lose my temper," and "make head or tail of it."

Q2 Look up the following words in a dictionary and find out how to pronounce them. Pay attention to how many syllables there are in each word, and find out which syllable is stressed, or said more forcefully. palpitations, interfere, implore, thoroughbred, pedigree, principle, evidence, misfortune, malicious, embezzlement, architect, neighbours, accustomed, temporary, behaviour, documents

SOLUTION

Below is the stress pattern for each word (stressed syllable shown in CAPITALS, syllable count in brackets):

palpitations - pal-pi-TA-tions (4)
interfere - in-ter-FERE (3)
implore - im-PLORE (2)
thoroughbred - THOR-ough-bred (3)
pedigree - PED-i-gree (3)
principle - PRIN-ci-ple (3)
evidence - EV-i-dence (3)
misfortune - mis-FOR-tune (3)
malicious - ma-LI-cious (3)
embezzlement - em-BEZ-zle-ment (4)
architect - AR-chi-tect (3)
neighbours - NEIGH-bours (2)
accustomed - ac-CUS-tomed (3)
temporary - TEM-po-rar-y (4)
behaviour - be-HAV-iour (3)
documents - DOC-u-ments (3)

This is a dictionary task; students should confirm the pronunciation and stress in a good dictionary.

Answer: A dictionary/pronunciation task — e.g. pal-pi-TA-tions (4 syllables, stress on 3rd), im-PLORE (2, stress on 2nd), PED-i-gree (3, stress on 1st); check each word's syllable count and stressed syllable in a dictionary.

Q3 Look up the following phrases in a dictionary to find out their meaning, and then use each in a sentence of your own. (i) You may take it that (ii) He seems to be coming round (iii) My foot's gone to sleep

SOLUTION

(i) You may take it that — means "you can assume / be sure that."
Sentence: You may take it that the office will remain closed on Sunday.

(ii) He seems to be coming round — means "he seems to be regaining consciousness" (or, in another sense, changing his opinion to agree with you).
Sentence: The patient had fainted, but after a sip of water he seems to be coming round.

(iii) My foot's gone to sleep — means "my foot has become numb" because of pressure that has cut off the blood supply.
Sentence: I sat cross-legged for so long that my foot's gone to sleep and I can't stand up.

Answer: (i) "You may take it that" = you can assume; (ii) "coming round" = regaining consciousness; (iii) "my foot's gone to sleep" = my foot has gone numb — use each in your own sentence.

Q4 Reported Speech. In the following sentences fill in the blanks to list the changes that have occurred in the pairs of direct/reported sentences given in the exercise. One has been done for you. 1. To report a question, we use the reporting verb asked. 2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb ___. 3. The adverb of place here changes to ___. 4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the ___ tense. 5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to ___ tense. For example, ___ changes to was getting. 6. When the sentence in direct speech contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb ___ in the reporting clause. 7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine, which are used in the first person in direct speech, change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb such as ___, ___, ___ or ___ in reported speech.

SOLUTION

Filling in the blanks based on the direct/reported sentence pairs:

1. To report a question, we use the reporting verb asked. (done for you)

2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb said (as in Set 2 — "Lomov

said that he was getting a noise..."). Set 5 also uses declared.

3. The adverb of place here changes to there (as in Set 3 — "asked why he hadn't been there").

4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the past tense (Set 3: "haven't" changes to "hadn't").

5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to the past continuous tense. For example, am getting changes to was getting.

6. When the sentence contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb respectfully in the reporting clause (Set 1: "Lomov asked Stepan Stepanovitch respectfully...").

7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb, becoming he, him, his or their in reported speech.

Answer: 2. said; 3. there; 4. past; 5. past continuous — "am getting" changes to "was getting"; 6. respectfully; 7. he, him, his, their.

Q5 Here is an excerpt from an article from the Times of India dated 27 August 2006. Rewrite it, changing the sentences in direct speech into reported speech. Leave the other sentences unchanged. "Why do you want to know my age? If people know I am so old, I won't get work!" laughs 90-year-old A. K. Hangal... "What's the secret?" we ask. "My intake of everything is in small quantities. And I walk a lot," he replies. "I joined the industry when people retire..." he says, adding, "but yes, I have always been underpaid."... "No doubt I am content today, but money is important. I was a fool not to understand the value of money earlier," he regrets.

SOLUTION

Rewritten with the direct-speech sentences changed to reported speech (the non-speech sentences are left unchanged):

Ninety-year-old A. K. Hangal, one of Hindi cinema's most famous character actors, laughs and asks why we want to know his age, and adds that if people knew he was so old, he wouldn't get work.

For his age, he is rather energetic. We ask what the secret is.

He replies that his intake of everything is in small quantities and that he walks a

lot.

He says that he joined the industry when people retire and that he was in his 40s, so he doesn't miss being called a star. He adds that he is still respected and given work, when actors of his age are living in poverty and without work, and that he doesn't have any complaints; but yes, he has always been underpaid.

Recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Hangal never hankered after money or materialistic gains. He regrets that, no doubt, he is content today, but money is important, and that he was a fool not to understand the value of money earlier.

Answer: Convert each quoted line to reported speech (backshift tenses, change pronouns to third person, drop quotation marks) while leaving the narrator's descriptive sentences unchanged, as shown in the model rewrite above.