FEROCIOUS BEAST (óarga dýr) BETWEEN NORTH AND EAST

FJODOR USPENSKIJ
Institute of Slavic Studies (Moscow), Russian Academy of Science, and Higher School of Economics

The paper presents a linguistic approach to obscure collocative adjective—noun expressions (Old Norse *óarga dýr* and Old Russian *ljutyj zver*) that appear to have become lexicalized as discrete lexical-semantic units in spoken language (which could also be described as formulae) but which are only preserved in medieval written texts, where their meaning potential has been adapted to or manipulated within the emerging register of written language. The method or strategy employed is typological cross-linguistic comparison through which corresponding phenomena in different languages can be reciprocally illuminating and reciprocally reinforcing. This becomes particularly significant in cases where one or both corpora are extremely limited. According to this method, each lexicalized phrase is contextualized within the relevant written corpus, as are its constituent components in cases where these exhibit limited use. Patterns of use are reviewed, correlating semantic use with the type of text. Rhetorical strategy in use or pattern of use is addressed as an essential factor when assessing semantic use in different texts (of which avoidance expressions related to naming-taboos would be a ritualized form). The correlation of each example across languages then offers insights into patterns of use, as well as reinforcing interpretations where evidence in one area or feature under discussion in one language may not be as well attested or evident as in the other. This reveals both cases as typologically similar developments of special expressions from spoken language being adapted as social resources into the emerging register of written narrative discourse during the medieval period. All this will be illustrated by a case study of Old Norse óarga dýr and Old Russian ljutyj zver'.

The Collocation *ljutyj zver*' in the 'Testament' of Vladimir Monomakh

In the Old Russian literature, there are few texts comparable to the *Pouchenie* ['Testament'] of Vladimir Monomakh (†1125). Indeed, this is a rather large biography of the Great Prince written in the first person. The *Testament* is a unique source for the description of the everyday life of a prince in the 11th century, exhibiting the spectrum of tastes for reading and literature of an educated person of that time.

It is known that one of the primary entertainments (or perhaps more accurately, the duties) of a ruler was hunting. Monomakh relates the difficulties of his life as a huntsman almost in as much detail as those of his military enterprises. The ancient names of the animals hunted by the prince, and of those which hunted him, have always been very interesting to historians, linguists and even for biologists, such as those in the following example:

а се в Черниговѣ дѣвалъ нсмъ . конь дики[®] своима рукама свазалъ нсмь . въ пуша[®] . 1 . и . к . живъв[®] конь . а кромѣ того иже по Рови ѣзда ималъ нсмъ своима рукама тѣ же кони дикиѣ . тура ма . в . метала на розѣ[®] и с конемъ . wлень ма wдинъ болъ . а . в . лоси wдинъ ногами топталъ . а другъи рогома болъ . вепрь ми на бедрѣ мечь шталъ . медвѣдь ми у колѣна подъклада оукусилъ . лютъи звѣрь скочилъ ко мнѣ на бедры . и конь со мною поверже . и Бъ неврежена ма съблюде. (ПСРЛ, I (1926 [1997]): 251.)

At Chernigov, I even bound wild horses with my bare hands and captured ten or twenty live horses with the lasso, and on top of that, while riding along the Rus, I caught these same wild horses barehanded. Two bison tossed me and my horse on their horns, a stag once gored me, one elk stamped upon me, whereas another gored me, a boar once tore my sword from my thigh, on one occasion a bear bit my kneecap, and on another *wild beast* (лютый звѣрь) jumped on my flank and threw my horse with me. But God preserved me unharmed. (Cross 1930: 308–309.)

Among these animals, one remains mysterious and has not yet been defined, in spite of the cooperative efforts of a number of scholars. The collocation *ljutyj zver'* (Anomaiŭ 38ept ['fierce, wild beast']) presents a particular lexical-semantic unit: its meaning is not merely the sum of meanings of its components. In order to understand why Vladimir Monomakh used this very expression in his description of the hunt in the *Pouchenie*, it is necessary, on the one hand, to determine its rhetorical function, and, on the other hand, to illustrate some linguistic and cultural parallels. At first sight, the parallels addressed are not directly connected with the work by Monomakh, but they illustrate how an identical – or at least very similar – formula functions in another literature tradition.

I believe that such a parallel can be found on Scandinavian ground in the equally mysterious *óarga dýr*.

Óarga dýr in Written Sources

In Old Norse texts, there is a corresponding fixed expression *óarga dýr*, which literally means 'intrepid, bold, fearless beast'. However, what is the actual meaning of this well-attested lexical-semantic unit? In the translated texts and in texts written under the influence of the continental literary or encyclopedic tradition, *óarga dýr* often means 'lion'. For example, Samson kills an 'intrepid beast' (*óarga dýr*) with his own hands,¹ and Daniel the Prophet is thrown in a ditch full of wild, fierce beasts (Benediktsson 1944: 39).² In addition, *óarga dýr* may describe some other large predatory animals (such as a panther), which were exotic for the Scandinavians. A similar conclusion has been drawn concerning the meaning of Old Russian *ljutyj zver*' in translated texts and in texts written under the influence of foreign patterns.³ However, would it be realistic to think that Monomakh was fighting with a lion in a Russian forest?

It is significant that both Old Russian and Old Norse texts had their own specific words for 'lion' – lev (100%) in Old Russian and léo, leo[n] in Old Norse. In both Old Russian and Old Norse, a 'lion' was more of a literatary figure than an object of hunting. Both the expression ljutyj zver' and the expression barga dýr appear to signify the absolute personification of fierceness and wildness within their respective languages. In this regard, it is significant that barga dýr often occurs in the texts as an element used in a comparison specifically for descriptions of men in battle, these comparisons being monotypic although they can be found in quite diverse sagas. Such a formulaic characterization of a fierce fighter can, for example, be taken from: Fóstbraðra saga ['The Saga of the Foster-Brothers'], a classic family saga describing a feud in Iceland in the 10th century, in which this or that personage is mentioned as fighting against his enemies sem it barga dýr ['like an intrepid beast'] (Björn Þórólfsson 1925: 18, 81); Gyðinga saga ['The Saga of the Jews'], an exposition of some parts of the Old Testament, where a corresponding comparison is made (Guðmundur

med hondum sinum einum banadi eno oarga dyri (Kålund 1908: 50).

² Cf. Kålund 1908: 52; Wisén 1872: 63; Benediktsson 1944: 39. On King David of the Bible killing the lion (= *óarga dýr*) see Benediktsson 1944: 31; Zitzelsberger 1988: 64; Cederschiöld 1884: 64. For additional examples for *óarga dýr* = 'lion', see Beck 1972: 98–101.

³ See Буслаев 1851; Ивакин 1901: 281–282; Клейненберг 1969; Сумникова 1986, with references; Топоров 1988; Савельева 1995: 189–190, with references; Королев 1998; cf. Успенский 2004: 88–105.

Porláksson 1881: 36); and *Karlamagnúss saga* ['The Saga of Charlemaigne'] (Unger 1860: 428, 520) and *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* ['The Saga of Tristan and Iseuld'] (Brynjulfson 1878: 17, ch. 11), rather free renderings of the West European compositions, where this comparison is also present. (For additional examples, see Beck 1972: 101; cf. also the data of *The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose: s.v. 'óargadýr'*, 'óarga'.)

Analyzing the Old Norse sources, it becomes apparent that *óarga dýr* cannot be reduced to a single, real predatory animal within the corpus of texts as a whole. Nevertheless, when individual texts are taken separately, this becomes possible, but not obligatory. Indeed, in some cases, the predator designated as a 'wild beast' can be identified. However, even in those cases it remains uncertain to what extent this identification was intended in the text by the author. Apparently, *óarga dýr* is not a special construction invented to designate exotic animals that do not occur in Scandinavia. This expression is therefore likely to have existed in the language prior to its use for these exotic animals, and probably for some time had, due to its broad compositional meaning, been frequently used in the literate tradition to signify wild, fierce beasts generally as well as various predatory animals exotic to the Scandinavians. These considerations offer a resolution for the semantics of *óarga dýr* in the language use of literature, but do not resolve the semantics of the earlier uses of the expression from which these derive.

The Semantics and Associations of *óargr*

The adjective *óargr* is the negative form of a term that was very significant in the Old Norse culture, especially in the language of law: *argrlragr* ['coward, effeminate, unmanly'] (Weisweiler 1923: 16–29; Sørensen 1983: passim). In juridical texts *argrlragr* is classified as obscene vocabulary, apparently connected with accusing a man of being a passive homosexual.⁴ Accordingly, the semantics of *ó-argr* is an antithesis of *argr*, 'un-tamed' in the sort of sexual domination potentially implied in *argr*, or 'that which cannot be made *argr*'. The model of the descriptive phrase itself, where the adjective component includes a negative element, suggests that here we are dealing with a euphemistic designation

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⁴ Cf.: Pav ero orð þriú, ef sva mioc versna máls endar manna. er scog Gang varða avll. Ef maðr kallar mann ragan eða stroðiN. eða sorðiN. Oc scal søkia sem avnnor full rettis orð, enda a maðr vígt igegn þeim orðum þrimr. (Finsen 1852–70, II: 392; I/II: 183–184.) ['There are three words that corrupt men's speech to such an extent that they all incur outlawry. If a man calls another man ragr or stroðinn or sorðinn, he shall prosecute as for other fullréttisorð (gross verbal insults). A man also has the right to kill for these three words'.] (Gade 1986: 132.)

of some predator associated with naming taboos. This begs the question: is it possible to reveal the original, pre-written-language meaning of the euphemistic word combination on the basis of material from the written sources?

To my mind, it is possible. First of all, it would be useful to reveal what the word *óargr* means outside of the set expression *óarga dýr*, in the texts which are to the least extent connected with the continental encyclopedic tradition. In particular, the fact cannot be ignored that the adjective *óargr* (*úargr*), which occurs very rarely and is used almost exclusively within the set expression under consideration, is known as a nickname as well.

It is potentially significant that the holder of the nickname *óargi* was a man having the proper name *Úlfr* ['Wolf']. In the family of that man, the 'wolf'-semantics of the proper name were not lost. This is clear from the story about his grandson, who had been named *Úlfr* after him. The latter's proper name and nickname came together to form the peculiar combination *Kvelld-úlfr* that is explained in the saga. *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* tells that *Kvelldúlfr's* behavior in the evening differed greatly from that in the daytime:

Var þat siðr hans at rísa vpp árdegiss ok ganga þá um sýslur manna, eða þar er smiðer voro ok sjá yfer fénat sinn ok akra, en stundum var hann á tali við menn, þá er ráða hans þurftu. Kunni hann til allz góð ráð at leggja, því at hann var foruitri. En dag huern, er at kuelldi leið, þá gerðiz hann styggr, suá at fáer menn máttu orðum við hann koma. Var hann kuelldsuæfr. Þat var mál manna, at hann veri mjog hamrammr. Hann var kallaðr Kuelldúlfr. (Finnur Jónsson 1886–88: 4, chapter 1.)

He made a habit of rising early to supervise the work of his labourers and skilled craftsmen, and to take a look at his cattle and cornfields. From time to time he would sit and talk with people who came to ask for his advice, for he was a shrewd man and never at loss for the answer to any problem. But every day, as it drew towards evening, he would grow so ill-tempered that no one could speak to him, and it wasn't long before he would go to bed. There was talk about his being a shape-changer, and people called him Kveld-Ulf [literally 'Evening Wolf']. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards 1976: 21.)

While the name and nickname of the grandson was understood as a set expression meaning 'Evening Wolf', the name and nickname of his grandfather, \acute{U} fr \acute{o} argi, was, probably, interpreted as 'Fearless Wolf'. The nickname or, better to say, epithet $\it Kvelld$ - is to a great extent conditioned, determined by the proper name $\it Ulfr$. When brought together, they combine to mean a were-animal – a werewolf, a person who turns into a wolf in the evening. The clear semantic relevance of 'wolf' to this family's identity and its naming practices is complemented by evidence that the epithets identifying and distinguishing different 'wolves' within the family were semantically relevant to the basic name 'Wolf' (i.e. the semantics of the basic name $\it Ulfr$ ['Wolf'] acted as a determinant factor

on the epithet). This consequently gives reason to believe that the epithet $\emph{o}argi$ is also determined by the proper name \emph{Ulfr} , underlining $\emph{o}argi$ as characterizing the courage or ferocity intrinsic to the wolf. The nicknames of the grandfather and the grandson, therefore, acquire the complete meanings only in combination with their names. In other words, \emph{Ulfr} $\emph{o}argi$ presents a sort of set expression in a manner corresponding to $\emph{o}arga$ $\emph{d}\emph{v}\emph{r}$, only instead of the word $\emph{d}\emph{v}\emph{r}$ there is the word \emph{ulfr} . When the adjective $\emph{o}argi$ is only encountered in two combinations – \emph{Ulfr} $\emph{o}argi$ and $\emph{o}arga$ $\emph{d}\emph{v}\emph{r}$ – and combination with \emph{ulfr} appears restricted to the use of \emph{ulfr} as a personal name, it becomes reasonable to hypothesize that $\emph{o}arga$ $\emph{d}\emph{v}\emph{r}$ was originally a euphemistic designation for the wolf in particular.

Further 'traces' of the primary, pre-written language meaning of *óarga dýr* can be pursued in the written sources. Graphically and phonetically (but not etymologically) *óargr* or *úargr* is close to the word *vargr*, one of the central cultural-juridical terms of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. As the adjective *óargr* (*úargr*) was regularly used only with the word 'beast' (*dýr*), therefore graphically, the combination *óarga dýr* or *úarga dýr* sometimes simply appeared as *varga dýr* in written texts (cf. e.g. *it varga dyr* in *Morkinskinna* or *hin vaurgu dyr* in the wording of the A manuscript of *Þiðriks saga af Bern*). In the language of law, *vargr* is 'an outlaw, social outcast, enemy', however, in the non-juridical texts *vargr* may mean 'wolf'. Apparently, the meanings 'outcast' and 'wolf' in Old Norse were not opposed to each other and, somehow, were blended. *Óarga dýr* and *vargr*, in spite of the difference in etymology, were extremely close for the native speakers.

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As for the euphemistic substitution of the *wolf* in the word combinations referring to the personal names, it is appropriate to mention an episode from the poetic *Edda*. As it is known, the Völsungs originated from the people who, according to the legend, could turn into wolves. It is interesting that the most famous of Völsungs, Sigurðr the Dragon Slayer, who wanted to avoid the curse of the dying dragon, does not tell his name but informs that he is a noble beast – *Göfukt dýr ek heiti* (Neckel 1936: 176). Sigurðr's answer, in spite of being deliberately mysterious, apparently was understandable for the audience well acquainted with the hero's genealogy. The matter is, one of the constant nicknames of Völsungs (referred to the legend of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli) was *Ylfingar*, 'Little Wolves' or 'descendents of Wolf', cf.: *Sigmundr konungr ok hans ættmenn héto Völsungar ok Ylfingar* (Neckel 1936: 146). Thus, using an allegory, Sigurðr tells that he is of the noble family of beasts; he allegorically underlines his belonging to the family of Wolf (Breen 1999: 34–35). There is no need to remind of the important place of the wolf symbolic in the Niflungs cycle: the 'wolfish' origin of the Niflungs is actualized in the numerous details of the plot.

See Finnur Jónsson 1932: 351; Bertelsen 1905–11, 1: 353. Cf. Cleasby & Vigfusson 1874: 658; Beck 1972: 101, 106, 110 footnote 24.

⁷ Cf. Vargr heitir dýr; þat er rétt at kenna við blóð eða hræ svá, at kalla verð hans eða drykk; eigi er rétt at kenna svá við fleiri dýr. Vargr heitir ok úlfr ... (Finnur Jónsson 1900: 129) ['It is correct to peraphrase blood or carrion in terms of the beast which is called vargr, by calling them his meat and drink; it is not correct to express them in terms of other beasts. The vargr is also called wolf.'].

So, it seems probable that initially the expression $\acute{o}arga~d\acute{y}r$ was used as an allegoric or euphemistic designation of the wolf. The development of the semantics of $\acute{o}arga~d\acute{y}r$ may be schematically presented as follows: initially this is a descriptive, tabooing designation for a certain predatory animal (possibly from the vocabulary of the hunters). This animal was the locally understood personification of something fierce and alien. Furthermore, this word collocation was used to signify a fierce beast of prey. This meaning is observed clearly in the translated and bookish texts where it is used to signify various predatory beasts – above all, a *lion*.

The great semantic potential implicit in this evolution was provided by the generalized, descriptive character of the euphemism $\delta arga~d\acute{y}r$. It should be stressed, however, that the change in meaning from 'wolf' to 'lion' was not at all definitive or final. It is rather significant that, in the written tradition, the expression $\delta arga~d\acute{y}r$ had no fixed meaning as referring to a particular predator. The allegory of rapacity and ferocity which linked to the word combination $\delta arga~d\acute{y}r$, could probably sometimes imply the old meaning 'wolf' as well. It should be noted once more that a word combination of the kind that underwent this complicated evolution allowed a combination of the more general and the particular meanings for the literary text: it could simultaneously be and not be the synonym of some particular, monosemantic word.

Ljutyj zver' in the Light of óargr dýr

The euphemistic character of the Russian expression *ljutyj zver*' ['fierce beast'] is not as evident as that of Old Norse *óarga dýr*, yet this thesis has been advanced already in a number of papers. Here, the typological comparison of this expression with the Old Norse *óarga dýr* appears to be productive once again: the components of *óarga dýr* are more lexically bound, and the euphemistic character of its structure (containing negation) is by far more obvious. Nevertheless, it is never an easy task to elucidate what this or that expression presented beyond the limits of the written language when all of the available material for the description of the epoch of interest is in the form of written texts. At some point in time, both the Old Norse expression *óarga dýr* and the Old Russian expression *ljutyj zver*' acquired a rather stable and adequate 'functional niche' in the literary language.

If it is hypothesized that the Old Russian *ljutyj zver*' ['fierce beast'] developed in close typological correspondence to the Old Norse expression, this can be situated in relation to its fit with the rhetoric and stylistic strategy of Vladimir

Monomakh in his *Testament*. In the *Testament*, alongside other techniques, Monomakh frequently engages in plays based on the combination of the abstract and particular semantics of terms and cultural concepts. The whole of Monomakh's text can be described as balancing on the cusp of its extreme autobiographical character and engaging a vast body of literature through citation. For example, in the passage following the description of hunting 'traumas' quoted above, he employs the word 'head' (20,108a) with almost punning repetition as it carries remarkably different loads of meaning in the various cases:

... лютыи звѣрь скочилъ ко мнѣ на бедры. и конь со мною поверже. и Бъ неврежена ма съблюде. и с кона много падах̂. голову си розбих̂ дважды. и руцѣ и нозѣ свои вередих̂. въ оуности своєи вередих̂ не блюда живота своєго. ни щада головы своє α . (ПСР Λ , I (1926 [1997]): 251.)

... wild beast (лютын звѣрь) jumped on my flank and threw my horse with me. But God preserved me unharmed. I often fell from my horse, fractured my skull (голову) twice, and in my youth injured my arms and legs when I did not take heed for my life or spare my head (ни щада головы свосы). (Cross 1930: 309.)

In other words, the Prince liked to juxtapose a very concrete word with a corresponding word referring to something very abstract. He places the expression *ljutyj zver*' at the end of the passage about the hunt, precisely at the very end of the list of absolutely real animals: *bison*, *elk*, a *bear*, etc. This list is arguably ordered according to the prestige of each animal on the hunt or the threat each poses to the hunter, in which case the progression suggests that the *ljutyj zver*' is a real animal and the most prestigeous or threatening.⁸ It should be pointed out that the *wolf* is absent from this list, although its presence should be expected as a dangerous adversary of the hunter.

It would be very consistent with Vladimir Monomakh's rhetorical strategies in the text to name the predators that had attacked him in common terms and then to designate the last of these euphemistically. The double rhetorical load seems particularly justified here, at the culmination of the list. Avoidance terms characterize their objects with an honorific status. This would be consistent with the list as an ordered progression and the ultimate status of the final adversary, and might be described as a rhetorical flourish that makes the list more dramatic. This rhetorical frame supports the identification of the *ljutyj zver*' as an otherwise unmentioned real animal and concrete adversary of the hunter that has been designated in this way for rhetorical effect. Consequently, the *wolf* becomes the most probable referent of the avoidance term as the only

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⁸ [1.] bison; [2.] stag; [3.] elk; [4.] boar; [5.] bear; [6.] *ljutyj zver*'.

culturally significant adversary of the hunter not otherwise mentioned. The use of *ljutyj zver*' combines a euphemistic designation of the specific predatory animal (a *wolf*, as proposed here) and the maximally generalized meaning of a fierce beast of prey, which can be seen as a kind of collective image of the human's adversary during the hunt. In other words, Monomakh makes a play on the polysemantic character of this construction, both realizing the final concrete animal in the list and simultaneously construing that conflict as an ultimate and symbolic confrontation between man and beast. Moreover, the appearance of the construction in the text appears attributable precisely to its polysemantic character.

This is not the only case of such usage of the word combination *ljutyj zver*' in Old Russian sources. It is mentioned in a similar way in the no less famous *Slovo o Polku Igoreve* ['The Tale of Igor's Campaign']. There, the prince Vseslav of Polock:

скочи от нихъ лютымь звѣремь въ плъночи изъ Бѣлаграда, обѣсися синѣ мылтѣ, утръже вазни С три кусы, отвори врата Новуграду, разшибе славу Ярославу, скочи влъкомь до Немиги ... 9

galloped from them like a wild beast (*ljutyj zver*') at midnight from Bélgorod, swathed himself in a blue mist, rent asunder his bonds into three parts, opened wide the gates of Nóvgorod, shattered the Glory of Yarosláv [the Wise]; galloped like a wolf to the Nemíga ...

Compare Vladimir Nabokov's translation:

Like a fierce beast he leapt away from them [the troops?], at midnight, out of Belgorod, having enveloped himself in a blue mist.
Then at morn, he drove in his battle axes, opened the gates of Novgorod, shattered the glory of Yaroslav, [and] loped like a wolf / to the Nemiga ...¹⁰

Apparently, in this poetic expression, the metaphoric and, paradoxically, a very particular meaning are combined. Indeed, it is possible to speak of a trope characterizing how fast and secretively prince Vseslav was riding. The example is interesting because there is every reason to assume that a trope of this kind

⁹ See Jakobson 1966: 145, lines 156–157.

¹⁰ See Nabokov 1960.

appears under the influence of the general idea of Vseslav being a werewolf, suffering from lycanthropy, because his mother gave birth to him through magic:

кегоже роди мти \ddot{w} вълхвованьм . мтри бо родивши кего . бъ \dot{f} кему мзвено на главъ кего . рекоша бо волсви мтри кего . се мзвено навъжи на нь . да носить ϵ до живота свокего . ϵ же носить Всеславъ и до сего дне на собъ . сего ради немл \dot{f} твъ ϵ сть на кровъпролить ϵ . (ПСРЛ, I (1926 [1997]): 155, sub anno 1044.)

Him his mother bore by enchantment, for when his mother bore him, there was a caul over his head, and the magicians bade his mother bind this caul upon him, that he might carry it with him the rest of his life. Vseslav accordingly bears it to this day, and for this reason he is pitiless in bloodshed. (Cross 1930: 228.)

Therefore the description of Vseslav running like a *ljutyj zver*' cannot be separated from his identity as a 'wolf' any more than the epithet *óargi* can be from *Úlfr*, as discussed above.

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