



Preface

This book is an introduction to the complexities of Russian punctuation. The rules of Russian punctuation were only codified quite recently, with the publication of A.B. Shapiro's *Osnovy russkoy punktuatsii (Fundamentals of Russian Punctuation)* in 1955. Since then, other excellent references on the subject have appeared, including A.N. Naumovich's *Sovremennaya russkaya punktuatsiya (Modern Russian Punctuation)* in 1983; and *Orfografiya i punktuatsiya: Spavochnik (Orthography and Punctuation: A Guide)*, by N.S. Valgina and V.N. Svetlysheva. These books offer a rich array of information on the use of punctuation and related symbols in modern literary Russian, and we have employed them as sources for writing the present book. Nevertheless, all of them (as well as the other books listed in the bibliography beginning on page 227) were written for educated native Russians and are accessible to only the most advanced non-native student. In creating a guide to Russian punctuation intended for intermediate-level students whose native language is English, we hope to fill an important gap in Russian pedagogy.

There are two reasons we believe our book will serve the needs of English-speaking students at the intermediate or advanced level.

First, the use of Russian punctuation cannot be inferred from even the most thorough knowledge of English punctuation. At first glance, this does not seem to be the case at all. Russian uses the same 10 marks of punctuation as English, nine of which seem entirely familiar: the **period**, **точка** (.), the **comma**, **запятая** (,), the **semicolon**, **точка с запятой** (;), the **colon**, **двоеточие** (:), the **dash**, **тире** (—), the **exclamation point**, **восклицательный знак** (!), the **question mark**, **вопросительный знак** (?), the **points of omission**, **многоточие** (...), the **parentheses**, **скобки** (()), the Russian **кавычки** (« »), or **quotation marks**, have an unfamiliar form; and still, the notion of quotes seems familiar enough from English. Despite their almost complete similarity in form, however, all ten of these marks show significant differences in usage between Russian and English. These differences are usually not predictable based on even the most thorough knowledge of English punctuation. For every instance where the use of some punctuation mark in English finds an exact parallel in Russian, there seem to be at least two others where a knowledge of English punctuation will actually interfere with the choice of the correct mark in Russian.

The second reason we feel our book will be useful to English-speaking students is that no guide to Russian punctuation has ever been written with the English speaker specifically in mind. Most textbooks of Russian rarely, if ever, make mention of any of the numerous differences between Russian and

English punctuation. This creates the false impression that Russian punctuation is simply a carbon copy of the English system. And, as we have already said and will soon show you in great detail, this erroneous assumption can easily cause frequent confusion and even occasional embarrassment.

Thus, although Russian and English make use of essentially the same set of graphic symbols as marks of punctuation, the rules for using many of these marks differ considerably between the two languages. Students who—for want of ever having been shown otherwise—blindly apply the rules of English punctuation when writing Russian, will confuse their Russian readers at least occasionally, and sometimes very seriously. This book will forewarn you of instances where an improper mark of punctuation, placed through naive analogy to English, can distort the intended meaning of a Russian phrase or sentence. In the following pages you will find explanations of how to use each Russian punctuation symbol properly. You will also be shown many contexts where English requires one mark of punctuation while Russian requires an entirely different mark or no mark at all.

Finally, to native Russian specialists on punctuation, whose many scholarly and pedagogical accomplishments in their field have done much to make our book possible, we feel the need to explain a few significant departures from the methods usually employed in writing guidebooks and references on Russian punctuation. These features of our book, which might seem unnecessary or unorthodox in a book written for native Russians, are intended to assist the English-speaking student who is still in the process of gaining a basic mastery of the Russian language.

First, we have included—as a preliminary to the description of punctuation itself—a discussion of the basic terms and categories of Russian syntax. We have also provided a section on punctuation-like symbols that are used for spelling, formatting texts, etc. We felt the need to include this final part of our book because many of these symbols resemble punctuation marks in form and tend naturally to be associated with punctuation by the student; also, as is the case with Russian punctuation itself, there is no book currently available that attempts to teach these punctuation-like devices to the English-speaking student in any comprehensive fashion.

Second, specialists will notice that we have not taken a majority of the example sentences from the classics of Russian literature; in fact, we have taken only occasional examples from the writing of famous Russian authors (in such cases, the Russian sentences are followed by the author's name in parentheses, or by abbreviations such as **П.** for **А.С. Пу́шкин**, and **Л.** for **М.Ю. Лёрмонтов**). We have also used many proverbs as examples, marking each one with the note **послóвица**, *proverb*. Most example sentences we have adapted from Russian newspaper or magazine articles, or from contemporary popular literature, without citing the specific source.

Finally, we have placed a stress mark on every multisyllabic Russian word, and have even marked the stress on the monosyllabic conjunctive words **что́**,

what; and **ка́к**, *how*, to distinguish them from the unstressed conjunctions **что**, *that*; and **как**, *as*, a practice not normally followed even in Russian texts that have been accented for pedagogical purposes.

We hope that the English-speaking reader will gain three invaluable insights from our book: a basic understanding of Russian sentence structure (Part I of our book); a solid introduction to the use of punctuation marks in Russian (Part II, divided into nine chapters); and a basic introduction to punctuation-like symbols and devices not generally discussed in other sources accessible to the English-speaking student (Part III, divided into three chapters). Each section of the book, including the initial discussion of Russian syntax, is accompanied by exercises that check the student's progress. Keys with suggested solutions to each exercise are provided in the back of the book for self study, and as an aid to the teacher.

And so we invite you to work through this book, either with or without a teacher. Your attempt to master literary Russian will remain significantly incomplete unless you assimilate the material we have gathered for you here.



This book is dedicated to one of its authors, Valentina Umanets, who passed away while the manuscript was in press. I would also like to thank Steve and Erika Tyler for their determination in seeing the manuscript through to publication and for helping to proofread the final draft.