

**Title:** Learning Language Through Literature: Twisted Idioms in Gogol's "Nose"  
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The use of 19th-century Russian literary texts in language classes has become a polemical topic. Some insist that this material enriches the students' knowledge of literature and culture, enhances their vocabulary, develops reading skills, and thus improves their overall mastery of the language. Others object that more recent prose provides a better context for learning colloquial language and is thus more helpful for achieving fluency. Connected to this debate are more traditional concerns about teaching idiosyncratic language "too soon," to students unprepared to appreciate or activate it. My paper argues that the former perspective is not inferior to the latter. I use Gogol's "Nose" to demonstrate that the upper-level language learners can benefit from it in terms of mastering colloquial idiomatic language.

In general, idiomatic expressions are difficult for second language learners because idioms cannot be understood from the individual meanings of their elements. The relationship between literal and figurative meanings is often obscured, their usage is contextual; when used inappropriately, they sound awkward and outlandish.

My paper focuses on Gogol's major comic device: his juggling with literal and figurative meanings of popular idioms. Of course, the very plot of the story – the disappearance of a nose – is a realization of the idiom "ostat'sia s nosom" ("to be fooled/cheated"). I trace a dozen of other idioms that Gogol twists or hints at in order to produce a comic effect. Their phraseology is tightly related to the plot, but as most of these expressions have no direct equivalents in English, they get lost in translations. An awareness of the philological framework for "idiom play" is itself educational.

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