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The Implications of English-Russian Interactions in Mass Media

The problem of contacts or interactions between languages traditionally studied by linguistics has now acquired new dimensions and requires a closer examination. Thus, it is worthy to note that previously the impact of one language on another was primarily the result of direct contacts between corresponding speaking communities under specific geographic, historical, or social conditions (Achmanova 1966, p. 535).

Nowadays, there is a powerful indirect means of bringing together different speaking communities. It is mass media. Part of almost every household, both traditional (news and magazines) and technologically advanced mass media (Internet, e-mail) not only introduce foreign words and realia into domestic contexts but also promote their dissemination due to the impact on their numerous addressees. This fact acquires special significance within the framework of general tendencies of development in this functional style observed by a number of linguists (Nešimenko 2001, p. 116-117). Thus, it has been pointed out that it is the language of public verbal communication that has recently come to be regarded as a source of idiomatic up-to-date style, standard (literary) norms, and a model to be followed.

With these general points in mind, let us turn to the analysis of English-Russian interactions as observed in recent publications in newspapers and magazines. The first thing which catches the eye of both linguists and non-linguists is a conspicuous presence of English (in particular American) words on the pages of the Russian press. It especially concerns such fields as economics, computer technology, advertisement, household technical appliances, sports, and mass culture in general (Kostomarov 1999).

English-Russian interactions have seen a number of periods in their development. The first one, dating back to 1553-1649, was the time of their establishment and was carried out mostly in oral form through direct contacts between representatives of both speaking communities. The second one

(1696-1725) was the time of Peter the Great's rule known for wide contacts with European countries, including England, and quite considerable borrowings from both oral and written sources of these languages. The third one (late 18th and mid 19th century) was a period of the most intensive contacts characterised by English-Russian oral and written bilingualism (especially the years from 1820 to 1870) (Aristova 1978, p. 43-44).

The modern period can be divided into two markedly different stages: the Soviet (before the late 80s) and post-Soviet (perestroika and democratisation). English words (most of them belonging to mass or pop culture) used by Russian young people in the 70s may be considered as a form of their protest against the official ideology of the time. But probably, no other period of English-Russian interactions can be compared with the present one in the massive character of English borrowings flooding into many spheres of modern Russian life stimulated and disseminated by mass media.

There are two major considerations in this respect. First, English-Russian interactions should be viewed as a part of the changing global linguistic situation with the unprecedented expansion of English that is becoming *the* world language and exerting its influence on any language it comes into contact with. Second, the linguo-ecological situation in Russia itself with the reconstruction and reform of all aspects of the society including the language is quite favourable for changes taking place in it and leading to the renovation and enrichment of its resources, very often at the expense of foreign words and terms on hand.

Thus, the linguistic situation in Russian pop-music and cinema, obviously influenced by American mass culture dominating the world today, may be described as bilingual so prominent are the inclusions from American English in Russian publications, especially in those addressing Russian youth. Let us adduce an example:

Эта группа первой в России стала выпускать *макси-синглы ремиксов*. «Моя певица» – уже четвертый *сингл* с альбома «Точно ртуть алюз». Илья Лагутенко разрешил разным музыкантам так поизмываться над песней и так ее переделать, как каждый сможет и захочет. Получились практически новые песни. Особенно постарался донецкий *ди-джей* Владислав Креймер под псевдонимом «*That Black*». Он перепрограммировал мелодию своей *версии* электронными ритмами и добавил

очень органичный женский вокал на втором плане. Денис Козлов со своим проектом «*In R Voice*» превратил композицию в медитативный психоделический транс. А Андрей Самсонов, саунд-продюсер самого интересного из последних альбомов «Аквариума» – «Пси», переделал «Мою певицу» в модном сегодня стиле «басс-энд-драм». Короче здесь есть что послушать. (Ровесник №3, 2001)

'This band was the first to publish *remixed maxi-singles* in Russia. "My Singer" – already the fourth *single* from the album "Like Mercury From Aloe". Ilja Ljagutenko allowed some other musicians to play around with this song and remix it just as they liked. The results were some practically new tracks. Wladislav Krejmer aka "That Black", a DJ from Donez, made a most remarkable effort: In his *version*, he modified the theme using electronic percussion in addition to the very physical female voice of the second part. In his project "In R Voice", Deniz Kozlov changed the *composition* into a *meditative psychodelic trance* track. Andrej Samsonov, sound-producer of the most interesting of the recent *albums* "Aquarium" – "Dogs" remixed "My Singer" into today's modern "*bass-and-drum*" style. To keep it short, there's a lot to listen to.' (Rovesnik 3, 2001)]

Besides direct English inclusions in the text (the pseudonym of the Russian DJ, the name of the musical project are given in English), there are a number of musical jargon terms transliterated from English (*bass and drum*, *DJ*, *maxi-singles*, *meditative*, *psychodelic*, *remixes*, *sound-producer*, and *singles*), which are a few of the recent borrowings in Russian. It is also interesting to note that such international words like *album*, *composition*, *trance*, and *version* that came into the Russian language from French and Latin are developing new specialised shades of meaning under the influence of corresponding English words. The impact of English is also felt in the stylistic character of the article, informal, colloquial ("chatty"), obviously following the stylistic format of musical reviews in American newspapers and magazines.

Action, *blockbuster*, *remake*, *sequel*, and *thrillers* that denote different kinds of films are a few examples of words borrowed (transliterated) into Russian from American English alongside with American movies and videos. Typical of the tendencies to commercialise the Russian cinema scene today is the informal word *blockbuster* (a film or a book that is very popular and successful, usually because of the exciting or sensational events featured in it).¹ The

¹ Here and further see: Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (1995); Словарь русского языка в четырех томах [Dictionary of the Russian Language in Four Volumes] (1981).

language in Russian publications on topics relating to music and cinema (video), especially in those appealing to mass audiences, the one actually spoken by young people, is sometimes defined as Runglish (that is, Russian plus English).

But to be fair, it is worthy to note that even quality papers and not only tabloids and youth magazines are following this fashion. Thus, in an issue of "Izvestia" (January 22, 2002), one can find both direct inclusions from English as "*story*" or "*Bloody Pit of Horror*" (the name of a theatre project after Macbeth staged in one of Moscow's theatres) and English words transliterated into Russian such as "*techno*", "*extreme*", "*computer*", "*performance*", "*sex-shop*", and "*action*".

As compared with direct inclusions from English, the impact on the lexical-semantic structure of the Russian language is less conspicuous but far more significant. Thus, a number of international words, which were borrowed into Russian from Latin and French, have now developed new meanings under the influence of their English counterparts; the process obviously facilitated by the similarity of their sound forms.

For example, in the sentence: "... государство не проводит и даже не *артикулирует* никакой политики по стимулированию рождаемости" 'The state doesn't pursue let alone *articulate* a policy to increase the birth rate' (Izvestia, Oct. 19, 2000), the word "*артикулирует*" (in English *articulate*) is used in the meaning which is described by the dictionary in the following way: *when you articulate your ideas or feelings, you express them clearly in words*; while in the Russian dictionary, it is still described as a mono-semantic technical word used in linguistics.

An article in the same Russian paper devoted to the victims among civilians during the US anti-terrorist bombings in Afghanistan has the title "Неаккуратная война" (or in English "*An Inaccurate War*"). Originally the Russian word "аккуратный" 'accurate' (here with the negative prefix "не" 'in-') is used to describe people who are 1) *exact, thorough*, 2) *tidy and neat*, while its English counterpart *accurate* has a number of meanings: (1) *Accurate information, measurements, and statistics are correct to a very detailed level*; (2) *An accurate statement or account gives a true or fair judgement of*

something; (3) You can use *accurate* to describe the results of someone's actions when they do or copy something correctly or exactly; (4) An *accurate* weapon or throw reaches the exact point or target that it was intended to reach. You can also describe a person if they fire a weapon or throw something in this way. The analysis of the semantic structures of the two words shows how different they are: The Russian word is used mainly to describe people and their habits while the English one refers to inanimate objects except for its last meaning.

Thus, it is unusual to describe a war as “*inaccurate*” in Russian while in English this word-combination is quite usual and its meaning is defined clearly in the dictionary. So either the author intentionally played upon this semantic difference for a certain stylistic effect or simply used it in the new meaning characteristic of the English word (since there is a reference to an English source in the body of the article), therefore, expanding the semantic scope of the Russian word.

In the same way, some other international words in Russian such as *эскорт* ‘escort’, *интимный* ‘intimate’, and *волонтер* ‘volunteer’ have recently acquired new meanings under the influence of their English counterparts and have come to be used more widely in the press.

America (the U.S.) and Americana seem to be important factors in the Russian frame of reference as the names of American films, videos, actors, actresses, and other celebrities are quite often cited on the pages of Russian newspapers. Let us give a few examples:

- 1) “... в обществе стало меньше ханжеского стыда по отношению к «основному инстинкту»” ‘... in society, there is less hypocritical shame and more “*basic instinct*”’ (Izvestia, Oct. 19, 2000) – a reference to the notorious American film “Basic Instinct”;
- 2) “Миссия выполнена. Эксклюзивный репортаж с палубы американского авианосца.” ‘*Mission accomplished*. Exclusive report from the deck of an American aircraft carrier.’ (Izvestia, Feb. 19, 2002). The title of the article is an allusion to another American film “Mission Impossible”;

- 3) “Лучше Познер, чем никогда.” ‘Better Pozner than never.’ (Izvestia, Jan. 22, 2002). This title refers to the English proverb “Better late than never” as the author plays upon an accidental phonetic similarity between Russian “поздно” (pozno) ‘late’ and “Познер” (‘Pozner’, the name of the American senator who came up with the list of the most clever men of the 20th century based on mass media publications discussed in the article). In the body of the article, there is another reference to an American film “Schindler's List”;
- 4) “Глупый список умных людей сенатора Познера заставил вспомнить об очень важных вещах. Например, что список Познера лучше списка Шиндлера.” ‘Senator Pozner's stupid list of clever people reminds us of some very important facts. For instance, Pozner's list being better than *Schindler's list*.’

To complete the present analysis of English-Russian interactions, it is necessary to examine English materials on Russian topics. Such publications appear from time to time in the American news magazines “Time” and “Newsweek”. The titles of these articles are quite characteristic and suggestive of their general tone: for example, *A Culture of Criminals (Body count is down, but only because there's not much left to fight over)* (Newsweek, Jan. 19, 1998); *The Cupboard is Bare (Russia is rich in resources, but a dangerous dependence on imports in exacerbating its plight)* (Time, Sept. 28, 1998). It seems that only publications on Russian classical music and Russian culture present an idea of a brighter side of Russia: for example, *Russian Brio (The new national orchestra is wowing audiences with its unique sound and repertory)* (Time, May 11, 1998).

There is an obvious asymmetry in English-Russian interactions as borrowings from Russian used in American magazines are very few when compared with the materials of the Russian press and most of them may be found in special publications dealing with Russia as they include a certain number of realia to specify and localise the facts and events they describe. These are primarily:

- 1) place names: *Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Siberia*, which are used in syntagmatic sequences like: *Russian presidential politics; a worried Moscow political establishment; Krasnoyarsk's forbidding winter landscape*, etc.;

- 2) names of parties, state and public organisations, companies and firms, newspapers and magazines: *the Commonwealth of Independent States* (a translation loan from Russian *Содружество независимых государств* 'lit.: Community of Independent States'), *a Communist dominated Duma; Governor of Krasnoyarsk, the newspaper Izvestia, the huge Kamaz lorry plant in Tatarstan, etc.*;
- 3) names of political figures: *Yeltsin's people, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Primakov's economy, privatisation czar Anatoly Chubais, Oleg Susoyev, a respected Yeltsin aide, etc.*

As can be seen even from these short contexts, realia syntagmatically combine with both stylistically neutral and stylistically marked words, the latter being used by journalists to express their own evaluative attitudes and, thus, to influence the readers' perceptions of the facts, events, and figures under discussion.

Very often these texts contain commentaries to certain Russian realia, because the authors are aware of the lack of relevant background knowledge on the part of their readers, for example, *Krasnoyarsk, three time zones and 3,400 km from Moscow, is the bellwether of Russian politics; VDNKh – which used to be an exhibition centre displaying the achievements of the Soviet socialist economy but now is one of the city's largest electronics and home-appliances markets; Alexander Lebed, the populist former Kremlin official who seemed to be sliding quietly into obscurity, had unexpectedly come out 10 points ahead of the incumbent in the first round of Krasnoyarsk's gubernatorial election.* As can be seen from these examples, commentaries express in fact the reporters' evaluations and, thus, serve to frame the readers' opinions.

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