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## Introduction to Volume 58

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## Introduction to Volume 58

### Language Culture in Contemporary Russia

It was the Russian linguist, Grigorii Vinokur, who first introduced the term “*kul'tura iazyka*” or “language culture” to Russian in his writings on the changes taking place in the Russian language in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution (*Kul'tura iazyka* [Moscow 1929]). Loosely defined as language production at all ranges of the discursive spectrum, the term provided Vinokur with a useful heuristic for writing about language in flux in a manner that took into account not just the high-end linguistic production of belles-lettres, but also the everyday language use (and abuse) of more mundane, but equally influential sources – including newspapers and other media, bureaucracies, classrooms, and everyday speakers and speech communities. Together, Vinokur argued, such a collective portrait of language production served as a far more accurate means of assessing the state and health of the language and, indeed, of the society in which it was used. This more integrated approach to language has become relatively standard through the decades since Vinokur, particularly under the influence of scholars such as Bakhtin, Foucault, and Bourdieu, whose work demonstrates not only the multiplicity of spheres responsible for language production (and codification), but also the fundamental role language plays in both reflecting and giving legitimacy to more general discourses of power and authority.

In the spirit of Vinokur and theoreticians of language who followed him, the present special issue of the *Russian Language Journal* reflects a cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional approach to language culture in Russia today. The broad range of topics reflect the complexity of language culture and innovation in this period of revolutionary transformation and the corresponding challenges this complexity poses for researchers. As the articles here show, changes to the linguistic landscape in Russia from the late-1980s through to the present day are visible across a broad range of spheres. In the first set of essays we see how the dynamic plays out in literary institutions -- in the manner in which writers themselves view the ongoing changes and literature's role in them (Lunde), in the rising influence of the new media and internet on creative production (Schmidt), and in the often curious intersections of Soviet and post-Soviet, modern and post-modern canons and practices (Kirschbaum,

Markasova). The second group of essays shifts focus to the non-literary realm of the mass media, with particular attention to the language of post-Soviet radio (Ryazanova-Clarke, Thomason) and newspapers (Cho). The third section offers important sociolinguistic insight into recent trends in the language of “high” (Romanov) and “low” (Hristova, Garza) sociocultural institutions, mapping out a useful trajectory for further studies in the stylistic contours of the language of Russian everyday life.

One theme common to nearly all of the contributions is the underlying tension – at times creative, at times contentious – between continuity and change, between stable and dynamic linguistic trends, between normalization and innovation. As the final essay (Shmelev) provocatively suggests, it may be more appropriate to speak not so much in terms of linguistic changes as in terms of changes in underlying values, which are then reflected through formal and stylistic recalibrations. There is no doubt that Vinokur and those who followed would acknowledge the fundamental role that values, politics, and ideologies play in giving shape to new models of language production. In any case, as the essays in this volume show, the methods for assessing the nature and degree of linguistic innovation have increased in diversity while remaining no less relevant for understanding new social and cultural landscapes.

Michael Gorham  
Special Issue Editor  
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