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“The State Turning to Language”: Power and Identity in Russian Language Policy Today

Lara Ryazanova-Clarke

Introduction

The first years of the twenty-first century in Russia saw a considerable rise in the state's regulation of language. In the words of one of the agents of this regulation, Natalia Liashchenko, a Consultant for the Committee for the Nationalities, “Определенный поворот к проблемам русского языка произошел и в органах государственной власти России.”¹ The engagement of the state by way of regulations in the national discussion of the nature and quality of the Russian language demonstrates ‘the state power turning to language’.

This paper considers ‘state power turning to language’ in the light of language policy as a cultural construct. Specifically, the paper addresses how the state has dealt with the issues of metalinguistic discourse² - i.e. the official discourse of character and status of the language - for the purposes of reinterpreting the Russian state and national identity during Vladimir Putin's presidency. The data on the new direction in language policy include legal texts, government documents, speeches, interviews, and the Duma debates on language. These sources illustrate attributes of the Russian language are now seen by the state as most relevant to its purposes.

Being a cultural construct, language policy is ultimately grounded in linguistic culture, “the set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language”³. It follows from this that official language management does not exist in a vacuum,

¹ ‘definite turn towards problems of the Russian language has also taken place within the bodies of the state power of Russia’; N.V. Liashchenko, “Russkii iazyk i gosudarstvennost”, *Analiticheskii vestnik. Seriya: Gosudarstvennoe stroitel'stvo i konstitutsionnye prava grazhdan*, Issue 14, part 1. Moscow, 2002. URL: <http://wbase.duma.gov.ru> (accessed 8.05.2006).

² Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, “The Crystallization of Structures”: Linguistic Culture in Putin's Russia”, in: Ingunn Lunde and Tine Roesen (eds), *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia*. Slavica Bergensia, 6. Bergen, 2006. (in press)

³ Harold Schiffman, *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*, London, 1996, p. 5.

but rather is part of the total linguistic landscape of a speech community and of society as a whole. Thus the official language policy in Russia could be viewed as a part of a complex system, in which certain perceptions and attitudes are exchanged between the state and the linguistic culture ‘on the ground’. At the level of state power, following certain ideological demands, the vaguely defined folklinguistic perceptions and attitudes circulating within the linguistic culture can be adopted and articulated in order to construct desirable defining characteristics of the nation.

It is rather significant that of all the periods in Russian and Soviet history, it was the period following 2000 when the Russian administration felt it most necessary to intensify the symbolic connection between state power and language. During the Soviet period, despite the measures of Russification implemented under Stalin’s rule, the Russian language was never legally regulated by the state. From approximately 1934, Russian became de facto a *lingua franca* throughout the Soviet Union,⁴ but this was never officially recorded in the Soviet jurisdiction. A reason for that might be found in the Soviet veneration of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine: at the outset of the First World War, the idea of establishing a state/national language was on Imperial Russia’s political agenda, but the Bolsheviks vehemently opposed it.⁵ In the article of 1914, entitled “Do we need a compulsory state language?” (Нужен ли нам обязательный государственный язык?), Lenin stood against both, ‘the reactionary position’ of the indivisibility of Russian lands and the ‘liberal arguments’ of cultural unity and interests of Russian statehood. He continued that the compulsory enforcement of the official language would repel numerous national minorities:

Мы не хотим загонять в рай дубиной. Ибо, сколько красивых фраз о “культуре” вы ни сказали бы, обязательный государственный язык сопряжен с принуждением, вколачиванием... Вот почему русские марксисты говорят, что необходимо: – отсутствие обязательного государственного языка...⁶

⁴ Chris Ward, *Stalin’s Russia*. London and New York, Edward Arnold, 1993, p. 192.

⁵ See: V.P. Neroznak, M.V Oreshkina, R.B. Sabatkov, “Russkii iazyk v iazykovoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii”, *Analiticheskii vestnik. Seriya: Gosudarstvennoe stroitel’stvo i konstitutsionnye prava grazhdan*, 2, part 1. Moscow, 2002.

⁶ ‘We do not want to herd people with a stick to paradise. Because however many beautiful phrases about ‘culture’ one may use, a compulsory state language is connected with coercion, with beating it in... That is why Russian Marxists say that it is necessary to have no compulsory state language...’; V. I. Lenin, “Nuzhen li obiazatel’nyi gosudarstvennyi iazyk?”, in V.I. Lenin,

It was only when Lenin's legacy was fading, near the end of the Soviet period, that the first law related to the Russian language was issued. The Law on the Languages of the Soviet Union of 1990, whereby Russian was declared the official language of the country (официальный язык), became one of the last laws of the Soviet Union. By then, resisting "the sovereignty parade" by the then Soviet republics was much more urgent for the Soviet state than concern with communist dogma. The language question had moved to the centre of the independence debate, and the dramatic disintegration of Soviet rule, followed by the rise of the post-Soviet successor states, was performed to a linguistic accompaniment. Subsequently, Russian post-Soviet legislation almost started with language: the Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation (LLRF) declared Russian to be the state language of the Federation, and this status of the language was written into the constitution (1993). Thus developments at the end of the twentieth century resulting in a redefinition of the Russian nation required that the Russian language serve as one of the nation's and the state's major symbols of power.

The symbolic meanings attached to the national language gained further import under Vladimir Putin's presidency when re-negotiation of the major socio-political principles of the Russian state took place. New doctrines launched in the last six to seven years – such as 'controlled democracy', 'war on terrorism', a revised version of economic reforms, and 'the power vertical' – contributed to the symbolic notion of 'order' that was opposed to the chaotic spirit of the previous decade. Concerns with language management fit well with the state's political needs in this new context. Hence, the government established the Russian Language Council and launched a *Federal Targeted Programme "Russian Language" for 2002-2005*. These steps were followed by intensive language legislation: new redaction and amendments were made to The LLRF, and in June 2005, after many hours of debates in the Duma chambers and committees, three readings and the Arbitrary Commission, the Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation (LSL)⁷ was passed.

The increasing legal regulation of the Russian language ran parallel with the rise of academic debates over the 'state and quality of the language' and

Sochineniia. Vol. 17, Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1935, pp.179-81. Here and further translation is my own.

⁷ "Zakon o gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii", URL: <http://www.adki.ru/gd/proekt/089059GD.SHTM> (accessed: 12.07.2005).

heightened public attention the ‘Russian national idea’⁸. The quest for a ‘national idea’ arose from the need felt by the power elites to rediscover and reconstruct the Russian national identity and thereby stabilize the new “Russian nation” after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin “political technologists,” as well as President Putin himself, have formulated several variants on such an idea, from “patriotism and prosperity guaranteed by the state” to “competitiveness and doubling the national product”.⁹

A search conducted with the use of *Integrum* databases¹⁰ has confirmed the upward trend in discourse on the national idea. In the period between 1992 and 2000, the expression национальная идея appeared in the national press 3871 times and in the regional press 2126 times, in the next six years, from 2000 to 2006, the figures were 7529 and 8235 respectively.¹¹

Because reform and regulation of the Russian language are intrinsically linked to the national idea,¹² it is clear Russian language policy is now a construction to shape national identity and serve the state.

The Russian language and the reinterpretation of statehood

The ideological ends of Russian language policy in shaping national identity and serving the state have become so pronounced that, as Maksim Krongauz has pointed out, the symbolic meaning of recent language legislation outweighs its legal regulative sense. He calls the LSL a ‘partiotic utterance’.¹³ This actually continues a tradition. In the previous epochs, the symbolism of ‘the great and mighty’ Russian language was connected with the ideology of Russian and then Soviet patriotism and the notion of the Russian and then the Soviet Motherland. In the post-soviet era, as Irina Sandomirskaia puts it, “Motherland is in a state of

⁸ On the connection between the nationalizing efforts and the question of the purification of Russian rising in the linguistic culture of 1990s see: Mikhael Gorham (2001), “Natsiia ili snikerizatsiia? Identity and Preservation in the Language Debates of Late and Post-Soviet Russia”, *Russian Review*, Vol.59, No.4, pp. 614-629.

⁹ Sergei Korolev, *Rezhim Putina: idei i praktika*. Moskva, 2005.

¹⁰ URL: <http://www.integrum.ru/>

¹¹ the search was conducted in June 2006.

¹² As Vladimir Elistratov states, Поиск национальной идеи – это проблема в первую очередь лингвистическая ‘the search for a national idea is primarily a linguistic problem’. Vladimir Elistratov, “Natsional’nyi iazyk i natsional’naia idea”; URL: http://www.gramota.ru/mag_arch.html?id=54 (accessed 22.07.2005).

¹³ Maksim Krongauz, 2005, “Zametki rasserzhennogo obyvatelia,” *Otechestvennye zapiski* 2. URL: http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2005/2/2005_2_4.html (accessed 11.11 2005).

active regeneration of its discursive tissue.”¹⁴ This indicates that the traditional patriotic meanings associated with the Russian language are merely being adjusted to the modern day situation.

To illustrate, the official metadiscourse now tends to blend references to language issues with the prominent discourse of *gosudarstvennost'* (the statehood). In numerous examples taken from the debates of the LSL, the Russian language is referred to as *основа государственности* ‘the backbone of Russian statehood’. A telling instance of this shift in emphasis is president Putin’s response at a press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, held on 20 June, 2003, to the question of whether the Russian language needs legislation. Making a direct connection between the Russian language and statehood he said: *Русский язык - это, конечно, одна из основ нашей государственности, без всякого преувеличения. Он нуждается в помощи и поддержке, и государство должно оказать эту помощь и поддержку.*¹⁵

The President’s identification of the Russian language as a foundation of Russian statehood is echoed in many other instances of official metalinguistic discourse. In particular, both the Duma member Nikolai Benediktov and a consultant to the Education and Scholarship State Duma Committee Anatolii Berdashkevich see in the Russian language a mechanism of ensuring the universality of state control and of promoting understanding of the state will: *государственный язык Российской Федерации одновременно является необходимым элементом для осуществления единообразия управления и понимания государственной воли.*¹⁶

Another *leitmotif* in Duma debates on language legislation is the idea that the Russian language can provide a force for unifying Russia’s multilingual lands and the people populating them. Emphasis, often overt and emotive, is placed on the Russian language as the common connector ensuring historical, heritage, and spiritual unity. In the following example, this aim is expressed in the metaphor *пуповина*, ‘umbilical cord’, which a deputy from the Communist

¹⁴ Irina Sandimorskaja, *Kniga o Rodine. Opyt analiza diskursivnykh praktik*. Wiener Slawistischer Almanach. Sonderband 50. Wien, 2001, p.232. My translation.

¹⁵ ‘The Russian language is certainly and without any exaggeration a foundation of our statehood. It is in need of help and support and the state must give this help and support.’ URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2003/06/20/1237_type63380_47449.shtml (accessed 7.05.06).

¹⁶ ‘the state language of the Russian Federation is at the same time an element of implementation of the uniformity of government and understanding of the state will’; N.A. Benediktov, A.P. Berdashkevich, “O pravovykh osnovakh gosudarstvennoi iazykovoï politiki,” 2003.

faction, Iurii Nekiforenko, uses when he describes the multinational connecting force of the Russian language:

Уважаемые коллеги, я являюсь одним из соавторов этого закона. Это очень долгожданный документ. Всем известно - велика роль нашего языка в объединении общества, в истории страны. Это, по существу, пуповина, связывающая народы, наши культуры, объединяющая россиян.¹⁷

Tapping into the narrative of the National Heritage and the Great Tradition allows the official metadiscourse to present the unifying property of the Russian language as one of the principal assets. Emotive expressions reminiscent of traditional cliché phrases of the Soviet discourse are typical of such narratives: национальное достояние ‘national heritage and patrimony’, средство духовного единения, ‘a means for spiritual unity’ бесценное наследие ‘priceless heritage’:

Разрабатываемый комитетами Государственной Думы проект федерального закона "О русском языке как государственном языке Российской Федерации" направлен именно на укрепление русского языка как государственного языка Российской Федерации, являющегося национальным достоянием России, важнейшим средством формирования личности и духовного единения нации, бесценным историко-культурным наследием русского народа.¹⁸

Beyond such propagandistic narratives, even the semantics of the language merge with state power. This can be seen in texts of legal documents. For instance, “the unifier” (expressed by the affixes *взаимо-*, *меж-* words *связи*

¹⁷ ‘Respected colleagues, I am one of the co-authors of this Law. This is a long awaited document. Everybody knows that the role of our language in uniting the society and in the history of the country is great. In essence it is an umbilical cord that connects the peoples, our cultures and that unites those who live in Russia.’ “Stenogramma zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy 7 iunია 2002 g.” URL: <http://wbase.duma.gov.ru/steno/nph-sdb.exe> (accessed: 7.05.06).

¹⁸ ‘The draft of the Federal Law “On the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation”, which is being developed by the State Duma committees, is aimed especially at strengthening the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation. The language is a Russian national patrimony, the most important means for personality formation and for spiritual unity of the nation, it is the priceless historical and cultural heritage of the Russian people.’ К.А. Бичелдеи, “К вопросу о да’нейшем совершенствовании законодатель’noi bazy iazykovoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii”, *Analiticheskii vestnik GD. Serii: Gosudarstvennoe stroitel’stvo i konstitutsionnye prava grazhdan*. Issue 14, part 2. Moscow, 2002. URL: <http://wbase.duma.gov.ru:8080/law?d&nd=981600608&mark=r981600005> (accessed 8.05.06).

'links', единый 'united') and "the state" (государство) are ultimately combined in the final wording of the LSL:

Государственный язык Российской Федерации является языком, способствующим взаимопониманию, укреплению межнациональных связей народов Российской Федерации в едином многонациональном государстве.¹⁹

While the language attributes noted above demonstrate a certain "regeneration of the Soviet discourse", the state metalinguistic discourse of recent years also exhibits a recognizable post-Soviet flavour. For instance, the phrase "the unifying force of the Russian language" connotes territorial, political, and geo-political dimensions, while at the same time it draws a symbolic delineation between "us" and "them".

This ideological emphasis in the properties attributed to the Russian language can also be observed in the official position concerning a balance between the linguistic freedoms allowed to the language minorities and the dominant, integral role of Russian (and the Cyrillic alphabet as its symbolic representation) as the state language. This metadiscourse is represented by the LLRF (1991, redaction of 1998)²⁰, the amendment to the Law of 2002 related to the decision of Tatarstan to move to the Roman alphabet, and the debate in the State Duma regarding this amendment.²¹

The LLRF guarantees equal rights to the languages of the Russian Federation (article 2.1), including the equal right of all peoples "to preserve and develop" their languages (article 2.2). Pointedly, the Law grants the right of linguistic minorities to create their own written language if it has not been yet developed (article 10). It also charges the federal state with the duty of assisting the development of the languages of Russia's republics. These freedoms and guarantees, for minority languages, were put to a test when the Republic of Tatarstan's Parliament voted to change the Tatar's script to the Roman alphabet. The results proved the pre-eminence of Russian. The Russian legislature counteracted Tatarstan's step by adopting, in 2002, an amendment to the Law on

¹⁹ 'The state language of the Russian Federation is a language that aids mutual understanding, strengthening inter-nation links between the peoples of the Russian Federation in a single multinational state'; "Zakon o gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii".

²⁰ "Zakon o iazykakh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii," URL: <http://www.peoples.org.ru/zakon.html> (accessed 21.07.2005).

²¹ see *Dumskoe obozrenie*, No.75, 6.06.2002.

Languages of the Russian Federation that now required all alphabets of the state languages of the Federation be based on Cyrillic. The addition to article 3 of the Law, reads that it "закрепляет за русским языком как государственным языком Российской Федерации и государственными языками республик использование алфавитов с графической базой на основе кириллицы."²²

The transcript of the Duma deliberations demonstrates that political considerations for the amendment were hardly veiled: "Нельзя не согласиться, что проект имеет важную политическую составляющую" (Kaadyr-ool Bicheldei)²³; "предложенные сегодня законопроекты касаются не только и не столько вопросов лингвистики, сколько вопросов большой политики"(Anatolii Nikitin)²⁴. The Russian legislators were obviously concerned about the dangers of political disintegration followed by a breakdown of the Russian Federation. For example, Anatolii Chekhoev assents to his Duma peers that it was the linguistic question (which he characteristically refers to as *болезнь* 'a disease') that had caused the disintegration of the Soviet Union. He warns therefore against falling into the same trap again, this time within the Russian Federation:

Уважаемые коллеги, честно говоря, я думал, что к 2002 году мы уже, наверное, переболели той болезнью, которой вдруг заболели все союзные республики СССР в 1988-1989 годах. Все начиналось с этого: язык, государственный язык, а потом уже дошли до развала Советского Союза.²⁵

Chekhoev sees the same significance in the symbolic properties of an alphabet as in such symbols of the state as the flag and the coat of arms. He points out that in many local and regional government offices, regional symbols and flags are displayed in preference to those of the Russian Federation, and he

²² it secures the use of alphabets based on Cyrillic for the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation and the state languages of the republics'; "Zakon o iazykakh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii".

²³ 'one cannot help but agree that the project has an important political component'. Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy RF. 5 iyunia 2002. URL: <http://wbase.duma.gov.ru/steno/nph-sdb.exe> (accessed 6.05.06).

²⁴ 'the law drafts presented today concern not so much the questions of linguistics but the questions of big politics'; *ibid*.

²⁵ 'Respected colleagues, to be honest, I thought that by 2002, we perhaps had overcome that disease that suddenly all Soviet republics of the USSR got in 1988-1989. Everything started with this: language, the state language and later we got as far as the break down of the Soviet Union'; *ibid*.

interprets this as yet another mark of the country's potential for a disintegration disaster. He concludes that the issue of the alphabet is a matter of Russia's territorial unity and therefore, his logic goes, of national security. Thus, he contends that the Russian language at once insures against political disintegration and provides national security and territorial integrity, alongside border control or anti-terrorist measures:

*Вообще-то, я бы даже перевел в разряд государственной безопасности, национальной безопасности России вот такие вопросы. Это вопросы территориальной целостности, я не боюсь утверждать это. Это действительно так.*²⁶

The theme of the Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet as guardians of national security takes on wider, geopolitical, overtones with the construction of 'the outsider'. Some official descriptions of Tatarstan's attraction to the Roman alphabet hint that the 'wrong' alphabet can lead to treason: in the manner of the cold war rhetoric the republic's decision about the alphabet, which was changed four times in the course of the twentieth century, is interpreted as affiliation with "other countries" and sinister "geopolitical interests":

*наш комитет полагает, что наличие единого алфавитного пространства в России является существенным показателем целостности нашего государства, а выведение того или иного языка за пределы этого пространства будет означать ослабление этого единства, включение его частей в сферу геополитических интересов иных государств. (Anatolii Nikitin)*²⁷

In June 2002, the State Duma debated the above amendment to the LLRF almost simultaneously with the LSL. Both debates demonstrate how the post-Soviet state regards as a tool of state power, from a symbol of a united country to a means of counteracting regional freedoms, to a pillar of national security. Discussants argued that the Law aimed at raising the official prestige of the Russian language should work as a necessary counterbalance to the trends in the

²⁶ 'Actually I would move all such questions to the rank of the state security, national security. These are matters of the territorial integrity, and I am not afraid to assert this. This is really so.:' *ibid.*

²⁷ 'Our Committee assumes that the presence of a single alphabetical space in Russia is an essential indicator of the integrity of our state; while moving one language or another outside this space will mean the weakening of this unity and the inclusion of its parts into the sphere of geopolitical interests of other countries.:' *ibid.*

national republics that, similar to Tatarstan, had taken ‘too much linguistic freedom’. And at a Round Table discussion of the draft of the LSL, in which both linguists and politicians took part, irritation surfaced at the discovery that an official paper from Yakutiia contained inscriptions in Yakut and English, but not in Russian.²⁸ This sentiment was echoed by the Duma member and a member of the Committee drafting the Law, Aleksei Alekseev. He coined the expression псевдосвобода ‘pseudo-freedom’, which he defined as ‘permissiveness’, for the linguistic challenges to pre-eminence of the Russian language. He placed the forces of the ‘pseudo-freedom’ outside Russian: “в последние годы испытал на себе напор “псевдосвободы”, а правильное сказать – вседозволенности”²⁹ And, like many of his colleagues, Alekseev draws parallels between the linguistic problems in the national regions of Russia and those of the countries of the former Soviet Union, and he describes these problems in terms of aggressiveness and danger to the Motherland:

В ближнем зарубежье - это проблемы, связанные фактически с выживанием русскоязычного населения, когда различного рода языковые ограничения являются составной частью политики. В современной России - это, на первый взгляд, более сбалансированные и менее агрессивные, но в перспективе - весьма опасные для единства нашей многонациональной Родины процессы.³⁰

These examples demonstrate that the state linguistic metadiscourse places the Russian language in the centre of dangerous processes – Russian is both a besieged and threatened entity, surrounded by unwarranted freedoms, and it is an important agent of national security. Thus, the new properties attributed to the language assist in projecting a national-oriented ideology, calling for heightened security and protection. The connection made between the Russian language and national security appears to be especially popular as a formula for official metadisocurse:

²⁸ Kruglyi stol. Proekt zakona o russkom iazyke kak gosudarstvennom iazyke RF, held on 6 July 2003. URL: http://www.gramota.ru/mag_arch.html?id=245 (accessed 16.11.2005)

²⁹ ‘in the recent years, [the language] suffered from pressure of “pseudo-freedom”, which more correctly, is permissiveness’; A.A. Alekseev, “Deistvuiushchee zakonodatel’stvo i problemy statusa i ispol’zovaniia russkogo iazyka”, *Analiticheskii vestnik. Seriya: Gosudarstvennoe stroitel’stvo i konstitutsionnye prava grazhdan*, Issue 14, part 1. Moscow, 2002.

³⁰ ‘In the near abroad it is connected, in actual fact, with the survival of the Russian population, when all sorts of language restrictions are an integral part of their policy. In contemporary Russia, at least at the first glance, there are more balanced and less aggressive processes, but in perspective, they are quite dangerous for our multinational Motherland.’ *ibid.*

Не будет преувеличением сказать, что одним из важных факторов обеспечения национальной безопасности России является русский язык, требующий сегодня серьезного внимания и защиты.³¹

Не будет преувеличением сказать, что русский язык является одним из важных факторов обеспечения национальной безопасности России. Без укрепления роли русского языка немислимо укрепление российской государственности.³²

Symbolism of spaces and borders

The debate about which alphabet is suitable for the Tatar language gave rise to new terminology in the political and legal domains, such as российское графическое пространство,³³ единое алфавитное пространство³⁴, выход из алфавитного поля³⁵. Hence: Необходимо отметить, что наличие *единого алфавитного пространства* в России является существенным показателем целостности Российского государства.³⁶

Novel expressions with the nouns пространство and поле are commonly used in the quasi-legal descriptions of the post-Soviet reality. Consequently, in recent years, phrases such as постсоветское пространство 'post-soviet space', экономическое пространство 'economic space', информационное пространство/поле 'information space/field' have become established and

³¹ 'It will not be an exaggeration to say that one of the important factors of the ensuring Russia's national security is the Russian language which requires today serious attention and protection'; K.A. Bicheldei, "K voprosu o dal'neishem sovershenstvovanii zakonodatel'noi bazy iazykovoii politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii", 2002.

³² 'It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Russian language is one of the important factors of ensuring the national security of Russia. Without strengthening the role of the Russian language strengthening of the Russian statehood is unthinkable'; N.V. Liashchenko, "Russkii iazyk i gosudarstvennost'", 2002.

³³ Irina Khaleeva, *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 28.10.2004.

³⁴ A.A. Nikitin, *Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 5 iyunia 2002 g.

³⁵ It is necessary to point out that the presence in Russian of the single alphabetic space is an essential indicator of the integrity of the Russian state'; K.A. Bicheldei, *Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 5 iyunia 2002 g.

³⁶ K.A. Bicheldei, "K voprosu o dal'neishem sovershenstvovanii zakonodatel'noi bazy iazykovoii politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii", 2002.

frequent collocations.³⁷ Collocations with words indicating ‘alphabet’ have been formed according to the same pattern, apparently to add an air of legitimacy to the pro-Cyrillic side of the debate. Additionally, a metaphor of space (поле ‘field’, пространство ‘space’), with an implied image of edges and borders, is used to conceptualize what is included within and excluded outside those borders – e.g., the phrase единое алфавитное пространство. Thus, these new metaphorical expressions serve to divide the in- and out-groups.

Because self-identification by contrast to ‘the other’ is fundamental to identity construction, this has also become an important feature of current Russian language policy. A close look at the government’s attempts at the lexical corpus management, shows how this contributes to the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. For instance, the intention of the legislators to purge recent foreign loanwords from contemporary Russian usage also appears to draw symbolic borders. The new loanwords are presented as unwelcome ‘others’ whose arrival is described in terms of aggression and invasion. Calling for action “to devise mechanisms of defence”, the Duma member Evgenii Loginov (LDPR) warns that if those mechanisms are not provided, the foreign ‘newcomers’ will “inevitably distort the Russian language”. He sees the weakest link in the strong armour of the Russian language in literature: it is the portal for questionable novelties:

Что же происходит в 90-е годы в России? Вы можете посмотреть любые публикации в газетах и обнаружить слова "листинг", "фьючерсы", "кастинг", "клиринг" и так далее, и так далее - все эти заимствования приобретают угрожающий размах. Если они будут официально закреплены, если не будут законодательно выработаны механизмы защиты от этих заимствований, этих нововведений в сфере использования русского языка как государственного, то они неизбежно проникнут и в художественную литературу и исказят русский язык, нарушат ту традицию нашего поэтического русского языка, которую все мы здесь приветствуем.³⁸

³⁷ The data was obtained in July 2006 using the *Integrum* database. This is in line with the data of the dictionary G.N. Skliarevskaja (ed), *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka kontsa XX v. Iazykovye izmeneniia*. According to the dictionary, both nouns, поле and пространство have undergone semantic changes and formed new set phrases.

³⁸ ‘So what is going on in Russia in 1990s? You can look at any publications in the newspapers and discover words such as *listing, futures, casting, clearing* and so on and so forth. All these borrowings are reaching a threatening proportion. If they get officially fixed [in the language] and if legal mechanisms for protection from these loanwords, from these innovations in the sphere of the use of Russian language as the state language, are not devised, then inevitably they will penetrate into literature and distort the Russian language, they will disrupt that tradition of

Loginov expresses a common view in the linguistic culture that the authentic linguistic elements (including those that had been borrowed in the past) are pure and vulnerable, and the new and foreign items are corrupting aggressors. The final text of the LSL therefore took on the role of the needed 'mechanism of defence'. It deems many foreign words that have entered the Russian language to be outside the norm and therefore unacceptable, or even illegal:

При использовании русского языка как государственного языка Российской Федерации не допускается использование слов и выражений, не соответствующих нормам современного русского литературного языка, за исключением иностранных слов, не имеющих общеупотребительных аналогов в русском языке.³⁹

Needless to say it is linguistically unreliable to distinguish between loanwords that have equivalents in the target language and those that do not. Scholarly writings on synonyms suggest that total synonymy⁴⁰ survives in a language only for a relatively short time, after which either one synonym drops out of use or the synonyms diverge in descriptive meaning or connotation.⁴¹ This suggests that despite having many participant linguists, the official discussions that construct an image of the 'foreign aggressor' in the language uniform draw on folklinguistic beliefs of language purity.

The metalinguistic construction of borders and aliens clearly sets within the wider context of national conceptualization. In this vein there has been a general trend in the official discourse to refer to the extralinguistic world in terms of the borders. An *Integrum* based search⁴² shows a dramatic rise in the

our poetic Russian language that we all here salute to'; *Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 7 iunija 2002 g. URL: <http://wbase.duma.gov.ru/steno/nph-sdb.exe> (accessed 7.05.2006).

³⁹ 'When using Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation, it is forbidden to use words and expressions that do not comply with the norms of the modern Russian language, excluding foreign words which do not have commonly used equivalents.'; "Zakon o gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii", URL: <http://www.adki.ru/gd/proekt/089059GD.SHTM> (accessed: 12.07.2005).

⁴⁰ David Crystal (1991), *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 340.

⁴¹ see for e.g. John Lyons, *Semantics*. Vol.1. Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 242; Iu. D. Apresian, *Izbrannye trudy. Vol.1 Leksicheskaia semantika. Sinonimicheskie sredstva iazyka*. Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1995, pp. 216-255.

⁴² conducted in July 2006.

occurrence of the lexical item граница ‘border’ and its more specific collocation государственная граница ‘the national border’ in the contents of the main pro-governmental national newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*. Two periods were compared, the first covering seven years, 1992-1999 and the second of less than six years, 2000-2006. The result demonstrates that the use of the above words increased, for the word граница, by 272 per cent (from 3561 counts for the first period to 9674 for the second), and for the collocation государственная граница by over 300 per cent (from 349 to 1049 counts respectively). These data shed a bright light on the official conceptualization of foreign loanwords.

Purity of the included

The language that is not just a vehicle of communication but a symbol of the state, the delineator of the borders, and a paragon of national dignity and security, needs to have special qualities. The official discourse therefore also turns its focus on the ‘condition’ and the ‘quality’ of the Russian language. It diagnoses a state of crisis in contemporary public use, describes the language as polluted and violated, and ‘the culture of speech’ in sharp decline. Besides the pollution of foreignisms, linguistic elements of low variety are claimed to be pollutants, that is colloquialisms, demotic elements, different kinds of slang, argots, obscenities or otherwise impurities occurring in the on-line, spontaneous production of speech (such as non-standard stress, or stylistic infelicities). New borders are dawn – now between the ‘good’ language that is ‘the insider’ and the ‘bad’ language that is the ‘intruder’. The official discourse uses the rhetoric of violation and pollution of the naturally ‘pure’ русская речь, ‘the Russian speech’, by the ‘outsiders’ (внедряются ‘intrude’, засоряется ‘gets polluted’):

В русскую речь все больше внедряются вульгарные, а иногда и просто непристойные выражения, она засоряется словами и оборотами, заимствованными из жаргонов, профессиональных языков, неоправданными заимствованиями из иностранных языков.⁴³

Qualities such as ‘pure’ and ‘contaminated’ attributed to a language belong to language attitudes, of the elite linguistic culture in the wider community. The official metadiscourse thus recruits folklinguistic views that

⁴³ ‘Vulgar and sometimes simply indecent expressions penetrate more and more into Russian speech, it is littered by words and expressions borrowed from slangs, professional languages, unjustified loans from foreign languages’; A.A. Alekseev, “Deistvuiushchee zakonodatel’stvo i problemy statusa i ispol’zovaniia russkogo iazyka”, 2002.

position the Russian language as a separate entity from its users, with normative structures uncompromised by the imperfections of use. Thus, language policy and folklinguistic prejudices merge, constructing the image “of languages as ideas and perfect structures, and of speakers as awkward creatures who violate these perfect structures by misusing and corrupting ‘language’”...⁴⁴ Those holding this belief see the root of language ‘contamination’ in the linguistic liberalization of the *perestroika* period and the 1990s which loosened what in the Soviet linguistic culture had been the norm.⁴⁵ Current developments in state metalinguistic discourse reject that linguistic turbulence and stand for the reaffirmation of linguistic norms. The final wording of the LSL shows that through this reaffirmation the state is attempting to assert symbolic power and legal control over the language, and consequently, over its users. Paragraphs 3 and 6 of Article 1 of the Law provides this authority. Paragraph 3 states that:

Порядок утверждения норм современного русского литературного языка при его использовании в качестве государственного языка Российской Федерации, правил русской орфографии и пунктуации определяется Правительством Российской Федерации.⁴⁶

In the text of the Law, the concept of language normativity, with conventional rules, blends with the authority of the state, allowing paragraph 6 simply to outlaw linguistic matter that does not fall within the norm, as well as users of that matter:

При использовании русского языка как государственного языка Российской Федерации не допускается использование слов и выражений, не соответствующих нормам современного русского

⁴⁴ James Milroy, *Language Variation and Change*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992: 31-32.

⁴⁵ Many volumes have been written about these language changes. See for e.g. Zemskaja, E.A. (ed) *Russkii iazyk kontsa XX stoletia*. Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1996; Ryazanova-Clarke, L., Wade, T. *The Russian Language Today*. London: Routledge, 1999; Kupina, N.A. (ed.) *Kul'turno-rechevaia situatsiia v sovremennoi Rossii*. Ekaterinburg: Izdatel'stvo Ural'skogo universiteta, 2000; Krysin, L.P. *Russkoe slovo, svoe i chuzhoe*. Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004; Kormilitsyna, M.A., Sirotinina, O.B. (eds.) *Problemy rechevoi kommunikatsii*. Vyp. 6. Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 2006. However, a deeper socio-cultural explanation of the turbulence of the norm when a large number of speakers intuitively started to reject it, is still ahead.

⁴⁶ ‘The manner of the adoption of norms of contemporary Russian language used as the state language of the Russian Federation, as well as the orthography and punctuation rules, is determined by the Government of the Russian Federation.’; “Zakon o gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii”.

литературного языка, за исключением иностранных слов, не имеющих общеупотребительных аналогов в русском языке.⁴⁷

An interesting question to pose, of course, is what exactly is the Russian language "as the state language"? One can certainly answer this question by arguing that as the Law refers only to "Russian as the state language", it therefore regulates solely the official register, appropriate for official communications and those between the individual and the state. In that light the two paragraphs of the Law quoted above, relating to the norm are only a declaration that the official register of the Russian language should use the linguistic resources of the official register. However numerous comments of those involved in drafting the Law suggest that it intends more than that.⁴⁸ In fact, the state discourse on this matter demonstrates a good deal of confusion. The official efforts to specify what attributes belong to "Russian as the state language" and how these differ from attributes of the Russian literary language, and from those of the vernacular Russian language, have not so far succeeded in making the distinction clear. The Duma debates over the Law proposal are a case in point. For instance, noticeable bewilderment can be sensed in the words of the President's Representative in the Duma, Alexandr Kotenkov, when he demands to вычлениТЬ [из языка - LRC] его государственную составляющую.⁴⁹ He carries on in confusion, trying to separate Russian as a state language from Russian as an "everyday language" in order to comprehend the proposal in front of him:

То есть что, мы говорим на русском языке только как на государственном, со всеми запретами, ограничениями и требованиями? Я могу по-русски говорить только вот так, оглядываясь, как бы кто чего не так не сказал?...Но просто говорить на бытовом русском можно? По закону, получается, нельзя...⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "When using Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation, it is forbidden to use words and expressions that do not comply with the norms of the modern Russian language, excluding foreign words which do not have commonly used equivalents"; *ibid.*

⁴⁸ See for example, V.P. Neroznak, M.V. Oreshkina, R.B. Sabatkoev, "Russkii iazyk v iazykovoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii", 2002.

⁴⁹ 'to extract [from the language] its state component'; Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 7 iunია 2002 g.

⁵⁰ 'So, does this mean that we speak the Russian language only as the state language with all its prohibitions, limitations and requirements? Does this mean that I can speak Russian only like that, looking over my shoulder, in case somebody will say something in the wrong way?... but is it allowed to simply speak the Russian everyday language? According to the law, it looks like it is not...'; *ibid.*

The deputy Oleg Smolin (KPRF) is no less confused on the question of the norm, that the state is set to protect. But, he utters a piece of linguistic wisdom: surely if we use the non-standard lexis all the time it then becomes standard (although he quickly labels this as regressive): *Более того, уважаемые коллеги, что касается ненормативной лексики. Конечно, мы наблюдаем часто, как ненормативная лексика превращается в нормативную. Но что это такое - прогресс языка или регресс?*⁵¹

Not only Duma members, most of whom are not versed in the intricacies of linguistics, but also advisers holding high linguistic positions found it difficult to work out what language matter is to be covered by the normative statements of the Law.⁵² Iurii Karaulov, for example, points out the conflict between the law's objectives and the impossibility of regulating spoken language use, which he sees as falling within the law's jurisdiction:

The fact of the matter is that the authors of this text in some oblique manner have connected two objectives that are of disparate natures and levels. One is the objective of the state, which lends itself to regulation and enforcement by the power of the government. The other pertains to the public use of language and can be dealt with not by force but only by public approbation and public opinion. They tried to establish the legal norms for the use of the state language (having established the spheres for its use, the rights and responsibilities of citizens for violation of the law) and at the same time to attribute the firmness of legality to the norms of the speech culture, having in mind a correspondence between the spoken language and the rules of grammar and word use. But latter, i.e., the norm of the speech culture, should not be regulated and such attempts are useless.⁵³

⁵¹ 'Moreover, dear colleagues, what concerns the substandard lexis. Of course, we often observe how substandard lexis turn into standard. But what is it: progress of the language or its regress?'; *ibid.*

⁵² See for e.g.: Zaochnyi kruglyi stol na temu "Iazykovaia politika v mnogonatsional'noi Rossii proekt feredal'nogo zakona "O russkom iazyke kak gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii" (K X Kongressu MAPRIAL – 29 iyunia – 5 iul'ia 2003 g)"; *Mir russkogo slova*, 2. 2003.; Lev Skvortsov, *Iazyk moi. Chto rodila gora? Kommentarii k Zakonu o russkom iazyke. Literaturnaia Gazeta*, No.9, 2005; discussion of the Law in *Otechestvennye zapiski*, No.2, 2005. URL: http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2005/2/2005_2_4.html (accessed 5.09.2006).

⁵³ Iu.N. Karaulov, "Pritcha vo iazytsekh. Po povodu zakona o gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii" URL: http://www.gramota.ru/mag_arch.html?id=293 (accessed 10.03.2006).

The internal contradictions add confusion introduced by the normative language policy result in no small part from a reaction by the Putin government to the chaos and disorder associated with the previous decade and exemplified by the speech patterns that bear the spirit of it. Representatives of state power today treat liberalization of linguistic norms as an aberration, a disease, and even a crime. Contributions by the Duma members and government advisers to the language law debate abound in such opinions. Evgenii Chelyshev⁵⁴ for instance, describes the current state of the language with the word *беспредел*, usually reserved for situations of unlimited and uncontrollable lawlessness⁵⁵, while the deputy Oleg Smolin claims that what has happened to the Russian language is *победа криминальной революции над языком*.⁵⁶ The Duma member Oleg Shein (Rodina) talks about the return to the norm as the path for national psychological recuperation implying that the present state of the language (and its speakers) betrays some kind of mental disease:

И мне кажется, что будет правильно, если палата сегодня проголосует за его принятие, может быть, по той причине, что это позволит хотя бы где-то нам слегка начать *определённое психологическое оздоровление* и возврат к тем обычным нормам русского языка, которые у нас, к сожалению, в последнее время оказались исковерканными.⁵⁷

These examples show how state power is summoning the mythological ‘purity’ of the Russian language, seen in linguistic norms, to condemn the disorderly legacy of the ‘liberal’ age and to appropriate the principles of the pure and the orderly as symbols of the Putin regime and of the imperatives of the Russian nation.

To conclude, the modern day intensification of language policy in Russia has numerous political and ideological causes and aims. The official

⁵⁴ the Secretary of the Department of Language and Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Duma Committee Adviser

⁵⁵ В последнее десятилетие мы наблюдаем особенно сильный — граничащий с беспределом — наплыв американизмов ‘in the last decade we observe an especially powerful, bordering on the unlimited incursion of Americanisms’; *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, URL: <http://www.rg.ru/teoria/articles/lang/3.htm> (accessed: 07.08.2005).

⁵⁶ ‘a victory of the criminal revolution over the language’; *Stenogramma plenarnogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 7 iunია 2002 g.

⁵⁷ ‘And it seems to me that it will be right if the Chamber votes today to accept it [the law], perhaps for the reason that this will allow us at least to some extent to start a certain psychological recuperation and the return to those ordinary norms of the Russian language that of late have been unfortunately mangled.’; *ibid.*

metalinguistic discourse, along with legislation reflecting it, pertaining to the status and role of the Russian language aim to re-construct a strong national identity while advancing the principles of order, security and state power. Certain ideas about language and its properties and attributes (either retained from previous discourses or newly ascribed to the language) are therefore called upon to draw numerous lines (geographical, political, social and historical) in order to redefine and separate the 'centre' and to marginalize the 'other' and the 'periphery'. At once a symbol of Russian statehood, a connector of lands and peoples, an emblem of a common heritage, and a means of achieving order and national security – the Russia language now embodies them all. Thus the "state turning to language" has made language policy an integral instrument of national policy in rebuilding the Russian nation as a historic power.