

Language Culture and National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia

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Introduction: shifting language cultures

WITH every period of radical social change, one expects corresponding changes, often dramatic, in the language culture of the day. Political upheaval begets linguistic rejection and innovation, the need and desire to abandon old structures and practices and come to terms, literally, with the new. One finds a particularly strong link between language and politics in the history of the Russian language. Peter the Great, in addition to encouraging the introduction into Russian of key trade terms from other European languages, personally took part in orthographic reforms, deeming the banishment of arcane letters as critical to Russia's modernization as the removal of facial hair. A century later, debates between the likes of Aleksandr Shishkov and Nikolai Karamzin over appropriate models for a viable literary language constituted thinly veiled arguments over the authentic roots of Russian national identity. And in the aftermath of October 1917, language became a major symbolic battleground for building the new Soviet state, citizen, and nation. Like Peter three centuries earlier, Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin all included writings on language culture in their resumes of revolution and state building.¹ Russia's

1 For an excellent discussion of the role and nature of language reform during the reign of Peter I, see V.M. Zhivov, 1996, *Iazyk i kul'tura v Rossii xviii veka*, Moscow, pp. 69–154. Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii nicely articulate the link between language and national identity in the early nineteenth century in Iu.M. Lotman & B.A. Uspenskii, 1975, "Spory o iazyke v nachale XIX v. kak fakt russkoi kul'tury ('Proisshestvie v tsarstve tenei, ili sud'bina rossiiskogo iazyka'—neizvestnoe sochinenie Semena Bobrova)," *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii* 24: literaturovedenie (Uchenye zapiski

long tradition of linguist-politicians, in fact, provides historical evidence as few other national cultures can of an idea expressed repeatedly, albeit in a variety of ways, since the time of Plato: that there exists an essential, and often awkward, relationship of mutual determination between language and broader issues of power, authority and identity.²

I will begin with a working hypothesis that I have explored more thoroughly in the context of my study of the language and politics of the Bolshevik Revolution—namely, that periods of radical social change tend to share a basic dynamic in the evolution of a language culture—one in which the rejection of old models of writing and speaking lead to verbal innovation and the articulation of a new order; in which these experiments, in turn, spawn a round of reaction, most commonly in some form of language purism; and, in which the sharply polarized tenor of the language debate between these two poles eventually assumes a more moderate, measured, and synthesized tone—again, much like the polarized social and political debates to which the linguistic one is inextricably linked. While a thorough vetting of this thesis would require more space, I will examine, in this article, various contemporary manifestations of language purism in order to better understand not only its relationship to the broader issue of national identity, but also its viability or potency as a mechanism for reshaping the norm, if not national identity itself.

Linguistic authority after the collapse

Any study of the post-Soviet language culture should recognize that most of the major trends that have emerged in the past decade have done so if not as a kind of linguistic revolt against the clichéd and tightly controlled language of the Soviet state, then at least as an alternative source of linguistic authority to fill the void created by that language's whole-

Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta 358), Tartu, pp. 168–254, where the authors note that the chief opposition was one pitting a “Slavic” culture, rooted in the liturgical and folk traditions of the Slavs, against an emerging “Russian” culture entirely beholden to and defined by influences from the West. For a detailed discussion of the language culture in the early Soviet period, see my book, 2003, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Early Soviet Russia*, DeKalb, Ill.

2 Boris Gasparov provides important historical perspective on this relationship in the Russian context in his discussion of the intersection between language and ideology in medieval Rus': Boris Gasparov, 2004, “Identity in Language?,” *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, eds. S. Franklin & E. Widdis, Cambridge, pp. 132–48.

sale de-legitimation.³ One sign of the discredited status of the language of the Soviet state is the very attempt to catalogue it, labeling it with such derogatory terms as *iazuk sovdepii* (“Language of the Land of the Soviets”), and *novoiaz totalitarizma* (“Totalitarian newspeak”).⁴ Another sign is the new life certain clichés of the Soviet language of state have acquired in the new era (мавзолей “a place at the entrance to which long lines usually gather, such as a wine store”; активист “practicing homosexual”; откуммуниздить “to beat someone”; скуммуниздить “to steal something”).⁵

The most vocal “participants” in the ensuing debate over the appropriate shape and form of language in the “new era” generally fall into one of two camps: one that actively promotes and fosters new, alternative language models, and another that relies more on some vision of a traditional national tongue. This debate has been codified in the history of the Russian literary language as one between “innovators” and “archaists,” terms I prefer to avoid as both groups were essentially involved in a form of language innovation, be it the construction of overtly new models or the perceived return to some mythical language of old.⁶ Let me refer, instead, to the two camps as “liberal” and “purist”; “liberal” in the sense of “not being limited to or by established, traditional, orthodox, or authoritarian attitudes, views, or dogmas,” “purist” in the sense of abiding by a “strict observance of or insistence on ‘traditional’ correctness, especially of language.”⁷

The liberal camp includes the language of democracy and democratization—that is, democracy as political and social system (консенсус, кворум, брифинг, имидж, пиар, рейтинг, etc.), and democratization as

3 For early examples of this process, see my article, 2000, “*Natsiia ili snikerizatsiia?* Identity and Perversion in the Language Debates of Late- and Post-Soviet Russia,” *Russian Review* 59 (4), pp. 614–29.

4 The most ambitious attempt to document the language of the Soviet state to date is V.M. Mokienko & T.G. Nikitina, eds. 1998, *Tolkovyii slovar' iazyka Sovdepii*, St Petersburg.

5 Mokienko & Nikitina, eds. 1998, pp. 6–7.

6 V.M. Zhivov, in fact, points out that both Karamzin and Shishkov were keenly interested in purity, but simply had different views (Zhivov, 1996, pp. 155–264, 419–56). And both sides, according to Uspenskii, framed their arguments in terms of *svoi* and *chuzhoi* (B.A. Uspenskii, 1994, *Kratkii ocherk istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka (XI–XIX vv.)*, Moscow, p. 167).

7 *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed., 1992. The single quotation marks around “traditional” are mine.

a process that gives a broader range of people and voices access to public channels of communication. This second form includes alternative voices from within the country (e.g. vernaculars, regionalisms, *blatnaia muzyka, mat*), as well as alternative voices from the outside (such as the heavily “barbarized” language of the glossy magazines, the imported TV serials and soaps, translated pulp fiction, and popular music). Related to each of these trends is the language of business and market economy, which has relied heavily on foreign loans for its vocabulary (e.g. ваучер, маркетинг, брокер, реалтр, спонсор, дефолт).

The purist voice was somewhat restricted in scope in the early post-Soviet years, given the lack of attention it received from the state and the mass media—two of the more powerful shapers of public opinion. It appeared in how-to manuals with titles ranging from the dry *Kul'tura parlamentskoi rechi* (*Parliamentary Speech Culture*) to the more desperate *My sokhranim tebia, russkaia rech'!* (*We Will Preserve You, Russian Speech!*).⁸ It appeared at pseudo-scholarly conferences, jointly sponsored by the Academy and the Church, dedicated to such causes as “The Defense of the Russian Language” and “The Fate of Russian Orthography.”⁹ And it appeared in such post-Soviet compendiums as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *Russkii slovar' iazykovogo rasshireniia*, a 270-page compilation of words and expressions that have disappeared “prematurely,” according to the compiler, from the “living language” and “still deserve the right to live.”¹⁰ In its most bizarre and inflammatory form, the purist voice emanated from the pages of such “patriotic” thick journals as *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia*, where a mixture of historical, ecological, biological and ethical metaphors converged to form a potent, but often unseemly form of linguistic xenophobia—as in the following 1996 diatribe against the pernicious effect of contemporary radio and television:

Всё замечательно: нет цензуры, нет худсоветов и, к сожалению, нет профессиональной чести. Зато есть сатанизация эфирного пространства. Черная энергия эфирных вибраций, злая, отрица-

8 L.K. Graudina & E.N. Shiriaev, 1994, *Kul'tura parlamentskoi rechi*, Moscow; L.K. Graudina et al., 1995, *My sokhranim tebia, russkaia rech'!*, Moscow.

9 The second, hosted by the “Society for the Rebirth of the Spiritual Traditions of Rus,” even called for the reinstatement of the pre-revolutionary writing system, blaming the Bolsheviks for bastardizing the great and mighty national script.

10 A.I. Solzhenitsyn, 1990, *Russkii slovar' iazykovogo rasshireniia*, Moscow.

тельная энергия словесных заклинаний превращается в живую психическую энергию, духовно уродующую незащищённых людей. Нельзя сказать, что вся Россия во мгле, но со появлением «свободы слова» (мата в театрах и с экрана кино), теле- и эфирной разнузданности, признанием воровского жаргона парламентским языком—по окраинам России от Владивостока до Приднестровья идет постоянное проявление зла. Это и четыре подряд взрыва складов с боеприпасами, наводнения, землетрясения, аварии газопроводов, Таджикистан, Карабах, Азербайджан, Грузия, Абхазия, ГКЧП, штурм телевидения и «Белого дома», Чечня и т.д. Злоба порождает зло.¹¹

While the Russian term *эфир* (“ether”) is ordinarily the unmarked word designating “airwaves,” its use here leaves little doubt as to the potency implied by its classical origins. Modern technology permits tainted language to spread like a diabolic infection throughout the physical and spiritual terrain of the national landscape, threatening that landscape’s integrity by giving rise to the most terrible of natural and man-made disasters—all because of this new state of linguistic affairs—vulgar and criminal language draped in the shrouds of “free speech.”¹²

Purism and national identity

For all its extreme and sometimes bizarre manifestations, the purist voice commands substantial power and appeal largely due to the coherent and

11 Iurii Makarov, 1996, “Otvēt’te mne oral’no, pristebyvaia gubami (Otkrytoe piśmo dikturu Radio Rossii T. Vizbor),” *Molodaia gvardiia* 5, pp. 239–57; p. 249. “Everything’s just great: no censorship, no art-soviets, and, unfortunately, no professional honesty. To make up for it, there is the satanization of ethereal space. The black energy of ethereal vibrations, the evil, negative energy of verbal incantations turns into living, psychic energy, which spiritually mutilates defenseless people. One cannot say that all of Russia is in darkness, but with the appearance of the ‘freedom of speech’ (cursing on the stage and movie screen) of tele- and ethereal unruliness, of the recognition of thieves’ jargon in parliamentary language—a constant manifestation of evil has spread through the distant lands of Russia, from Vladivostok to Pridnestrov’e. This and four explosions of munitions storage units in a row, floods, earthquakes, gas line fires, Tajikistan, Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia, GKChP, the storming of the TV station and White House, Chechnia, etc. Malice begets misfortune.” (Translations are my own.)

12 For a more measured employment of environmental metaphors to language culture, see L.I. Skvortsov, 1996, *Ekologiia slova, ili pogovorim o kulture russkoi rechii: Kniga dlia uhashchikhsia*, Moscow.

multi-dimensional means by which it symbolically intertwines language and national identity. It does this chiefly through the clear delineation of moral, spiritual, genetic and geographical *boundaries*—lines between the clean and the contaminated, the sacred and the profane, the historically rooted self and the ahistorical other. Those who speak purely are clean, divine, true to their authentic national roots and genes; those who litter language with verbal waste are impure, evil and alien, representing, as one Russian purist put it, “the interests of foreigners, prostitutes, robbers, bums and prisoners.”¹³

The conditions for a more broad-based appeal for purification—linguistic and national—emerged with the deepening of the country’s social, political and economic crises. As the feeling that Russia had lost her way intensified, the discourse of liberalism and democratization that had held linguistic sway in the early 1990s gradually lost some of its allure, giving way to strengthening calls for the articulation of a “Russian” or “national idea.” Within months of Boris Yeltsin’s 1995 challenge to the Russian people to come up with a new national ideology, he also decreed into existence the President’s Russian Language Council, a body made up of distinguished writers, philologists, university administrators and state officials assigned with the task of reporting to the president on “issues relating to the support and development of the Russian language.” It is of little surprise that the two actions coincided, as they each addressed the same critical issue: how to set the country on the proper course to national regeneration in the face of pernicious, hostile and largely external forces. And in this sense, today’s Russian purism—like its predecessors in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—is as innovative as it is reactionary, not only rejecting the language of new, but objectionable, sources of authority, but also projecting a vision of an ideal language culture based on the memory of a mythical lexicon of national ideals.

In recent theoretical writings on language and national identity the “constructed” nature of this kind of purist discourse has become almost axiomatic. As one specialist in the cultural history of the English language has put it,

13 For a report on similarly toned pre-election political attacks on reform candidate Grigorii Iavlinskii, see Michael R. Gordon, 2000, “Russian TV Network Ties Putin Rival to Jews, Gays and Foreigners,” *New York Times*, 25.03.

[...] national identity is not something which is fixed for ever, an eternal set of values, but rather something which is often proposed at particular times of crisis as a way of negating difficulties. Which is to say that national identity is not something waiting to be discovered, but something which is forged. It is a weapon in particular types of discursive struggle, and though it is often represented monologically, it is in fact the site of great contestation.¹⁴

The ambiguity of the Russian purist's claimed "authenticity" is perhaps nowhere more exposed than in the world of post-Soviet marketing, where the traditional language and culture are invoked—often inaccurately—to promote an extraordinary range of products, such as banks, pharmacies (Старый Лекаръ ("Old Healer")), business newspapers (*Коммерсантъ Daily* (*Merchant Daily*)), eating establishments (Кафеъ ("Café"), Грандъ-Империаль ("Grand Imperial"), Пушкинъ ("Pushkin")), theaters (Модернъ ("Moderne")), and pop music stands (Попсъ ("Pop")).¹⁵ The shifting connotations of "pure" and "impure" also stand out when one considers the relative ease with which the "liberal" voice stakes claims on monikers of "authentic" and "organic" with regard to its own language models—especially with the language of the Soviet State looming as an ideological foil. In defense of the "right to citizenship" of prison-camp

14 Tony Crowley, 1996, *Language in History: Theories and Texts*, (The Politics of Language), London, p. 181. See also Susan Gal & Kathryn A. Woolard, 1995, "Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation," *Pragmatics* 5, pp. 129–38.

15 All of the examples cited feature the stylistically marked use of the "hard sign," which in the old orthography was used to mark word-ending consonants. In some cases the sign stands out due to the definitively non-traditional context, such as a pop music store or a newspaper title mixing Russian and English words (*Pops*, *Kommersant* "Daily"). In others, it is simply incorrect (*Lekar*' ends in a soft consonant and *Kafe* ends in a vowel). E.S. Kara-Murza, 2001, "Chto v imeni tebe moem," in "Divnyi novyi mir' rossiiskoi reklamy: sotsiokulturnye, stilisticheskie i kulturno-rechevye aspekty," Part 7, *Russkii iazyk: Spravochno-informatsionnyi portal*, 19 January, URL: http://www.gramota.ru/mag_arch.html?id=47 (accessed 14.01.2006); I.P. Priadko, 2001, "Doreformennaia orfografiia i sovremennaia reklama," *Russkii iazyk: Spravochno-informatsionnyi portal*, 9 February, URL: http://www.gramota.ru/mag_arch.html?id=57 (accessed 14.01.2006); Aleksandr Ageev, 1995, "Vosstavshii "Ъ," *Znamia* 4, pp. 184–90. Viktor Pelevin makes light of this market-driven "fashion" for tradition in his novel *Generation "P"* (1999), where the "Russian Idea" itself is portrayed as the brainchild of the advertising industry.

language and thieves' argot, for instance, the editors of a 1992 dictionary argue that, in reality,

ставший за годы тоталитаризма деревянно-резиновым, ставший забывать, что он — русский, язык сам все давно понял, прочувствовал и, устав от повиновения и добропорядочности по-советски, от лицемерных заклинаний в своей «могучести и великостии», обратился к корням. Как губка все эти годы, не и спрашивая разрешений, он впитывал и впитывает экспрессивную, образную лексику зоны, основательно подзабытый правильный (настоящий!) русский дозволенных наконец Набокова, Довлатова, Синявского, Алешковского, Платонова [...] И, думается, этим излечивается от метастаз фарисейства, заштампованности, официозного косноязычия, идеологизмов, усредненности.¹⁶

Similar arguments have been made in defense of Russian *mat*, much to the purists' chagrin (many of whom prefer to blame Turkish for this profane invasion of the mother tongue). Anatolii Baranov of the Academy of Sciences Russian Language Institute, for example, argues that, aside from being a legitimate oral folk tradition, *mat* and Russian colloquial language as a whole have exerted "serious pressure" on Russian political language, and describes the process as no less than "a historical fact of

16 D.S. Baldaev, V.K. Belko & I.M. Isupov, eds. 1992, *Slovar' tiuremno-lagerno-blatnogo zhargona (rechevoi i graficheskii portret sovetskoi tiur'my)*, Moscow, pp. 6–7. "[...] the language long ago felt and understood that it had become stock and rubbery and had forgotten that it was Russian, and, tired of being the Soviet-style submissive do-gooder, turned to its roots. Like a sponge, all of those years—without asking permission—it has soaked up the expressive, vivid lexicon of the zone, the thoroughly forgotten, correct, (real!) Russian of the finally permitted Nabokov, Dovlatov, Siniavskii, Alekhovskii, Platonov [...]. And in this manner, it seems, it is healing itself of the metastases of pharisaism, cliché, official tongue-tiedness, ideologisms, and mediocrity." In his short history of the genre of dictionaries of thieves' language, Aleksei Plutser-Sarno traces this discourse back to the romantic influences on writers, linguists and lexicographers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Aleksei Plutser-Sarno, 2000, "Russkii vorovskoi slovar' kak kul'turnyi fenomen," *Logos* 2 (23), pp. 208–17). In defending his claim that argot is one of the most syncretic and ambiguous language phenomena, Vladimir Elistratov notes that, while argots often times occupy the lowest rung of the language hierarchy, they can also exist as a kind of alternative, or "parallel" language (V.S. Elistratov, 2000, "Argot i kul'tura," *Slovar' russkogo argo (materialy 1980–1990-kh gg)*, Moscow, pp. 574–692; p. 577).

democratization.”¹⁷ Vladimir Zhirinovskii, himself well versed in colorful language and well aware of its political power, offers a more impassioned defense of *mat* that lives up (for a change), in a curious way, to his party’s claims to being both “liberal” and “democratic”: “This is our living language! Who has decided that *mat* is just bad words and deviant vocabulary? They’re rejecting the language of the people. Obviously, part of the vocabulary of *mat* was created in prisons, but haven’t we driven the entire population through the prisons? This language has become the norm!” In a deft rhetorical twist, he turns purist logic against itself when he adds, “Russian is the most expressive language in the world! But we have a hatred of our own tongue. We reject the wealth of the language, and this has led to a rejection of Russian wealth in general. We need to rehabilitate *mat*.”¹⁸

Emerging signs of synthesis and moderation

If one assumes that times of revolutionary language change eventually subside, giving way to periods of relative linguistic stability, how does this process take place, and where do we look for signs not only of resolution, but of the more specific features of the new “norms” themselves? Descriptive linguists are inclined to dismiss the active role of humans as “agents” in the process of normalization, or moderation. Even those post-structuralists who are willing to recognize the role that speakers and societies play in the process of language change would argue that this process is still essentially natural or elemental in nature and cannot be manipulated from the outside, as it were, by self-proclaimed language guardians. To an extent, of course, they are correct. Concerted campaigns to proactively control how language is used are far more noted for their failures than their successes—and perhaps even more so in Russia than elsewhere.¹⁹ But this “hands-off” approach ignores the significant

17 Quoted in Victor Erofeev, 2003, “Dirty Words: The Unique Power of Russia’s Underground Language,” *The New Yorker*, 15. 09., pp. 42–48; p. 47.

18 Quoted in Erofeev, 2003, p. 48.

19 The most recent example of ill-conceived attempts to legislate language norms comes in the form of the new law “O gosudarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (“On the State Language of the Russian Federation”), signed into law on 1 June 2005, not only because of the lack of guidance the law provides in the way of enforcement and punishment, but also because of the internal contradictions and gaping loopholes contained in the language of the legislation (see Iuliia Taratuta, Timur Bordiug & Iuliia Kulikova, 2005, “Zakonotvorchestvo: iazyk ikh—vrag ikh,” *Kommersant* daily 91,

role that language proscription plays in influencing, “tweaking,” if you will, the “natural” process of language change. It ignores the power of the language maven’s “bully pulpit”—be it in the form of a grammar, a dictionary, a guide or a newspaper opinion piece—to shape the way the public (and the press) thinks about and uses language. It ignores the role that prominent cultural and political figures have in serving as linguistic role models for speaking and writing citizens. And it ignores the more time-tested attitudes, or ideologies, that a culture holds with regard to language. All of these forces contribute to something of a linguistic public relations campaign—albeit poorly coordinated and on multiple fronts—but nevertheless a campaign for the verbal allegiances of consumers and citizens.²⁰ As Susan Gal and Kathryn Woolard put it, the “bounded and naturalized representations” of “cultural categories of communication, such as named languages, dialects, standards, speech communities and genres” are

enacted and reproduced in familiar linguistic practices: Translation, the writing of grammars and dictionaries, the policing of correctness in national standards, the creation of linguistic and folklore collections or academies. The work of linguistic representation produces not only individualized “speakers” and “hearers” as the agents of communication, but also larger, imagined and emergent social groupings, including [...] “publics.” Such representational processes are crucial aspects of power, figuring among the means for establishing inequality, imposing social hierarchy, and mobilizing political action.²¹

According to this reading, then, an analysis of at least three levels of language attitudes and production—ideology, institutions and individuals—should shed light not only on the shape and direction of the con-

21.05. For earlier examples of misguided language legislation, see Oksana Yablokova, 2001, “Government Moves to Purify Russian,” *Moscow Times*, 27.07; Lev Pirogov, 2001, “V krasnoi rubashonochke: K voprosu o demonstratsii rechevykh organov,” *Literaturnaia gazeta* 28, 11–17.07.

20 The most eloquent defense of this position comes from Deborah Cameron, 1995, *Verbal Hygiene*, London, where she argues that, while “prescriptivists” may in fact be overestimating their power to change language, language in another sense is always undergoing change at the hands of its speakers, in efforts that can either be conscious or subconscious.

21 Gal & Woolard, 1995, p. 129.

temporary Russian language culture, but also on the effort to forge a new, post-Soviet national identity. On at least the second of these levels (where I will focus the remainder of my remarks), there are signs of synthesis between the liberal and purist linguistic poles.

A number of institutions help shape public discourse; among the more prominent in contemporary Russia: the mass media, the advertising industry, the academy, the church, the schools, the state (broadly defined to include the entire political infrastructure—including the president himself as an important individual symbol of language use) and, last, but certainly not least, the creative intelligentsia. The state stands out as the most powerful of institutional forces, given its ability to set, legislate and fund national priorities. Its prominence has been punctuated by some of the most spectacular failures in reining in language chaos, such as the slow demise of Boris Yeltsin's Russian Language Council in the mid-1990s, and later attempts to pass laws that would fine government officials who used obscenities on the job (under the category of "petty hooliganism").²² But it has also shown signs of more productive involvement in the language question. In January 2000, Vladimir Putin revived the Russian Language Council, this time giving it greater financial and symbolic support than it ever enjoyed under Yeltsin. In contrast to its first-generation counterpart, the Council has acted swiftly in bringing issues of language closer to both political and popular consciousness, with such projects as the internet portal "Russkii iazyk" (<http://www.gramota.ru>), a virtual mediator of a wide range of language-related issues and resources, including official documents and decisions, scholarly papers, national contests, conference announcements and reports, informal chat forums, and an extensive catalogue of online resources.²³ Another productive act was the government's July 2001 approval of the target program (*tselevaia programma*) "Russian Language" for 2002–2005, with an allotted budget of 80 million rubles and a broad range of plans that include the development of a new code of usage rules, a new generation of textbooks, technology-based methods and materials for teaching and

22 The bill was introduced by State Duma Deputy (Unity) Kaadyr-Ool Bicheldei in June 2001.

23 The website is also sponsored by the Federal Ministry of the Press, Television and Mass Media. Also significant in this regard is the language broadcast "Likbez" (i.e. *likvidatsiia bezgramotnosti* "eradication of illiteracy") on *Russkoe Radio-2* and several projects for language-related television programs.

learning, and a series of TV and radio programs “propagandizing Russian language and culture.”²⁴

These efforts are significant for a number of reasons. Most importantly, they break down previously existing tensions and animosity between the purists and the mass media. After years of confining their fight to the pages of their professional journals, conferences, roundtables and commissions, purists have now begun to make inroads into the very media they hope to rein in—radio, television, the print media and the internet. These more mass-oriented venues likewise hold greater potential for influencing the popular linguistic consciousness, creating space for what Deborah Cameron calls “folk linguistics”—opinionated non-specialists engaging in discussions about their mother tongue in the press, over the airwaves, and on the internet.²⁵

As important in the process of linguistic reconciliation are efforts at language moderation and purification coming from within the media itself. The popular radio station *Ekho Moskvy* for many years featured weekly broadcasts of “Govorim po-russki” (“Let’s speak Russian”), a talk show dedicated to general issues of language usage, policy and history.²⁶ *Radio Rossiia* broadcasts a similar show on Friday afternoons, entitled “S russkogo na russkii, ili Kstati skazat” (“From Russian into Russian, or Speaking of which”), *Radio Maiak* features “Gramotei” (“The one who can read and write”) every Saturday afternoon (hosted by the Academy of Sciences Russian Language Institute’s Elena Shmeleva), and the popular weekly news magazine *Itogi* features “Mezhdometiia” (“Interjections”), a half-page exercise in linguistic shaming that reprints structurally flawed

24 Pravitel’stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Press-tsentr, Soobshcheniia dlia pechati, no.865 URL: http://www.government.gov.ru/data/news_print.html?he_id=103&news_id=2733 (accessed 14.01.2006). The program was renewed on 29 December 2005 in the form of “Russkii iazyk (2006–2010 gody),” with 1,58 billion rubles earmarked for similar initiatives, cf. “Pravitel’stvo RF utverdilo federal’nuiu tselievuiu programmû ‘Russkii iazyk (2006–2010)’ obshchei stoimost’iu 1,5805 mlrd rub,” PrAIM-TASS, 16.01.2006, URL: <http://www.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?id=561336&ct=news> (accessed 31.05.2006).

25 Deborah Cameron, 1990, “Demythologizing Sociolinguistics: Why Language does not Reflect Society,” *Ideologies of Language*, eds. John E. Joseph & Talbot J. Taylor, London, pp. 79–93. (A study of the role of various language-related internet forums and chat rooms in the promotion and shaping of a more popular Russian linguistic self-consciousness would prove particularly insightful in this regard.)

26 Since January 2005, this show has run under the name “Kak pravil’no?” (“What’s correct?”) though it continues to be hosted by Marina Koroleva.

and/or comical utterances of high-profile politicians. Particularly when viewed in conjunction with the recent return to Russian products and themes in the marketing world,²⁷ these more public acts of linguistic cleansing suggest that purism is coming back into fashion.

What can be said with certainty, is that the post-Soviet language culture is taking shape under the influence of a complex web of ideological, institutional, and individual factors, which, in their diversity, should insulate it from over-zealous attempts at manipulation on the part of either the most respected guardian or the most feared tyrant or thug. At the same time, more subtle manipulation is possible and commonly practiced by language mavens and dilettantes of all political persuasions—be it in the form of publishing, marketing, legislation, or ideologically charged “talk about talk”—practices that ultimately help forge a more stable set of language norms, as well as a more stable vision (or visions) of national identity. The eventual dissipation of linguistic chaos during times of revolutionary change is as inevitable as the initial shock. The language question will wither away along with the debate over a “Russian Idea,” each finding resolution in some amalgam of newly invented tradition and traditional embrace of change.

27 Such as the radio station *Nashe radio* boasting an all-Russian music offering; Coca-cola deciding to bottle kvas because of the downturn in sales of its own classic drink.