

Norm Negotiations in Russian Literary Criticism

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RECENT STUDIES in linguistics and sociolinguistics have pointed out the abundance of metalinguistic reflection and its significance for the way languages exist and develop.¹ Talking about language seems to be a crucial activity in any language community. The same appears to be true for the Russian language community in the post-Soviet era.

This article is devoted to the concept of linguistic “norm negotiations” and how they manifest themselves in one particular area of post-Soviet Russian language debate. I will start by looking at the relationship between metalanguage and language norms. I shall then go on to study a few examples of such norm negotiations in post-Soviet Russian literary criticism.² I shall focus on how language is discussed in connection with the reception of literary fiction. My examples will be taken from literary reviews that discussed publications by Viktor Erofeev, Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Pelevin in the 1990s.

1 Deborah Cameron, 1995, *Verbal Hygiene*, London; Adam Jaworski, et al., eds. 2004, *Metalanguage: Social and Ideological Perspectives*, Berlin; Dennis R. Preston, 2004, “Folk Metalanguage,” *Metalanguage: Social and Ideological Perspectives*, eds. A. Jaworski, et al., Berlin, pp. 75–101; Henning Andersen, 1989, “Understanding Linguistic Innovations,” *Language Change: Contributions to the Study of its Causes* (Trends in Linguistics; Studies and monographs 43), eds. L.E. Breivik & E.H. Jahr, Berlin, pp. 5–28.

2 The article is based on work conducted for my PhD thesis. However whereas the thesis includes perspectives on language ideology, the Russian standard language and the sociology of literature, the discussion here will be more explicitly focused on the concept of norm negotiations. Martin Paulsen, 2009, *Hegemonic Language and Literature: Russian Metadiscourse on Language in the 1990s*, PhD-thesis, University of Bergen.

Metalinguage and language norms

Metalinguage became a central concept in linguistics with Roman Jakobson's 1960 article "Linguistics and Poetics." Here Jakobson presents the metalinguistic function as part of his expanded model of verbal communication. The role of metalinguage is to bring attention to the *code* of communication, in other words, to check whether interlocutors are "speaking the same language." Jakobson sees the importance of the metalinguistic function in connection with language acquisition and intersubjective understanding. He points out its importance in learning to master a language: "A constant recourse to metalinguage is indispensable both for a creative assimilation of the mother tongue and for its final mastery."³

In my understanding the concept of intersubjectivity is central here. Even if "intersubjectivity" as a term indicates some kind of shared knowledge, it should still be based on an understanding of humans as individual subjects *between* whom this communication takes place. As Jakobson's model indicates, there is no guarantee that we understand a given word or grammatical construction in the same way, so there is need to talk about language to increase the chance of understanding each other correctly. Jakobson's understanding is confirmed by Laada Bilaniuk:

No two people have the same experiences of contextualized utterances, so cumulatively we could say that no two people share exactly the same language, and even one person's language changes through time. The differences in meaning that speakers and hearers bring to an utterance may be microscopic, but infinitesimal variations build up over time, leading to greater differences.⁴

3 Roman Jakobson, 1985 [1976], "Metalinguage as a Linguistic Problem," *Roman Jakobson: Selected Writings*, ed. S. Rudy, The Hague, vol. 7, pp. 113–21; see also Roman Jakobson, 1981 [1960], "Linguistics and Poetics," *Roman Jakobson: Selected Writings*, ed. S. Rudy, The Hague, vol. 3, pp. 18–51. Note that Jakobson himself ascribed the term to the Polish logician and mathematician Alfred Tarski, who introduced it in a Polish language paper in 1933.

4 Laada Bilaniuk, 2005, *Contested Tongues: Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine*, Ithaca, p. 30. But how can we understand each other at all, if language is "situated in" each and every one of us? The best answer to this fundamental question is probably given by Andersen, 1989, p. 23 (my emphasis): "The likely reason why spontaneous innovations arise is that *man's ability to acquire language is so superior to the task that even the merest cues may suffice* for the identification of some existing

Consequently, talk about language should not be seen as something external to language itself, but rather as an integral component of language as it exists in society. Thus talk about talk is not the same as talk about the weather. Whereas talking about the weather will not make it rain more or less, talking about talk might increase our command of language.

The understanding of how important talk about language is to the existence of language is helped if we take into account the concept of norm. The norm concept was given a central place in linguistics by Eugenio Coseriu as part of his attempt to bridge the gap between a synchronic language system and diachronic linguistic change.⁵ He proposes an understanding of language with what could be described as two basic layers: the system and the norm. The system refers to the possibilities of creating utterances within a given language, whereas norms indicate the way in which this system is used. In Coseriu's words:

Allgemein läßt sich also sagen, daß eine funktionelle Sprache (eine Sprache, die man sprechen kann) ein "System von funktionellen Oppositionen und normalen Realisierungen" oder, besser gesagt, *System* und *Norm* ist. Das *System* ist "System von Möglichkeiten, von Koordinaten, die die offenen und die versperrten Wege angeben" eines in einer Gemeinschaft "verständlichen" Sprechens; die *Norm* dagegen ist ein "System verbindlicher Realisierungen," die sozial und kulturell festgelegt sind: sie entspricht nicht dem, was "man sagen kann," sondern dem, was bereits "gesagt worden ist," und was "man" traditionellerweise in der jeweiligen Gemeinschaft "sagt." Das System umfaßt die *idealen* Realisierungsformen einer Sprache, das heißt, die Technik und die Regeln des entsprechenden Sprachschaffens; die Norm die mit dieser Technik und nach jeden Regeln historisch *bereits realisierten Muster*. Auf diese Weise stellt das System die *Dynamik* der Sprache dar, die *Art und Weise ihres Werdens*, und folglich ihre Möglichkeit, über das bereits Realisierte hinauszugehen; die Norm dagegen entspricht der *Fixierung* der Sprache in traditionellen Mustern, und

regularities, and even fluctuations may be interpreted as rule governed variation." It is "man's ability for language" that guarantees the possibility of communication.

- 5 Luis Fernando Lara, 1983, "Le concept de norme dans la théorie d'Eugenio Coseriu," *La norme linguistique: Textes colligés et présentés*, eds. É. Bédard & J. Maurais, Paris, pp. 153–77; John Earl Joseph, 1987, *Eloquence and Power: The Rise of Language Standards and Standard Languages*, London.

genau in diesem Sinne stellt die Norm in jedem Augenblick das synchrone ("äußere" und "innere") Gleichgewicht des Systems dar.⁶

Coseriu's understanding of the norm has been criticized, notably by Renate Bartsch, for being too simple: "[the norm] seems to figure as a statistical notion in Coseriu's writings," she says.⁷ Another understanding of norms, with a more explicit focus on their social characteristics, is offered by Bartsch herself and by Kjell Lars Berge. In a structuralist way Berge focuses on norms as a semiotic system that helps us interpret the surrounding world (what Berge refers to as the principle of signification). A consequence of this is that norms contribute to upholding the existing world order (the principle of conservation). Furthermore, norms help unify and rationalize human action (the principles of coordination and economizing).⁸ Since norms accommodate our understanding of the world and the coordination of human action, they are accompanied by a notion of necessity or urgency. And since norms are so important to our communal living we expect others not only to *know* them, but also to *follow* them. Norms can function as such only if the members of a society follow them, if not, they lose their accommodating force, or, to use Berge's terminology, they do not live up to the principles of coordination and economizing. Norms that are not followed are therefore generally useless. This expectation of appropriate behaviour helps to give norms their *normative force*.

The urgency associated with the continuation of norms implies that the members of a (linguistic) community will go to extremes to protect the norms as they understand them. This inevitable situation may lead to what could be called explicit norm negotiations, where different understandings of norms are expressed and/or juxtaposed.⁹ The term norm

6 Eugenio Coseriu, 1974, *Synchronie, Diachronie und Geschichte*, trans. H. Sohre, Munich, pp. 47–48.

7 Renate Bartsch, 1982, "The Concepts 'Rule' and 'Norm' in Linguistics," *Lingua* 58 (1/2), pp. 51–81; p. 53.

8 Kjell Lars Berge, 1990, *Tekstnormers diakroni: Noen ideer til en sosiotekstologisk teori om tekstnormendring*, Stockholm, pp. 35–37.

9 Martin Paulsen, 2006, "Criticizing Pelevin's Language: The Language Question in the Reception of Viktor Pelevin's Novel *Generation 'P'*," *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), eds. I. Lunde & T. Roesen, Bergen, pp. 143–58.

negotiations has been used both in linguistics “proper” by Henning Andersen and in language anthropology by Laada Bilaniuk.¹⁰

I suggest that we distinguish this *explicit* norm negotiation from an *implicit* norm negotiation, in which the speaker’s understanding of the norm is not expressed and raised to a *metalinguistic* level, but is evident in the choice of linguistic unit for an expression. These two, the implicit and explicit norm negotiations, might very well be combined in a given situation, where one speaker’s choice of linguistic expression is commented upon by another speaker. The use by a speaker of a specific word, a particular conjugation or a certain phrase in a given situation can be interpreted by us as an *implicit* attempt to promote the place of this linguistic element in the language in question. Similarly, the negative reaction of another speaker to this choice can be interpreted as an *explicit* objection to it.

Andersen’s research is concerned with implicit norm negotiations. Even if he acknowledges the existence of explicit norm negotiations, he maintains that these are of minimal importance compared to what I have called implicit norm negotiations.¹¹ While I appreciate the *relative* importance of implicit norm negotiations, I still do not think that this eliminates the importance of explicit norm negotiations in *absolute* terms. In other words, even if explicit norm negotiations are less important, I still find them to be quite significant for our understanding of language.¹²

The preceding discussion of the nature of norms hints at one of the sources of norm change and the debates on norms: the different interpretations of norms made by different individuals. Additionally, because we have unique backgrounds, we are also prone to evaluate norms differently. What may appear to be perfectly sound norms to some of us, can be completely unacceptable to others. Therefore, some of us want to uphold existing norms, while others would prefer to change them. And, as Berge indicates, norms may also be questioned or subjected to evaluation when individuals are faced with new situations where norms cannot

10 Andersen, 1989 and Bilaniuk, 2005. Note that Andersen talks of “norm negotiations” in the sense here referred to as *implicit*, whereas Bilaniuk refers to “negotiation of correctness.”

11 See Andersen’s article in this volume.

12 See also James & Lesley Milroy, who focus on public statements about language. James Milroy & Lesley Milroy, 1999, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*, London.

give precise indications about how to behave.¹³ This leaves us with at least three sources of norm change: *different interpretations* of norms, *different evaluations* of norms, and *new situations*.

However, these sources of norm change are disputed by what Berge calls the principle of conservation. Since norms are perceived as so important for our mutual understanding, we tend to want to preserve them. Therefore people speak out when they get the impression that norms are under attack. Such discussions about norms are what are referred to as explicit norm negotiations. Using Saussure's terminology we could say that what is being negotiated is the "contract signed by the members of [the linguistic] community."¹⁴ The difference would be that in Saussure's understanding of language there seemed to be no room for negotiation.

Thus, I would maintain that talking about talk not only increases our command of language, it also changes language.

Norm negotiations by literary critics

Let us now turn to more concrete examples of such norm negotiations in post-Soviet Russian literary criticism. Following the theoretical discussion in the preceding section, comments made by literary critics on the language of a novel can be seen as explicit reactions to the linguistic choices made by authors. Thus the publication of literary works and the reactions to them by literary critics can form a linguistic norm negotiation on both an implicit and an explicit level. In fact, it follows from the theoretical discussion above that this alternation between implicit and explicit norm negotiation is the normal condition in a language community.

In a discussion of the norms of the Russian language, literature and literary criticism are of particular interest. Historically, literature has played an important role in debates on language. This is best exemplified by the Russian term for standard language, *literaturnyi iazyk* (literally: *literary language*), but can also be seen in the way Russian linguists have promoted the language of writers as *the* example to be followed. Hence, in the introduction to the 1980 academic grammar of the Russian language we can read:

¹³ Berge, 1990, p. 47–48.

¹⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, 1959, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin, New York, p. 14.

[T]he great writers are those carriers of the standard language (*nositeli literaturnogo iazyka*) who know and feel it best. It is first and foremost they, through their writing, who determine which linguistic elements from the common national language should be incorporated into the standard language. It is they who test the vitality, precision and expressiveness of these elements. That is why the language of literature, of its classics, of the best national writers of prose and poetry, should be considered the most important source for the study of the standard language.¹⁵

Writers and their literary works, then, have a special place in the discourse on linguistic matters and especially the one connected to the maintenance of the standard language. The importance ascribed to writers is also apparent in the tradition of asking writers for their opinion on the state and development of the language, under headings such as “pisateli o iazyke” (*writers on language*).¹⁶ At the same time, in the discourse on literature, writers are subjected to the scrutiny of another group which has traditionally held a significant position in the public discourse—the literary critics, even if their interest has traditionally *not* been with the linguistic features of literary works.¹⁷

Given the importance traditionally ascribed to these two groups in Russian society, and given the increased interest in linguistic matters in Russia in the 1990s, it is interesting to study the reactions of literary critics to the language of Russian writers in this period of linguistic upheaval.¹⁸ In Paulsen 2009, I have looked at the reception of four specific literary works by three writers in the 1990s, *Russkaia krasavitsa* (1990) by Viktor Erofeev, *Norma* (1994) and *Roman* (1995) by Vladimir Sorokin,

15 Quoted in Iu. A. Bel'chikov, 2004, *Akademik V. V. Vinogradov (1895–1969): Traditsii i novatorstvo v nauke o russkom iazyke*, Moscow, p. 84. My translation, МР.

16 See Ingunn Lunde, 2008, “Писатели о языке: Contemporary Russian Writers on the Language Question,” *Russian Language Journal* 58, pp. 3–18.

17 I discuss the role of the critics in contemporary Russian literature in Martin Paulsen, 2008, “Literary Critics in a New Era,” *Studies in East European Thought* 60 (3), pp. 251–60. For a discussion of the traditions of Russian literary criticism, see Birgit Menzel, 2001, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte: Die russische Literaturkritik der Perestrojka*, Cologne.

18 Ingunn Lunde & Tine Roesen, 2006, “Introduction,” *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), eds. I. Lunde & T. Roesen, Bergen, pp. 7–17.

and *Generation "P"* (1999) by Viktor Pelevin. I have deliberately chosen three much-debated writers, in order to make sure that the reviews contain a variety of reactions.¹⁹ In light of the theoretical discussion above it will be interesting to see 1) whether the critics actually comment on the language of the literary works, 2) whether these comments can be regarded as contributions to a linguistic norm negotiation, and 3) if so, what linguistic elements the critics discuss.

My investigation included eight reviews of Erofeev's novel, eleven reviews of Sorokin's two works, and thirty-seven reviews of Pelevin's much discussed novel. More than half of these contain comments on or discussions of the language in the literary works. While some of these are longer discussions of the state and development of language in general, or of language in contemporary literature, others comment on the style or genre of the given work.

In writing about *Russkaia krasavitsa* the critic Alla Marchenko enters into a discussion of the state of the Russian language. The discussion continues the tradition of turning to writers for authoritative opinions on the language, as when Marchenko quotes the poet Osip Mandel'shtam:

Чаадаев, утверждая свое мнение, что у России нет истории, то есть что Россия принадлежит к неорганизованному, неисторическому кругу культурных явлений, упустил одно обстоятельство,—именно язык. Столь высоко организованный, столь органический язык не только дверь в историю, но и сама история. Для России отпадением, отлучением от царства исторической необходимости и преемственности, от свободы и целесообразности было бы отпадение от языка. «Онемение» двух, трех поколений могло бы привести Россию к исторической смерти. Отлучение от языка равносильно для нас отлучению от истории.²⁰

19 A more detailed presentation of the literary works and their authors can be found in Paulsen, 2009.

20 "In maintaining his opinion that Russia has no history, i.e. that Russia belongs to the unorganised, non-historical class of cultural entities, Chaadaev forgot about one factor—the language. So highly organised, so organic a language is not only a door to history, it is history itself. For Russia secession from the language would amount to secession or excommunication from the kingdom of historical inevitability and continuity, from freedom and purpose. The 'numbing' of two or three generations could result in Russia's historical death. For us, excommunication from the language would be tantamount to excommunication from history." Osip Mandel'shtam quoted in Alla Marchenko, 1991, "Unesennye vetrom," *Soglasie* 3, pp. 222–24; p. 223.

This quote is then used to discuss the linguistic situation after the fall of the Soviet Union (which lasted for two to three generations), and Erofeev's place in this picture. Here the literary work of Erofeev and its language serves as starting point for a discussion of the Russian language in a wider perspective. Marchenko is thus less concerned with the specific norms of the language than with the *ideology* of language and its position in society.

Other comments are more directly concerned with the norms of the language. Some critics focus on the quality of the text as literature, while others focus on specific linguistic elements in a more general discussion of linguistic norms. Let me bring in a concrete example. In his review on *Russkaia krasavitsa*, the critic Vadim Balduiev metaphorically compares *mat* (obscene language) with spices:

Ерофеев употребляет некий набор пряностей и специй для приготовления прозы: без «перца» и «чертовщинки» не испечет не то что романа—рассказа мелкого. Сыплет, сыплет острые приправы, брызжет безцензурным матерком—как будто не знает, что все это свидетельствует о потере вкуса к изначальным «продуктам», «ингредиентам» текста—фразам и словам. Здесь вкус слов можно сравнить со вкусом овощей, выращенных на «материнских» метровых черноземах—и в теплице. Искусственные добавки и приправы могут быть острыми, дразнящими, но они травмируют вкусовые рецепторы. Конечно, мат—«речь родная», «русский фольклор», но ее «расцензурирование» в тексте, изданном массовым тиражом, приводит к эффекту, который сродни действию острых добавок.²¹

21 "Erofeev uses a certain assortment of herbs and spices to prepare his prose: without 'pepper' or 'devilry' he will not bake a short story, let alone a novel. He sprinkles and sprinkles seasoning and drizzles on taboo obscenities, as if unaware that all of this points to a loss of taste for the original 'foodstuffs', the 'ingredients' of the text—the phrases and words. Here one could compare the taste of the words with the taste of vegetables cultivated on the 'ancestral' metre-deep black earth—and in a greenhouse. Artificial additives and spices can be spicy and mouthwatering, but they traumatize the taste buds. Obscenities are, of course, part of our 'dear mother tongue' and 'Russian folklore', but the 'detaboosation' of this mother tongue in a text published in large numbers leads to an effect equivalent to that of spicy additives." Vadim Balduiev, 1996, "Viktor Erofeev v labirinte proklyatykh voprosov," *Druzhba narodov* 2, pp. 180–84; p. 181.

The entire paragraph is developed around two metaphors. One describes *mat* as spices, while the other, parallel but less developed, seems to interpret spices as equivalent to greenhouses. Balduiev uses these metaphors to indicate how alien *mat* is to the language, and how it obscures its true nature. One can, of course, discuss how precise and effective his use of these metaphors is, but the main point here is how he uses them to attack the language of Erofeev's novel, and thereby to uphold the norm of a taboo regarding the use of *mat*. The subordinate clause towards the end of the paragraph referring to the large number of copies of the novel should be interpreted as a warning against the effect this language might have on readers of the novel. This particular concern of Balduiev's is seconded by the critic Evgenii Ermolin. His comment is full of contempt for Erofeev's novel:

По первому впечатлению, своеобразие ерофеевской «классики» заключается в том, что ее нельзя давать для чтения подросткам. И вообще каждому читателю лучше набраться мужества перед тем, как открыть книгу, а захлопнув ее—хотя бы тщательно вымыть руки.²²

In this sense Balduiev's and Ermolin's reviews can be interpreted as contributions to a norm negotiation, where they reject the place of *mat* in literature. It is as if they want to say: even if the law no longer protects us against the use of *mat* in literary works, we still think it does not belong there. To return to the terminology of the theoretical discussion of norms above, Erofeev's use of *mat* (as perceived by Balduiev and Ermolin) constitutes implicit norm statements in favour of the acceptability of *mat* in literary works, whereas the critics' rejection of his language is an explicit norm statement against the use of *mat* in literature.

Balduiev and Ermolin's way of interpreting a literary text is challenged by Petr Vail' in his discussion of Sorokin's *Norma* and *Roman*:

²² "The first impression is that the distinctiveness of Erofeev's 'classic' consists in the fact that it should not be given to teenage readers. And in general every reader had better muster some courage before opening the book, and, having closed it, at least wash his hands thoroughly." Evgenii Ermolin, 1996, "Russkii sad, ili Viktor Erofeev bez alibi," *Novyi mir* 12, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1996/12/knoboso4.html.

И вот тут следует сказать важное. С Сорокиным связано одно из досаднейших заблуждений в русском литературном процессе. Из Сорокина охотно вычитывают пафос разрушения, тогда как он по преимуществу—собиратель и хранитель. Чего? Да все тех же стилистических—внеидеологических!—штампов и клише, несущих уверенность и покой. Они обновляются, разнообразно возрождаясь под сорокинским пером, не в ерническом наряде соц-арта, а как знаки стабильности, едва ли не фольклорной устойчивости без времени и границ[.]²³

In Vail's view, Sorokin's style is brilliant. His imitation of the classical Russian novel in *Roman* is on the level of Turgenev and Bunin, his attempts at socialist realism are better, according to Vail, than the Soviet masters themselves, while "Padezh," the part of *Norma* concerned with the destruction of the Russian countryside, is on a par with Platonov's *Kotlovan*. But most importantly, he is a collector and guardian, a "convinced and thorough conserver," of Russian literature and language. The seeming paradox of this characterization is based on the assumption that the linguistic brilliance of Sorokin's texts would not be possible without a thorough feeling and respect for the norms of the Russian language. Thus, Vail implies that the use of a certain word in a literary text does not necessarily imply the author's promotion of that word in the linguistic community. Literature is more complex than that. In this sense, Vail's understanding is less didactic than Balduiev and Ermolin's.

However, there are also examples of comments that are concerned with the language at large. In her review of Pelevin's novel, Irina Rodnianskaia relates comments on language to the wider context of the Russian language community and the language outside literature:

23 "And here an important point needs to be added. Sorokin's name is connected to one of the saddest misunderstandings in the Russian literary process. Sorokin is enthusiastically associated with the pathos of destruction, while in fact he is mainly a collector and guardian. Of what? Exactly those stylistic—non-ideological—stock phrases and clichés, which convey confidence and tranquillity. They are renewed and reborn in various ways by Sorokin's pen, not in the sarcastic attire of sots-art, but rather as signs of stability, of an almost folkloristic steadiness without time and borders." Petr Vail', 1995, "Konservator Sorokin v kontse veka," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 01.02.1995, p. 4.

Да, весь текст Пелевина—волапюк. Только не «серых переводов с английского», как тут же добавляет Немзер, а живого, вьедливого арго. Что делать, если в очередной раз «панталоны, фрак, жилет—всех этих слов в русском нет», а вещи—просто лезут в глаза...²⁴

Alongside several other reviews of *Generation "P"* Rodnianskaia's review forms part of a debate on the language in Pelevin's novel, where the critics comment as much on each others comments as on the novel itself. Like several of the other comments in this particular debate, Rodnianskaia's comment is linked to the use of loan words from English in the novel. However, Rodnianskaia argues that the question of loan words cannot be restricted to the novel, but is the result of fundamental changes in the world that the novel describes with its overwhelming array of novelties. In this respect, her comment also concerns the Russian language as such, i.e. it becomes an argument supporting the use of English loan words in contemporary Russian. By using a quote from the national poet Pushkin, who is considered the founder of the modern Russian standard language, to support her argument, Rodnianskaia produces the trump card in Russian language debates.²⁵ Simultaneously, Pushkin's position as the "founder of the Russian standard language" implies that the use of the quote from *Eugene Onegin* reinforces the link between Rodnianskaia's argument and the negotiation of the norms of the Russian *standard* language. The implication is that English loan words should be allowed not only in literary works, but also in contemporary dictionaries of the Russian standard language.

24 "Yes, Pelevin's entire text is volapük. Only not 'of grey translations from English,' as [the literary critic Andrei] Nemzer hastily adds [in his review of *Generation 'P'*], but of a vivid, pernickety argot. What can you do, if, yet again "'dress coat," "waistcoat," "pantaloons"—in Russian all none of these words are not' while the things are glaringly obvious..." Irina Rodnianskaia, 1999, "Etot mir priduman ne nami," *Novyi mir* 8, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/8/rodnyan.html. The quotation is from A.S. Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as translated by Nabokov (1964, London, vol. 1, p. 108).

25 For a discussion of Pushkin's position in Russian language discourse see Lara Ryzanova-Clarke, 2006, "'The Crystallization of Structures': Linguistic Culture in Putin's Russia," *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), eds. I. Lunde & T. Roesen, Bergen, pp. 31–63; Andrew B. Wachtel, 2006, *Remaining Relevant after Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*, Chicago; Marcus C. Levitt, 1994, *Literatura i politika: Pushkinskii prazdnik 1880 goda*, St Petersburg.

In a similar vein Andrei Minkevich supports Pelevin's use of foreign loan words, indicating that since the language is in constant evolution, the adaptation of new words is only natural:

Спасибо писателю, что он называет рендер—рендером, Public Relation—PR, не путает Fuck с его русским эквивалентом, словом, не пытается говорить со мной на птичьем языке, которого нет. Попробуйте, например, реально подобрать русский перевод слова рендер. Господа критики Пелевина, ваше слово в защиту русского языка. Только помните, что язык—это не идол, не священная книга, а живой процесс.²⁶

In his discussion of Pelevin's novel Minkevich is even more direct in relating its language to the linguistic situation outside of literature. Pelevin copes well, Minkevich indicates, with the challenges of describing the new technological realities of Russia in the 1990s.

However, this enthusiasm is not shared by all critics. Vasilii Beliaev is much more sceptical than both Rodnianskaia and Minkevich about Pelevin's language and his use of foreign loan words:

Пелевин то и дело провирается самым детским образом, когда искажает латинские цитаты, английские и итальянские названия фирм и торговых марок, вообще всяческие иностранные реалии, которыми его текст буквально напичкан. Да что там иностранные слова—наш романист не в ладах и с русским языком.²⁷

26 "A 'thank you' to the author for calling a 'render' a render, 'Public relation'—PR, for not mixing up 'fuck' with its Russian equivalent, in other words, for not trying to talk to me in a gobbledygook language that does not exist. Try, for instance, to find a Russian translation of the word 'render'. Gentlemen critics of Pelevin, have your say in defence of the Russian language. But just remember that language is not an idol, it is not a holy book, but a living process." Andrei Minkevich, 1999, "Pokolenie Pelevina," *Russkii zhurnal*, 08.04.1999, <http://old.russ.ru/krug/99-04-08/minkev.htm>.

27 "Now and again Pelevin slips up in the most infantile way, when he distorts Latin quotations, the names of English and Italian firms and brands, and more generally the various kinds of foreign realities that his text is literally crammed with. But why go on about the foreign words, when our novelist is even at odds with the Russian language?" Vasilii Beliaev, 1999, "Mertvye dushi Viktora Pelevina," *Bogatei*, 01.06.1999, p. 3.

By indicating errors in Pelevin's novel and pointing to a lack of feeling for the language, Beliaev undermines Pelevin's authority in linguistic matters. This strategy, which is used by several of the critics, is directly opposed to Rodnianskaia's use of Pushkin's status to enhance Pelevin's authority, and shows that negotiations take place not only in relation to the language, but also in relation to the status of Pelevin as a writer.

Conclusions

The examples chosen have shed some light on the three questions addressed in this article. First of all, more than half the critics commented on the language of the chosen literary works. Since the literature on this specific question is so limited, it is difficult to assess this result very precisely, but compared to what Birgit Menzel has described as a low interest in linguistic questions among literary critics during the Soviet period, the results seem significant. The critics' interest in linguistic matters might be explained by the controversial character of these works, or by what has been described as an increased linguistic awareness in Russian society in the 1990s.

Secondly, the different comments vary in character. Marchenko's comment was concerned with the ideology of language. The other comments included in this article fit better with my understanding of norm negotiations. Balduiev, Ermolin and Vail' were primarily concerned with the norms of (the language of) literature, even if they touched upon the wider context. Rodnianskaia's, Beliaev's and Minkevich's comments were more closely related to a wider debate about contemporary developments in the Russian language. In Rodnianskaia's case, her comment on the language formed part of a broader discussion about linguistic matters related to Pelevin's novel.

A similar focus dominated the public discourse on the Russian language in the 1990s, and the critics' discussions of Erofeev's, Sorokin's and Pelevin's works, which are studied in greater depth in Paulsen 2009. The fact that the critics' discussions relate mainly to stylistic and lexical matters supports Andersen's thesis about the reduced importance of explicit norm negotiation, as it is concerned with only a limited part of the language. On the other hand, one could say that this kind of explicit norm negotiation is necessarily influenced by the linguistic performance it takes as its point of departure (in this case the literary works), and that

if deviances from the perceived norms are found on a stylistic or lexical level, then the discussion of these works will eventually be based on these deviances.

Needless to say, the excerpts presented here are far from sufficient to allow any far-reaching conclusions, but they serve as examples of how literary criticism can function as an arena for explicit linguistic norm negotiations. Ultimately, it seems to me that the concept of norm negotiations is a promising point of departure for our further investigations into metalanguage.