

## “We Speak Russian!” New Models of Norm Negotiation in the Electronic Media

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THE RANGE of practices that constitute “norm negotiation” is broad. It extends from the traditional activities of specialists such as lexicographers and grammarians, from descriptions of stable and changing aspects of language, to the less professionally informed opinions and questions of everyday users. Purist declarations, however extreme, also count as a form of norm negotiation, to the extent that their pronouncements serve as linguistic marching orders for their peers and readers. Which voices enjoy authority in this regard depends in part on the linguistic ideologies, economies, and technologies of the language culture in question. As Ingunn Lunde’s work on *Pisateli o iazyke* has documented, writers have traditionally enjoyed significant linguistic authority in Russian and Soviet culture, although that may be changing.<sup>1</sup> Less prominent in the Soviet context, although arguably more influential, were the practitioners of what came to be known as *kul’tura rechi*, a practice concerned chiefly with proper usage that emerged as a dominant trend in the 1950s and 60s in academic institutions such as the Russian Language Institute and journals such as *Kul’tura russkoi rechi* and, later, *Russkaia rech’*.<sup>2</sup> While less likely to make headlines than the literary elite, it was this movement that had a major impact on everything from dictionaries and

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

2 Michael S. Gorham, 2010, “Language Ideology and the Evolution of *Kul’tura iazyka* (“Speech Culture”) in Soviet Russia,” forthcoming in *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917–1938*, eds. C. Brandist & K. Chown, London.

professional teaching journals to usage manuals and grade-school textbooks—arguably well into the *perestroika* era.<sup>3</sup>

But just as writers and intellectuals saw their authority wane under the onslaught of more democratic and commercial mass media during the 1990s, so too did the voice of the language mavens recede in prominence. More often than not their work was either overly pedantic (projecting the voice of the preachy or scolding grammar teacher), overly scholastic (steeped in professional jargon inaccessible to the mass user), or (just the opposite) overly simplified. This, together with the technological handicap of being “stuck” in the world of printed monographs and professional journals, meant limited exposure to a narrow audience particularly compared to that of the mass media—the most productive source of the landslide they sought to critique). In this sense, the “playing field” for the language debates was markedly uneven. In fact, opposing participants—those involved in the adoption and reproduction of new language forms—were not even on the same field, let alone playing by the same rules. They operated on altogether different planes of engagement.

Once (beginning roughly in the late 1990s) metalinguistic discourse began making more significant forays into the mass media—mass-audience magazines and newspapers, radio, the internet and even TV—this imbalance began to change. Though still outnumbered by the relatively unmediated influx of violators of linguistic norms (or promulgators of linguistic innovation, depending on how you look at it), they were at least and at last waging their campaign for normalization on the same playing field, unlevel though it may still have been. In radio alone, *Ekho Moskvy*’s “Govorim po-russki,” *Radio-Maiak* and *Golos Rossii*’s “Gramotey,” *Russkaia Sluzhba Novostei*’s “Likbez,” and *Radio Rossiia*’s “S russkogo na russki...” and “Kak eto po-russki” all brought popular forms of language debates to the airwaves. And they usually did so in a manner that was more interactive with the listening public, introducing a more effective, even democratic, venue for norm negotiation (explicit though it may have been). I focus here on “Govorim po-russki!” or “We Speak Russian!” (henceforth GPR), for as one of the longest running and most successful of the lot, it arguably has the most to tell us, first, about the shape

3 Some of the more prominent practitioners of *kul'tura rechi* include V.G. Kostomarov (e.g. 1994, *Iazykovoi vkus epokhi: Iz nabliudenii nad rechevoi praktikoi mass-media*, Moscow) and L.K. Graudina & E.N. Shiriaev (e.g. 2000, *Kul'tura russkoi rechi*, Moscow).

and impact of norm negotiation and folk linguistics in the age of mass and new media and, secondly, about some of the trends and dominant aspects of the discourse on language over the past ten years.<sup>4</sup>

*“We Speak Russian!” History and Profile*

The show began in December 1998 as a weekly broadcast featuring comments, analyses, and etymologies by co-hosts and trained philologists Marina Koroleva and Olga Severskaya. Then the only such program on the air, GPR quickly grew popular and expanded to include a shorter daily rubric, “Kak pravil’no” (“The Correct Way”) hosted by Koroleva, and dedicated specifically to issues of usage. At the request of station producers, they soon expanded again, moving to an hour-long live broadcast on Sunday mornings that included guests, games, prizes, and live interaction with the listening audience.<sup>5</sup> To this day, one may tune in at 10:10 on Sunday mornings and listen to what has become something of a variety show about language, usually hosted by Koroleva, Severskaya, and the *Ekho Moskvy* journalist (and graduate of the GITIS theater school), Kseniia Larina.

According to Severskaya, the GPR listening audience differs little from that of *Ekho Moskvy* as a whole, “since issues of language are of interest to everyone, without exception.” Based on calls received, the most active participants are those with a higher education between the ages of thirty and forty-five, and the number of male, white-collar professionals, seems on the rise.” The reach of GPR, Severskaya notes, extends beyond the live and virtual communities and into Russian classrooms:

Shows about Russian are in demand among teachers—both school teachers and teachers of Russian as a foreign language; they are recorded and used as learning materials in classes. They also allow the putting into practice of monitoring of the media and the public sphere... and resistance against the onslaught of illiterate word usage.<sup>6</sup>

4 The Russian title for the program contains a play on words that gets lost in English translation; it not only implies the declarative “We speak Russian!” but also carries the hortative connotation of “Let’s speak Russian!”—dual modalities which nicely reflect the multiple functions of the program.

5 Marina Koroleva, 2003, *Govorim po-russki s Marinoi Korolevoi*, Moscow, pp. 3–4. Related to this is the rubric “Spravochnoe biuro” (“Reference Desk”), which dates back at least to May 2001.

6 From personal correspondence with the author (8 September 2008).

The structure of the show has evolved over time—no small reason being the need to keep listeners engaged and ratings up—and has expanded into other media spheres as well, turning what was once just a radio show into something of a multimedia institution.<sup>7</sup> Both Koroleva and Severskaya have authored regular language columns in print venues—Koroleva in the eponymous column “GPR” for *Rossiiskaia gazeta* from 2003 to the present and Severskaya in *Vremia MN*, under the heading of “Slovo za slovo” (“Word for Word,” 2003) “GPR” in *Rodnaia gazeta* (from 2006–2007), and “Kul’tura rechi” (“Speech Culture”) and “Sprashivali? Otvechaem!” (“You Asked? We Answer!”) in *Russkii iazyk*.<sup>8</sup> Each has published a book based on material from the show.<sup>9</sup> They debuted on the internet with a discussion forum linked to the site, which exists to this day but has taken on a life largely independent of the show. More recently they have integrated SMS, blitz polling, and blogs to create additional ways of engaging folk linguists in the debates.<sup>10</sup>

A closer look at the format of the show suggests that much of its success stems from a winning mix of enlightenment, engagement, and entertainment. It offers a host of informational rubrics, background on various aspects of the history of the language, language-related resources, and reports on matters of language policy. It provides nuts-and-bolts explanations of usage issues, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes in the form of set rubrics such as the previously mentioned “Kak pravil’no?” and “Spravochnoe biuro,” and “Radio-al’manakh” (“Radio Almanac”). At least in its later manifestations, the show has also involved a considerable amount of give-and-take through the discussion formats, listener and reader comments and questions submitted by phone, SMS, email or blog. Its interactive component also comes in the form of “play”—on-air quiz questions and games that occupy nearly one-half of the broadcast in

7 On the ratings-driven need to devise new ways of keeping and attracting listeners, Severskaya writes “the infamous ‘rating’ and ‘share’, as they begin to fall, force us to quickly change the conception of the show.” From personal correspondence with the author (8 September 2008).

8 Koroleva’s columns for *Rossiiskaia gazeta* are available online at <http://www.rg.ru/plus/koroleva>.

9 Koroleva, 2003; Ol’ga Severskaia, 2004, *Govorim po-russki s Ol’goi Severskoi*, Moscow.

10 The GPR forum archive contains entries dating back to 1 October 1999. See <http://speakrus.ru/index.htm>. For a discussion on the role of folk linguistics in language culture, see Deborah Cameron, 1995, *Verbal Hygiene*, London.

its more recent form and give listeners the chance to test their language skills and win some sort of edifying prize. (The current title of the program, “GPR: Peredacha-Igra” (“GPR: Game Show”) underscores the notion of metalanguage as entertainment.)

### *Varieties of Norm Negotiation*

I would like to look more closely at the content of the show to give a clearer sense of the variety of ways GPR functions as a venue for norm negotiation. In doing so I will distinguish between two types of norm negotiation. One I’ll call “authoritative” norm negotiation, by which I mean more “top-down” metalinguistic practices such as clarifying, articulating and generating rules, laws, or guidelines about what is right and wrong, proper and improper. Here, the “negotiation” takes place essentially on unequal turf, between the authoritative hosts or guests and one of two audiences—either users in search of answers (in advice mode), or the perpetrators of linguistic violations (in policing/monitoring mode).<sup>11</sup> The second type of norm negotiation I’ll call “democratic,” for lack of a better term, and by this I mean more interactive, give-and-take, discussion and debate between hosts and listeners or readers. Here the negotiation more actively includes parties on all sides, although it is clear that the views of the hosts hold more sway (they are still the specialists, choose the themes, direct discussion and often select user input). In many cases, it should be added, the two modes of negotiation can easily, and often do, overlap.

“Authoritative” norm negotiation more closely resembles the traditional practice of *kul'tura rechi*, where there are relatively clear lines between “specialist” and everyday language user, and the latter more often than not is expected to abide by the professional pronouncements of the former. Despite the traditional nature of the practice, however, its transposition into a weekly interactive radio show instills the old practice with new vibrancy and relevance. This comes in part from the energy and spontaneity that the live format brings to discussions of even the oldest of thread-worn issues. The regularity of the broadcasts also brings a degree of relevancy often untenable for published books—a piece on the

11 One may well question the status of this sort of activity as “negotiation”; I retain the term, qualified by inclusion in quotes, to acknowledge the listener’s ability, even in this more top-down form of attempted inculcation, to react—be it in the form of adoption, modified personalization, or rejection.

lexicon of balls and dancing at New Year celebrations (1 January 2003), one on the origin of *shpargalki* during university entrance exams (18 June 2000), a discussion of Putinisms in the wake of the former president's final press conference (17 February 2008); or a piece on "the language of *top-menedzhery*" in the winter of 2006 when the new Russian production novels by Minaev, Robski and others were all the rage (5 February 2006).<sup>12</sup> Finally, the show injects traditional *kul'tura rechi* with new life by offering an entertaining mix of subgenres that strike the right balance between sparkle and substance.

One such subgenre is what has been called, in other venues, "linguistic first-aid," a quick-response mechanism designed to help listeners (and internet readers) solve their usage problems (e.g. Which is it—*kUkhonnyi* or *kukhOnnyi*? How about *odnovrEmennyi* vs. *odnovremEnnyi*? 29 April 2007). A related practice comes in the form of what might be called "linguistic self-help"—concrete instructions and advice to listeners geared toward maneuvering through everyday situations. For listeners concerned about job-related speech etiquette, for instance, the 8 January 2006 broadcast discussed the use of "ty" vs. "vy" in the workplace, and two months later the hosts reached out to job-seeking listeners by discussing appropriate and inappropriate language for interviews (12 March 2006). A 21 November 2004 show casts its net wider to all those interested in improving their speech skills by tackling the question, Можно ли научить красиво и правильно говорить? ("Is it possible to learn how to speak prettily and correctly?") and inviting two guest specialists from the speech department of the Shchukinskii theater institute to offer their views (which are unsurprisingly optimistic about the prospects given that they have just written a book called *104 Exercises in Diction and Pronunciation for Independent Work*).<sup>13</sup>

Another productive type of authoritative norm negotiation comes in the form of linguistic enlightenment—commentaries and rubrics dedicated to educating listeners on a variety of language topics, from the set-piece archaisms, foreign loans and vulgarisms (Забывтые слова ("Forgotten words")), Иностранцы в русском ("Foreigners in Russian") and

12 All cited shows are listed by the date on which the show aired and are listed by that date at the GPR show archive at <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/speakrus/>.

13 Anna Brusser & Mariia Ossovskaia, 2004, *104 uprazhneniia po diktsii i orfoepii dlia samostoiatel'noi raboty*, Moscow.

Сильные словечки (“Rude words”)) mentioned above to forays into the history of the Russian language to offer listeners glimpses of Russian’s linguistic past—such as the decade-by-decade run through of the linguistic high and lowlights of the Soviet era that aired during the summer of 2000 (e.g. the Ushakov dictionary for the 1940s, the origins and proper usage of *изменник Родины* (“traitor of the Motherland”) for the 1950s).<sup>14</sup>

A third productive authoritative practice falls into the category of “language monitoring” or “policing” of public discourse. Again, it is a time-honored practice by language specialists, but here the frequency and interactive nature allow the hosts of GPR to do it in a more engaging, more immediately relevant, and more sustained manner. In December 2003–February 2004, for instance, they dedicated a “mini-series” to the language of advertising. Later that same year they addressed the rampant use of the parasitic (*слово-паразит*) на самом деле (“in reality”) suggesting that it functioned as something of a verbal antidote to the ubiquitous *как бы* (“seemingly”)—itself, they argue, a phraseological indicator of the profound uncertainty that colored Russian perspectives through the 1990s (6 November 2005).

Other subgenres of more authoritative norm negotiation include reports on contemporary Russian language policy and legislation, such as the 2000 draft legislation “On the Russian language as the state language of the RF” (22 November 2000), the status of Russian in countries of the “near abroad” (featuring one country per show, November–December 2002), and an initiative to require upper-level bureaucrats to pass a Russian language proficiency test (21 April 2004).

They also integrate metalinguistic public relations in the form of book reviews and guest specialists, in effect killing two birds with one stone—getting synopses of the content on language issues out while also giving second life, or double exposure, to the authors and resources in question. On 22 November 2000, for example, they discussed the launch of the new, government-backed language “portal” *Russkii iazyk* ([www.gramota.ru](http://www.gramota.ru)). The rubric *Наш детский сад* (“Our kindergarten”) appears later in the same broadcast, and is based on readings on children’s language from

14 The entertaining presentation of the “history of the language, popularizing knowledge about language and the achievements of national and international Russian studies,” ranks high in Severskaya’s own list of goals for the program—along with “showing [listeners] the place of language in the life of contemporary society.” From personal correspondence with the author (8 September 2008).

Kornei Chukovskii's *Ot dvukh do piati* (*From Two to Five*). For an extended stint in 2001 the hosts integrated the notorious mangling of Russian by leading Russian politicians collected in *Itogi* magazine's regular rubric "Mezhdometiia" ("Interjections," e.g. 31 January 2001), thus extending scope and shelf-life of this jocular form of public, metalinguistic shaming.<sup>15</sup>

### *Folk-linguistic Practices*

While many of the above-mentioned practices resemble the traditional spheres of influence of language specialists, nearly all can be re-scripted as more democratic practices by drawing on the interactive interfaces accessible to the various branches of the GPR project. (Severskaya, at least, sees the hosts' function not so much as that of edifiers as that of interlocutors sensitive to the needs and interests of listeners: "We study our listeners and offer them that which is essential to them at the moment. We do not preach (поучаем), but rather reason together with them.") Take the practice of language monitoring as a case in point. Rather than penning a description of or diatribe against neologisms that have entered or "distorted" the contemporary mass media, the GPR hosts enlist listeners to offer their own discoveries, then publish the collective labor in the form of a список отвратительных неологизмов ("list of disgusting neologisms") on the GPR website in the form of an "internet event" (интернет-акция).<sup>16</sup> They have orchestrated a similar "event" dedicated to "Hated Forms of Address" (Эти ненавистные обращения!)<sup>17</sup> and on 30 June 2006 organized a "popular monitoring" (народный мониторинг) of the mass media called Сегодня в эфире—завтра в вашей квартире? ("On the air today—in your apartment tomorrow?"), in which listeners

15 Featured guests are too numerous to list in full, but include Vladimir Voinovich, Svetlana Ter-Minasova, Vladimir Lopatin, and Vladimir Elistratov. Featured books are still more plentiful (including titles by all of the previously mentioned guests), ranging from Gasan Guseinov, 2003, *D.S.P.: Materialy k russkomu slovariu obshchestvenno-politicheskogo iazyka xx veka*, Moscow (discussed on 18 December 2003) to Pavel Klubkov, 2004, *Govorite, pozhaluista, pravil'no*, St. Petersburg, 2000 (discussed on 8 January 2004).

16 <http://www.echo.msk.ru/doc/152.html>. Among the more frequently mentioned words: *kreativ* (*kreativnost'*, *kreativnyi*), *glamour*, *vau*, *gotichnyi*, *vintazh* (*vintazhnyi*), *kazhul'nyi*—*elitnyi*, *piar* (*piarshchik*, *otpiarit'*, *propiarit'*), *merchendaizer*, *otnosheniia*, *korochi*, *messedzh*, and *trend*.

17 <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/words/42037>. The five most hated turning out to be женщина, дама/дамочка, брат/братан/брателло, сударыня and товарищ.



were instructed to collect mistakes they heard on the air and send them in to GPR.

Another democratic format introduced by the hosts earlier this year is the blitz survey conducted live on air by having listeners call in to cast votes for one of two positions on an issue (e.g. dial one number for “yes,” another for “no”). Some of the issues they have polled listeners on: whether or not they find the colorful language of Vladimir Putin appealing (20% “yes,” 80% “no”); whether or not the language of Russian Orthodox Church services should be translated from Old Church Slavonic to modern Russian (57% “yes,” 43% “no”); and “for” or “against” the rehabilitation of товарищ (“comrade,” 43% “for,” 57% “against”).

Inevitably, integrating more democratic forms of folk linguistics (i.e. opportunities for non-specialists to put forward their own opinions on and knowledge of language) into a forum traditionally reserved for authoritative declarations leads to metalinguistic tension and conflict, particularly in instances where both opinions and sources of authority become contested. Just such an encounter emerged in the 18 May 2008 episode, centering on the very issue of norms (a rarity in fact) and featuring a guest specialist in pronunciation, or orthoepy (in Russian, *orfoepiia*), Mariia Kalenchuk.<sup>18</sup> I would like to quote some extended passages of the program to give a better sense of the nature of the tension between “folk” and “specialist,” and the heightened urgency it assumes in the context of a live broadcast that invites real-time contributions from listeners. Olga Severskaya opens the show by introducing the guest, underscoring in the process the long list of titles that give her authority to offer pronouncements on orthoepy and norms:

О. СЕВЕРСКАЯ: Наш гость—главный человек по орфоэпии, заместитель директора Академического Института русского языка, председатель фонетической комиссии РАН, доктор филологических наук, профессор Мария Каленчук. Я перечислила часть титулов. Если буду дальше, это будет слишком долго.<sup>19</sup>

18 Both an audio recording and a printed transcript of the complete broadcast can be found at <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/speakrus/514670-echo>.

19 “O. Severskaya: Our guest is the main authority on orthoepy, Assistant Director of the Academy Institute of Russian Language, chair of the phonetics commission of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a Doctor of Philology, Professor Mariia Kalenchuk. I have listed only a selection of her titles. If I were to continue it would take too long.” All translations are my own.

Almost immediately, however, the show's other host, Kseniia Larina, complicates the situation by bringing up a proposition from an online contributor essentially questioning the real authority of the specialists: aren't they, in essence, simply beholden to the dominant usage practices of the speaking population?

К. ЛАРИНА: Прежде чем начнем наш разговор, я хочу вспомнить одну свою встречу, о которой уже упоминала [...]. Михаил Казаков сетовал: «Вот увидите, через какое-то время словари зафиксируют слово «звОнит», потому что так говорит 70% российского населения». Он был убежден, что именно так оно и происходит. Если население настаивает, то ученые в конце концов вынуждены будут подправить кое-какие ударения в словарях. Так ли это?<sup>20</sup>

Larina's position as the only non-philologist among the three regular hosts turns out to be quite interesting and important from the perspective of folk linguistics, as she ends up more often than not asking questions and offering opinions one might more readily associate with the non-specialist—that is, either a more populist position with regard to language practices or a viscerally patriotic one. In this episode, as suggested by the quote above, we see her in the former role.

Telling in this exchange, however, is the degree to which Kalenchuk relies on her authority as specialist (as well as that of the authorities who proceeded her) in establishing normative boundaries. Here is her response to Larina's opening volley, laden itself with weighty foreign loans and technical terms:

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Добрый день! Это не совсем так, слава богу. Дело в том, что не все, что нам предлагает стихийный поток речи (а это—невероятное разнообразие живых вариантов), становится нормой. Для этого надо разобраться, что мы считаем нормой:

20 “K. Larina: Before we begin our conversation, I would like to recall a meeting which I have already mentioned [...]. Mikhail Kazakov laments, ‘Now you’ll see—after some time dictionaries will record the word ‘ZvOnit’ because that’s the way 70% of the Russian population speak’. He was convinced that that was the way it happened. If the populace insists, then scholars will, in the end, have to correct some word stress in the dictionaries, right?”

нормой произносительной—орфоэпической нормой—принято считать те особенности произношения, которые свойственны образованным людям; те особенности произношения, которые закреплены в специальных словарях и справочниках. Поэтому вопрос, что из реального речевого потока (или, как говорят лингвисты—из узуса) становится нормой и по каким критериям присваивается тому или другому произносительному варианту статус нормы. Это вопрос чрезвычайно сложный.

Надо сказать, что есть некоторые заданные критерии. Во-первых, несомненно, что литературный язык—это язык культуры, и чрезвычайно важно, чтобы не прервалась связь времен, поэтому мы не можем позволить, чтобы хаотично и очень быстро изменялась наша норма. Если это произойдет, то очень скоро мы не сможем читать Пушкина, Льва Толстого. Если язык начнет очень быстро развиваться [...], то традиция прервется, и для нас язык вековой давности станет чужим языком, от которого мы такое эстетическое удовольствие получать не сможем. Вы знаете, мне очень нравится выражение замечательного нашего лингвиста Евгения Дмитриевича Поливанова, который говорил, что «один из законов развития любого литературного языка в том, что он все менее и менее развивается». Или, как говорил Михаил Викторович Панов, другой наш замечательный лингвист: «В языке прогрессивно то, что консервативно». Поэтому в какой-то мере мы вынуждены набрасывать определенную узду, не давая нормам развиваться очень быстро и сменять друг друга. В то же время, помимо этого, мы должны отбирать в качестве нормы. Это делают те, кто кодифицирует и официально закрепляет в словарях, справочниках и иных пособиях нормы. По сути дела, это интуитивно делают носители литературного произношения. Мы должны закреплять только то, что отвечает внутренним законам языка.<sup>21</sup>

21 “M. Kalenchuk: Good morning! It doesn't quite work that way, thank God. The thing is, not everything that the natural flow of speech presents to us (and this is an unbelievable variety of living variants) becomes a norm. To understand this, we have to clarify what we mean by 'norm': pronunciation norms, orthoepic norms—are typically understood as those pronunciation features that are characteristic of educated people, pronunciation features that are codified in special dictionaries and guides. For this reason, the question is what of real speech flow (or “usage” as linguists call

In the invocation of “complex” technical explanations, quotes from a “who’s who” of linguistic icons, and references to “predetermined criteria” and “internal laws,” we find a fantastic example of a discourse of linguistic power that would have us believe that we are saved from total linguistic “chaos” (a state in which we could no longer even understand each other, let alone the literary classics) by those select “educated people” who intuitively use the “right” form and those linguists who lock this proper usage into dictionaries and guidebooks and thereby “bridle” language’s dangerous potential to get out of hand. Additional authority is recruited through quotes of various patriarchs of language (here Polivanov and Panov) who attest to the essentially conservative nature of language change (a point which seems to undermine Kalenchuk’s warnings of unbridled linguistic chaos).

After running through a laundry list of some of the more contentious normative issues (*zvOnIt’* vs. *zvOnit’*, the gender of *kofe*, etc.) Larina steps back and asks a broader question on behalf of the multiple folk linguists of the listening audience who are sending in examples and counter examples that bring into question the very validity or “lawfulness” (правомерность) of norms in the first place. She does not really get a direct answer at first—just a reiteration of the orthodox pronunciation. When pressed, the specialist suggests that, in part, it is up to specialists, and in part, it is a matter of a “social contract.” Larina’s skepticism is un-

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it) becomes a norm and by what criteria does one or another pronunciation variety acquire the status of norm. This is an extraordinarily complicated issue.//I should say that there are certain predetermined criteria. First of all, there’s no question that the literary language is the language of culture and it is extremely important that the link between eras is not broken, and for this reason we cannot allow our norms to change chaotically and very quickly. If this happens then we will very soon be unable to read Pushkin, Lev Tolstoy. If the language begins to develop very quickly..., then tradition will be broken off and the language of centuries gone by will become an alien language for us and no longer be able to provide us with such esthetic pleasure. You know, I very much like the expression of our great linguist Evgenii Dmitrievich Polivanov, who said that ‘one of the laws of development of any literary language is that it develops less and less’. Or, as Mikhail Viktorovich Panov, another one of our great linguists, said, ‘In language, that which is conservative is progressive’. For this reason we are obliged to a certain extent to pull at the bridle, preventing norms from developing very quickly and replacing one another. At the same time, in addition to this, we must be selective in choosing what constitutes a norm. This is done by those who codify and officially fix norms in dictionaries, guides, and other manuals. As a matter of fact, those with a mastery of the literary language do this intuitively. We must fix only that which abides by the internal laws of language.”

derscored when she catches Kalenchuk using a normatively questionable term herself:

К. ЛАРИНА: Скажите, пожалуйста, насколько вообще правомерны споры об ударении? Потому что на каждую вашу норму наши слушатели приведут 225 тысяч аргументов против этой нормы, потому что, например: «А как же слово «рог»? Где звонкое окончание?». Или наоборот, слово «бог» [бох], которое многие произносят как [бог].

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Только [бох] и можно произносить.

К. ЛАРИНА: Конечно. Или, например, пишут по поводу [звОнит] и [звонИт].

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Вот Вы один вопрос озвучили, давайте я на него отвечу.

К. ЛАРИНА: А правильно говорить «вопрос озвучили»?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Мне не нравится, честно говоря. Но сейчас часто говорят: «озвучить проблему», например, — в телевизионной речи. Это, конечно, мне кажется нарушением культуры речи.

К. ЛАРИНА: Так вот вопрос простой: насколько дискуссионны эти разговоры?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Дискуссионны, как и должны, потому что норма в определенной мере—это наш с вами социальный договор. И здесь нет никакого стопроцентного инструмента, чтобы мы могли сказать, что так правильно, а так—неправильно. Это специалисты-профессионалы, специалисты в первую очередь по орфоэпии, анализируют каждый конкретный случай, учитывая, несомненно, и частоту распространения вариантов.<sup>22</sup>

22 “K. Larina: In general, how valid are debates about stress? Because for every one of your norms our listeners have put forward 225 thousand arguments against those norms, because, for example: ‘What about the word “rog” (‘horn’)? Where’s the voiced ending there?’ Or just the opposite, such as the word “bog” [bokh] (‘god’), which many pronounce as [bog].//M. Kalenchuk: It can only be pronounced [bokh].//K. Larina: Of course. Or, for instance, they are writing about [zvOnit] (‘calls’) and [zvонIt].//M. Kalenchuk: You have already vocalized (ozvuchili) one question; give me a chance to answer it.//K. Larina: Is it proper to say “vocalize a question?”//M. Kalenchuk: I don’t like it, to be honest. But nowadays they often say “vocalize an issue,” for example, in television speech. That, of course, seems to me to be a violation of speech culture.//K. Larina: Then the question is simple: to what extent are these conversations debatable?//M. Kalenchuk: They are debatable, as they should be, because a

Paying little attention to the underlying contradiction between the claim that norms are a “social contract” and thus debatable among everyday users and the assertion that their validity is determined by the detailed analyses of “professional specialists,” Larina (again speaking on behalf of the listening audience) presses on:

К. ЛАРИНА: Вот Вам еще целый список: «Я не сторонник тех, кто [звОнит] и [лОжит]. Но как мне объяснить, что [ходить]—[хОдит], [бродить]—[брОдит], [стонать]—[стОнет], [мочить]—[мОчит], [точить]—[тОчит], [писать]—[пИшет], а [звонить]—почему-то [звонИт]?»—спрашивает Дима?<sup>23</sup>

Kalenchuk offers a long, technical answer that ends with a “reassurance” to concerned listeners that the situation really is not all that bad—that only four percent of words in Russian have shifting stress.

Meanwhile, the questions keep rolling in, this time articulated by Severskaya in regard to *obespechEnie*—*obespEchenie* (“provision”). Here, after a series of relatively authoritative declarations of a proper form, Kalenchuk deems both variants permissible—a liberalism that surprises and distresses Larina:

О. СЕВЕРСКАЯ: Вот у нас есть еще вопросы с нашей sms-ленты. Трудно не воспользоваться возможностью услышать авторитетное мнение. [обеспЕчение] или [обеспечЕНИЕ].

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: И так, и так.

К. ЛАРИНА: Почему? Раньше был только один вариант.

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Дело в том, что просто это соответствует определенной тенденции.

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norm to a certain extent is our social contract. And there is no one-hundred percent instrument that would allow us to say that this way is right, that way is wrong. It is the professional specialists, specialists first and foremost in pronunciation, who analyze each concrete instance, taking into consideration, no doubt, the frequency of dissemination of variants as well.”

23 “K. Larina: Here’s a whole list for you: Dima writes, ‘I’m not a big supporter of those who *zvOnit* (phone) and *lOzhit* (lies). But how do you explain to me that [the third-person singular form of] *khodit’* (to walk) is *khOdit* (walks), *brodit’* (to wander) is *brOdit*, *stonat’* (to moan) is *stOnet* (moans), *mochit’*—*mOchit* (to soak—soaks), *tochit’*—*tOchit* (to sharpen—sharpens), *pisat’*—*pIshet* (to write—writes), but for some reason *zvonit’* (to call) is *zvOnIt* (calls)?”

К. ЛАРИНА: Когда появилась вторая норма? Когда Владимир Владимирович Путин начал так говорить?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Ничего подобного! Конечно, нет. Эта норма давным-давно закреплена в орфоэпических словарях. Сначала вторая из них была менее предпочтительная. А сейчас они идут как абсолютно равноправные. А с Вашей точки зрения, какая норма правильнее?

К. ЛАРИНА: По моему, [обеспЕчение] все-таки.

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Да, [обеспЕчение] более правильно, это классически. Но сейчас этот перенос вполне допустим.

К. ЛАРИНА: А [мЫшление]?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Для меня [мЫшление]—неверно окрашенное слово. Причем окрашенное именно социально. Но тем не менее, действительно это слышно все чаще и чаще из очень авторитетных уст, что пока все-таки не дает возможность нам считать это нормой.

О. СЕВЕРСКАЯ: [в сЕти] или [в сетИ]?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: И так, и так.

К. ЛАРИНА: Все и так, и так.

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Нет, не все и так, и так. В данном случае только.

К. ЛАРИНА: А как лучше, как правильнее?<sup>24</sup>

Again Larina as a representative of folk linguists shows an equal measure of deference to the specialist and her role in dictating norms and frustration over the specialist's apparent equivocating, suggesting in a half-joking way that, as in other spheres, phoneticians take their cues from

24 "O. Severskaya: Now we have more questions from the sms feed. It's hard not to take advantage of the chance to hear an authoritative opinion: *obespEchenie* or *obespechE-nie*?//M. Kalenchuk: Both.//K. Larina: Why? There used to be just one variant.//M. Kalenchuk: The thing is that it simply corresponds to a specific tendency. //K. Larina: When did the second norm appear? When Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin began to speak that way?//M. Kalenchuk: Nothing of the sort! Of course not! This norm has long been fixed in orthoepic dictionaries. First the second version was the less preferred of the two, but now they appear as absolute equals....//K. Larina: And *mYshlenie*?//M. Kalenchuk: For me, *mYshlenie* is an incorrectly colored word. What's more, it is colored socially. Nevertheless, it is heard more and more often from very authoritative lips, which still does not give us the chance to consider it a norm. //O. Severskaya: *v sEti* ili [on the web] or *v setI*?//M. Kalenchuk: Both.//K. Larina: Always both.//M. Kalenchuk: No, not always both. In the current case only. //K. Larina: Still—which is better, more correct?"

political leaders when establishing the ground rules for proper speech. What good are linguistic authorities, she essentially asks, if they cannot provide clarity to murky aspects of language usage?

As the discussion about the need for norms continues, Larina attempts to negotiate with Kalenchuk, suggesting that a variant qualifies as a norm when seventy percent of the speaking population use it:

К. ЛАРИНА: Подождите! Все-таки я хочу понять, зачем тогда нужны жесткие нормы, если они так быстро могут изменить себе.

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Во-первых, они вовсе даже не быстрые.

К. ЛАРИНА: С помощью тех людей, которые сами эти нормы могут корезить как угодно. А мы потом считаем процентное содержание: ага, 70% говорит так—давайте тогда пойдем навстречу.<sup>25</sup>

But the specialist will have nothing to do with such accommodation, returning to her favorite theme of “internal laws of language,” which in this case relegate the fashionable term *imidzh*, due to its violation of the natural law of devoiced consonants in word-ending positions (pronounced with the Anglicized [*imidzh*] rather than according to Russian devoicing rules [*imitsh*]), to the bone pile of “aggressive Anglicisms”:

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Нет, это не так. Я уже не один раз отмечала сегодня на разных примерах, что то, что 70% говорит так, это не значит, что это норма. Только тогда такой процент в употреблении какого-то варианта можно считать основанием для придания ему нормативного статуса, если при этом соблюдены всякие другие условия культурной традиции. А самое главное—соответствие внутренним языковым законам. Вот я сегодня говорила, что подавляющее большинство молодого поколения скажет [*imidzh*], потому что они все агрессивно англоязычны. Но нет ни малейших намеков на то, что это нормативное произношение. Только тогда, когда мы складываем разные причины и раз-

25 “K. Larina: Wait a minute! I still want to understand why, then, we need strict norms, if they can change so quickly.//M. Kalenchuk: First of all, they are not at all quick.//K. Larina: With the help of those people who can bend the norms as they see fit. Then let’s count the percentage content, ah yes, seventy percent say it this way—then let’s accommodate it.”



ные условия функционирования вариантов, мы можем делать вывод о будущем и перспективе. Не все то, что мы слышим во-круг, является нормой.<sup>26</sup>

After another series of inquiries, Larina tries another tack—this one exposing the vulnerability, frustration, and doubt felt by many who have had to struggle to abide by the norms handed down from on high:

К. ЛАРИНА: А почему удобнее говорить неправильно?

М. КАЛЕНЧУК: Почему? Смотря кому, простите, удобнее!

О. СЕВЕРСКАЯ: Вот тебе удобно говорить [средства]?

К. ЛАРИНА: Нет.<sup>27</sup>

Kalenchuk's automatic comeback (смотря кому, простите, удобнее) makes it clear that, in the end, norms are essentially a mark of distinction that some by dint of their birthright or education have acquired effortlessly, while others, who have not felt compelled to struggle to master the established norms in order to make it, suffer from the repression of their own socially acceptable standards.<sup>28</sup>

It is for this reason as much as any that Larina and other folk linguists express the simultaneous and somewhat contradictory desire to know the rule and frustration over the complexity of the rules (or seeming lack

26 "M. Kalenchuk: No, it doesn't work that way. I've noted on more than one occasion today using various examples that the fact that seventy percent of people say something a certain way does not mean that it is a norm. You can only consider seventy percent usage of a certain variant grounds for attributing normative status to a form when at the same time certain other conditions of cultural tradition are met. The most important is the conformity with the internal laws of language. For instance, I've said today that the vast majority of the younger generation will say [*imidzh*], because they are all aggressively English-language oriented. But there isn't the slightest hint that this is normative pronunciation. Only when we combine various reasons and various conditions of the functioning of variants can we draw conclusions about the future and prospects. Not everything we hear around us is a norm."

27 "K. Larina: So why is speaking incorrectly more comfortable?//M. Kalenchuk: How so? More comfortable for whom, if you'll pardon my asking?//O. Sevskaya: Is it more comfortable for you to say [sredstvA (means)]?//K. Larina: No."

28 For a discussion of language norms as markers of cultural distinction, see Pierre Bourdieu, 1990, "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language," *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. J.B. Thompson, trans. G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 43-65.

of rules), underscoring the notion that only a chosen few are able to successfully maneuver through the minefield of norms. And yet try they do; despite expressions of frustration and exasperation, they still proceed to play the call-in game shows, testing their mastery of (in this episode) pronunciation norms—such as the stress pattern in the oblique forms of деньги (“money”) and the proper pronunciation of мусоропровод (“garbage chute”). In this sense, even the give-and-take format of the GPR project, as diverse as it can be in both form and content, not only marks a new style of norm negotiation, but, in the end, constitutes an institution of normalization as well—and one arguably more effective by virtue of its messier, more democratic structure.

### *Thematic trends*

By early 2007, Koroleva was actively using her *Ekho Moskvy* blog to get feedback on upcoming topics, a move that both raised the authority of the voice of the folk linguist and gave the hosts more raw data for commentary on some of the more burning issues of the day.<sup>29</sup> If the GPR forum, from its inception in 1999, was quite often a site for negotiating norms on the level of proper usage, the GPR blog, given Koroleva’s participation and initiation of discussion questions, has served more as a virtual public sphere for the engagement of broader issues of language, those more connected to trends, attitudes, and identity. Put differently, rather than the more eternal conundrums of proper usage, such as the perniciousness of *zvOnit* and *obezpechEnie*, it seems to be the bigger issues that are most closely linked to the language culture in a state of flux and more readily linked to issues of Russian national identity that engage folk linguists.

A closer look at the types of topics taken up by the show over ten years reveals the following themes as most dominant: the language of the mass media, the barbarization of Russian (foreign loans), issues of language and national identity, and the criminalization and vulgarization of Russian. One also finds an interesting trend in the relative dominance of these themes over time that suggests a growing sense of stability (as opposed to chaos) in the contemporary language culture. More specifically, there seems to be a perceptible shift in attention from what might be called pernicious sources of linguistic pollution in the early years of the broadcast to more positive, “organic” features in more recent years. Issues

29 <http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/markorol>.

of barbarization, vulgarization, and criminalization have always featured prominently on GPR, but the relative attention to them has declined. And when they are addressed, they arise in a far more tempered and nuanced context—as in the 16 November 2007 discussion, introduced as Нашествие англицизм: нужно ли бороться? (“The onslaught of Anglicisms: need we fight it?”) (not Как бороться? (“How do we fight it?”), as we may well have seen it phrased half a decade earlier). In a similar manner, the 10 February 2008 show takes up the often discussed issue of youth slang, but in an unlikely fashion: “Might it make sense to ‘legalize’ (узаконить) youth slang in schools and universities? In forcing them to write according to the norm, are we not, in some way, turning them away from normative language in revulsion?”<sup>30</sup>

Also indicative of this “normalization” is the tenor of the 22 March 2007 broadcast dedicated to the speech style and correctness of current television broadcasters, where the main thrust of the discussion is that, while there has been noticeable improvement in the area of accuracy and general literacy, the language of news anchors and talk show hosts now suffers from a monotonous conventionality. The lack of stylistic variety, they conclude, suggests that “norms” are being misinterpreted as “uniformity” of discourse.<sup>31</sup>

In more recent years, the thematic focus has seemed less concerned with the threat of external invasion or even internal threats to the national tongue (such as *mat*, *blatnaia muzyka*, *zhargon*); instead you see themes more geared to defining, redefining (and in some cases even expanding) the linguistic markers of national identity from within. Among the issues taken up in the past year alone: Why do we use so many diminutives? (3

30 In the course of the discussion, the hosts agree that, more important than avoiding it altogether is cultivating the ability to know when to switch in and out of the register. It is worth mentioning that, while “legalize” here is used metaphorically, the issue of linguistic expertise and libel has become more prominent in recent years, suggesting a more law-based orientation toward language usage. Cf. Daniel Weiss’s contribution to this book.

31 Compare this to the 14 October 2007 edition dedicated to Неправильности в речи (“Mistakes in speech”), where the issue presented for discussion was Слова паразиты—вредят речь или помогают? (“Parasitic words: do they harm speech or help it?”) under the hypothesis that they add color to the language and are more memorable. (In this case, the show’s hosts proved, at least on the surface, to be more tolerant than listeners, who almost without exception alluded to the perniciousness of the phenomenon.)

February 2008); Should Russians do away with the formal *vy* altogether and switch for good to *ty*? (16 December 2007); Should Russia switch over entirely to the Latin alphabet? (26 August 2007) How do we foster a love for reading among the general public? (24 February 2008); Do the words *intelligentsia*, *intelligent*, *intelligentnyi* have any meaning anymore? (30 March 2008); Should Russian be made the official language of the CIS? (22 June 2008); Should the Russian Orthodox Church service be conducted entirely in Russian? (27 April 2008); Should *rossiiskii*, as the term adopted by El'tsin to indicate Russian Federation citizens, be replaced simply by *ruskii*? (23 November 2007).

In some cases, such as the debate over *rossiiskii*—*ruskii*, these more “organic” topics generate some of the fiercest debates; in others, such as the discussion of nurturing reading, switching to *ty*, or adopting the Latin alphabet, they fall flat largely because there is near-total unanimity of opinion (“for” nurturing reading and “against” the second two propositions). If everyone is either “for” or “against,” it is hard to get worked up about an issue. Where there is little evidence of contested norms, in other words, there is not much negotiating to be done.

If this truly represents a growing trend towards “normalization,” as I am suggesting, then one wonders about the sustainability of projects like *Govorim po-russki*—despite the success they have had in bringing both language monitoring and norm negotiation more prominently into the public sphere and doing so in a more democratic manner. One sees this tension in Olga Severskaya’s explanation as to why people tune into GPR:

Нашу передачу слушают потому, что защита и сохранение русского языка в последнее десятилетие стало национальной идеей, объединив разные слои общества вне социально-экономической стратификации. Кроме того, просто интересно и полезно—удается и удовлетворить любопытство, и получить ответ на практический вопрос (обращаются редакторы, школьники и их родители).<sup>32</sup>

32 “People listen to our show because the defense and preservation of the Russian language have, over the past decade, become a national idea that has united different layers of society without regard to socioeconomic stratification. In addition, it is simply interesting and useful: one can satisfy one’s curiosity and get an answer to a practical question (editors, schoolchildren, and parents alike turn to us).” From personal correspondence with the author (8 September 2008).

No doubt there will always be usage issues that give rise to the need for some form of negotiation, be it authoritative, democratic, or some mix of the two. But will this be enough to keep GPR alive? Once the big identity questions have been more or less resolved, how likely is it that the phones will be ringing off the hook to chime in on the *ty-vy* debate, or the revival of Old Church Slavonic instruction in the schools (13 July 2008)? I would wager not very likely, but there is certainly the possibility that in some format this show and projects like it will carry on—in part due to the age-old reverence in Russia for the spoken and written word; in part because people like to play games, test their mastery, and hear themselves on the radio; and in part, perhaps, due to the possibility of looming linguistic landslides of a different sort. As Severskaya herself puts it, “Сегодня ясно, что расширение аудитории происходит за счет увеличения доли интерактива и за счет усиления «сотрудничества» со слушателем: ему нравится самому определять темы дискуссии.”<sup>33</sup> If the views of the co-host hold any weight on this matter, then the future success of the show will depend not so much on the state of the language as on the degree to which the producers are able to enhance democratic forms of engagement—a point which speaks to the growing influence of folk linguists in helping negotiate norms and define the ever-changing contours of the Russian language culture.

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33 “It is clear today that the expansion of the audience takes place as a result of the increase in the amount of interactivity and the strengthening of ‘collaboration’ with listeners: they like to determine the topics of discussion themselves.” From personal correspondence with the author (8 September 2008).