

Reviews

From Poets to Padonki: Linguistic Authority and Norm Negotiation in Modern Russian Culture, edited by Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen, [Slavica Bergensia 9]. Bergen: Department of Foreign Languages University of Bergen, 2009. pp. 348, £17.00, ISBN: 978-82-90249-35-4. Language: English and Russian.

From Poets to Padonki focuses on ‘Russian language culture of the post-revolutionary and post-Soviet periods, times when norms – linguistic and otherwise – have been eagerly debated, challenged, broken and redefined’ (p.7), in the words of its co-editors, Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen. The book is an outcome of a four-year interdisciplinary project entitled ‘Landslide of the Norm: Linguistic Liberalization and Literary Development in Russia in the 1920s and 1990s’ and it centres on both the explicit and implicit norm negotiations in the Russian-speaking community.

The book questions the multiplicity of meanings of the ‘linguistic norm’ in modern Russian language culture. The ongoing dialectic interaction of professional (prescriptive) and popular (‘lay’) perspectives is well illustrated throughout the collection, making it, for the most part, an informative and engaging study, rich in empirical detail. It is a collection of chapters by seventeen contributors from different countries and research fields. Each of the chapters assembled in this collection explores various aspects of linguistic practice and language culture (literary fiction, aesthetics, linguistic play, internet slang, blogs, etc.) and are discussed in turn.

The first chapter ‘Living Norms’ by Henning Andersen discusses the notion of the ‘norm’ and provides a theoretical framework for the book. After comparing declarative (descriptive and experiential) norms and deontic (prescriptive and living) norms, Andersen considers specific features of the Russian linguistic tradition. He claims that both the linguists and ordinary Russian speakers tend to equate the ‘norm’ with the norms of the standard language (prescriptive norms) rather than with any other norms. The author of the second chapter ‘Norm Negotiation in Russian Literary Criticism’, Martin Paulsen, argues that explicit norm negotiation (meta-language) should be seen as an integral part of language in any society. He dedicates his chapter to the analysis of meta-linguistic reflection in post-Soviet literary culture. Paulsen studies the responses to the language question by literary critics in Russia in the 1990s and asserts that it should be understood within the general language debates of that period.

Vera Zvereva underlines the meta-linguistic component of these discussions and reflects on the changing attitudes towards the *padonki* style, by exploring online debates about a particular Rунet slang [*iazyk padonkov*]. The author shows that, since its emergence in the

1990s, *iazzyk padonkov* explicates the process of linguistic norm negotiations and triggers reflexivity about these changes. The playful and reflexive experimentation with the language within the *padonki* style is a complex phenomenon that reflects the nature of online communication (freedom of expression, pragmatism, etc.) and allows community building, manifestation of various subcultures and testing of symbolic power. Elena Markasova continues Zvereva's study of the interaction between explicit and implicit norm negotiation by examining the grammatical category of parentheticals. Comparative analysis between text corpora (the Russian National Corpus) and school children's comments on the usage of parenthetical expressions in contemporary Russian language illuminates a number of similarities. The ongoing changes in the semantics (perception of certain parentheticals as archaic) correspond to the frequency of their everyday usage.

In the next chapter 'Wrong Is the New Right. Or Is It? Linguistic Identity in Russian Writers' Weblogs', Ellen Rutten scrutinizes discrepancies between the writers' metalinguistic statements about their own style of writing and their actual linguistic practices in blogs. The case of Tat'iana Tolstaia, a contemporary Russian writer of renown, illustrates the ways in which the actual linguistic performance in Tolstaia's blog differs from the purist views (explicit meta-language) adopted by the writer. The debate about meta-language as a linguistic practice continues in the following chapter by Ingunn Lunde. After providing a brief introduction to the history of performative meta-language, Lunde outlines tendencies within Russian cultural practice. Referring to the negotiation of linguistic norms within such genres as *Duponisms*, internet Russian and linguistic humour, Lunde notes that performative meta-language can alter perception of linguistic norms and ideologies.

Next, Tine Roesen considers the performative meta-discourse in her analysis of Aleksei Slapovskii's novel *Oni* [They]. The adherence to a particular set of linguistic norms by M.M. (one of the main characters of the novel), who fails to establish his own denotative language, is contrasted to the lexical creativity of Slapovskii himself and his commentary on the negotiation of linguistic norms in today's Russia. Dirk Uffelmann also addresses norm negotiations in literary language and posits continuity between Sorokin's early novel *Norma* [Norm] and his recent work *Den' Oprichnika* [Oprichnik's Day]. He demonstrates that the author's attitude towards norms has undergone certain changes: excessive use of 'norma' and characters' compliance with the norm in *Norma* are in contrast with the marginalization of references to 'norma' and the dominant role of commands in *Den' Oprichnika*. At the same time, Uffelmann shows Sorokin's consistent application of linguistic norms to negotiate social norms.

This is followed by Karin Grell's inquiry into Sorokin's and Tsvetaeva's texts. She notes that both authors utilise the ongoing ideological clashes in vernacular Russia to foreground an aesthetic dimension of their works. They alter the semantics of established genres: '*Krysolov* [The Pied Piper], *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* [Marina's Thirtieth Love] could thus be read as a social satire, and at the same time as an illustration of the finalizing action of the artists' language, staged by discursive as well as allegorical means' (p.183).

Peter Alberg Jensen finds Pasternak's rejection of the norm informative for our understanding of how the poet perceives language (conventional norms) and relates it to historical norms. He asserts that for Pasternak this opposition to the norm constitutes true artistic representation. Genrich Kirshbaum persists with the theme of creative norm breaking in his analysis of the writings of Formalists and their critics (using the works of Tynianov and Jakobson).

He suggests that innovative norm breaking should be placed within a wider cultural context. Of particular interest here is the transformations of the ambiguous notion of ‘landslide of the norm’ [opolzen’ normy] introduced by Jakobson in 1934, as the term constitutes the main premise of the book. In the next chapter, through the example of Pasternak’s poetry, Suzanna Witt offers another perspective on deviation from the norm. While Jensen’s chapter, discussed above, looks at the aesthetic and philosophical problems in Pasternak’s representation of reality, Witt claims that the practice of distortion [iskazhenie] in Pasternak’s literary practice can be viewed through the prism of creativity and originality.

The theme of creativity in norm negotiation continues in the chapter by Boris Norman, who investigates the phenomenon of ‘semanticization of form’ (a play on semantic shifts based on a formal similarity between words). He looks at language play in informal speech, contemporary slang (especially in computer jargon), newspaper publications, advertisements and so forth. The abundant examples of ‘semanticization of form’ are used to scrutinize directions of change in contemporary Russian language.

The next chapter by Daniel Weiss evaluates the most typical legal cases which require linguistic expertise in norm negotiation. He focuses on three types of implicit information: the absence of modal markers, presuppositions and conversational implicatures. His analysis of legal practice elucidates the need to clarify the meaning of concrete phrases (e.g. when dealing with ‘verbal crimes’) and the language of the law itself. In the next chapter ‘Instruments of Incomplete Communication in the Blogosphere’, Gasan Guseinov speculates on norm negotiation in blogs. He convincingly argues that the appeal to such rhetorical devices as *errativ* (a deliberate mis-spelling) and *liturativ* (a style of breaking the norm by constructing a multilayered message when the ‘erased’ {usually inappropriate} text remains visible) is partially conditioned by the new media logic.

Lara Ryazanova-Clarke’s chapter (‘How Upright is the Vertical? Ideological Norm Negotiation in Russian Media Discourse’) highlights the process of ideological norm negotiation by looking at the notion ‘*vertikal*’ [vertical of power] during Putin’s presidency. The author compares the semantic evolution of ideologeme ‘*vertikal*’ in official discourse (in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*) and counter-discourse (on radio show ‘*The Melted Cheese*’ by Viktor Shenderovich). The variety of alternative meanings constructed by Shenderovich’s satirical semantic manipulation explicates the dynamic of norm negotiation within a wider media discourse in contemporary Russia.

In the final chapter, ‘We Speak Russian! New Models of Norm Negotiation in the Electronic Media’, Michael S. Gorham outlines the top-down and bottom-up ways of norm negotiation in the popular show ‘*Govorim po-russki!*’ [We speak Russian!]. He states that in the context of ongoing media convergence (the analysis included radio broadcast, blog and interactive internet projects) the ‘authoritative’ trend of establishing rules and asserting guidelines has been supplemented with a more interactive (‘democratic’) approach adopted by the show’s host. Gorham concludes that interaction between the host and the listeners highlights a more pragmatic attitude towards the issues of language cultivation.

The strength of the book lies in the selection of the material, which brings to light ‘the *intersection* between linguistic authority and creative response, prescriptive regulations and concrete practices, explicit and implicit meta-language’ (p.11). At the same time, the structure of the volume might have benefited from a more systematic approach. For instance, sev-

eral chapters pursuing similar approaches or covering related linguistic domains might have been better interlinked and arranged in separate relevant sections, depending on the arena of the ‘talk about talk’ (new media platforms, ‘talk’ in various institutions such as courtroom, analysis of specific literary texts, etc.).

Another confusing aspect of the publication is the inclusion of papers both in Russian and English language. This might constitute an obstacle for those readers who are proficient only in one language and/or lack knowledge of Russian culture. Further, the transliteration of various Russian words into English varies on occasion. Fortunately, this does not hamper the flow of the argument.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this collective work is unique. Much of the material in the volume identifies new points of discussion and ongoing lines of further investigation, particularly in the area of linguistic norm negotiation in online media. This book can be recommended for teachers and students of media, linguistics, cultural studies, sociology and area studies. This novel collection will also be of interest to a wider readership concerned with the recent developments of the Russian language culture.

GALINA MIAZHEVICH is the Gorbachev Media Research Fellow at Christ Church, University of Oxford, UK and is also an associate of the Rothermere American Institute and the Reuters Institute for Journalism, University of Oxford, UK. She is working on several projects dealing with (i) mass-media representations of terrorism and the ‘security-threat’ discourse, (ii) the interaction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ media in post-communist societies and (iii) issues of press freedom in the post-Soviet media (using the treatment of inter-ethnic cohesion as a case study). [e-mail: galina.miazhevich@rai.ox.ac.uk]