

Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen, eds. *From poets to padonki: Linguistic authority and norm negotiation in modern Russian culture*. Bergen: University of Bergen, 2009. [*Slavica Bergensia*, 9.]

Reviewed by Anastassia Zabrodskaia

The issues discussed in *From poets to padonki* became a part of my life in 1999 when I began my university studies and using Russian and Estonian became my everyday reality. Choosing different languages for different purposes, code-switching, and multilingual language play have all been part of my daily language use for the last eleven years. This collection challenges definitions of what can be meant by “language”, “standard” language, and the linguistic “norm”. It acquaints readers with a wide range of linguistic phenomena in modern Russian culture. *Padonki* refers to a subculture within the Russian-speaking Internet (Runet), whose representatives use erratic spellings for words, aiming at creating a comic effect. Their nickname *padonki* itself illustrates such a trend—it is an alteration of *podonki* ‘dregs’. *Padonki* is also characterized by gratuitous use of profanity and a penchant for obscene subjects.

During the last decade, a body of literature has emerged proposing that (socio)linguists direct their attention away from the traditional focus of linguistics, i.e., language as a bounded system, towards broader semiotic resources, to see what is really going on when people use “language” (Stroud 2003, Jacquemet 2005, Shohamy 2006, Makoni and Pennycook 2007, Blommaert 2010). The notion of “language” becomes especially questionable in cases of (multilingual) computer-mediated communication. The last decade has also witnessed rising scholarly interest in language on and of the Internet in general and in e-mails and postings on Internet discussion forums or message boards in particular (e.g., Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou 2003, Palfreyman and al Khalil 2003, Hinrichs 2006, Dorleijn and Nortier 2009, Androutopoulos 2006, 2009). García (2009: 32) instead of “language” offers a more suitable term for the multiple discursive practices—*linguaging*, i.e., “social practices that are actions performed by our meaning-making selves.” For her, dialects, pidgins, creoles, and academic language

are all examples of languaging, as there are differences between language practices at home, in communities, and in academic contexts. I would argue that standard languages are idealized constructs, and none can remain unaffected by language contacts during its entire history. While studying language use by individuals, it is important to shift “from focus on structure to focus on function—from focus on linguistic form in isolation to linguistic form in human context” (Hymes 1974: 77). The volume under review offers fascinating reading for (socio)linguists, who work with different manifestations of real language practices rather than seeking for linguistic norm descriptions. Comprising 17 contributions written in English and Russian, the book summarizes analyses of the norm in modern Russian language culture based on data from multiple sources: “literary fiction, Internet slang, literary criticism and aesthetics, writers’ blogs, linguistic play, and various arenas for ‘talk about talk,’ such as the classroom, blogs, the media, the courtroom, etc.” (11).

The book opens with Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen’s excellent general introduction, an insightful synthesis of how various approaches to the standard Russian language, its norms, and linguistic standards see the history, development, and future of the Russian language culture.

The first paper, “Living norms” by Henning Andersen, gives a comprehensive overview of the history and development of the notion of language norms. Andersen reviews historical contributions to the understanding of norms. Making a distinction between declarative and deontic norms and dividing them further into explicit and implicit norms, he highlights the leading ideas in the field of (socio)linguistic studies that concern the position of norms. On the example of excerpts from Soviet grammars and dictionaries, he illustrates how norms can be governed from above by agencies of the state. “The standard norms include only prescribed and permitted forms”, and all other forms must be avoided (25). Andersen also comments on spoken language standards, noting that “the [Russian] language continues to be spoken effectively in its numerous variants all over the inherited Russian language area as well as in the diasporas, old and new” (32).

Martin Paulsen continues the discussion about the norms of the language in his contribution “Norm negotiation in Russian literary criticism”. Discussing the relationship between the norms of the Russian language, literature, and literary criticism, Paulsen starts with the

reminder that “historically, literature has played an important role in debates on language.” The best example of that is “the Russian term for standard language, *literaturnyi iazyk* (literally: *literary language*)” (39). Examining eight reviews of Viktor Erofeev’s novel *Russkaja krasavica*, eleven reviews of Vladimir Sorokin’s *Norma* and *Roman*, and thirty-seven reviews of Viktor Pelevin’s *Generation “P”*, he concentrates on how language is perceived in connection with the reception of literary fiction. He finds that more than half of the critics are somehow concerned about the language in the fiction, specifying that “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” (41). He explains this phenomenon by the rising linguistic awareness in Russian society after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. It is noteworthy that while some reviews discuss language ideology, the others touch upon the topic of norms in the language of literature.

In her paper “‘Jazyk padonkaŕ’: Diskussii pol’zovatelej Runeta” (“The language of the dregs: Discussion among Runet users”), Vera Zvereva discusses linguistic performance characterized by numerous deviations from the standard norms on the lexical level and graphical corruptions used as Internet slang by Runet bloggers. This performance is known as *jazyk padonkaŕ* ‘the language of the dregs, or as *olbanskij jazyk* ‘Albanian’. The main characteristic of such languaging is deliberate distortion of the customary shape of a word and ostentatious contrast to the common orthography: e.g., the spelling *padonkaŕ* instead of the normative *podonkov*. Zvereva pays special attention to metalinguistic comments and attitudes towards *padonki* style and standard language use. This paper started me to thinking that maybe the use of a non-standard language is not necessarily life-threatening, although a deliberate corruption of a standard language is similar to death for a civilized human being. Undoubtedly, *jazyk padonkaŕ* might have a significant negative impact on the use of Russian. Zvereva notices that “bol’sinstvo pol’zovatelej ulovilo osnovnoe poslanie ‘olbanskogo’: èto udobnyj, bystryj jazyk neformal’nogo obščeniya v Seti, i, èto nemalovažno, on legitimirovan soobščestvom Runeta ‘razrešen’ k ispol’zovaniju. Osobeno čutko na èto otreagirovali tinejdžery, kotorye načinajut ne tol’ko pisat’, no i razgovarivat’ (i, možet byt’, dumat’) s ispol’zovaniem lingvističeskix izobretenij ‘padonkov’” (“The majority of users caught the main message of *olbanskij*: this is convenient, quick

language for informal communication on the Internet, and not insignificantly it is legitimized by the Runet community, 'permitted' for use. Especially keen in reacting to this are teenagers (*tinejdžery*), who start not only writing but also speaking (and, maybe, even thinking) using linguistic inventions of *padonki*") (79).

As Zvereva ends up with the conclusions about the language attitudes of young people, Elena Markasova's contribution "'Ja ne upotrebljaju drevnie vvodnye slova...': (o sud'be vvodnyx konstrukcij v russkom jazyke poslednego desjatiletija)" ("I do not use old parenthetical words...': [on the fate of parenthetical constructions in Russian of the last decade]") continues on the topic of contemporary Russian language usage among young Saint-Petersburgers, examining parentheticals in the Russian National Corpus. The paper gives an overview of metalinguistic comments about parentheticals and their use in modern Russian and to show the linguistic intuitions and awareness of young people. For example, *čestno govorja* 'to tell the truth' is altered to *po česnoku*, punning with the word for 'garlic'. For them, parentheticals are artificial elements of written texts fabricated by adults.

Ellen Ruten's contribution "Wrong is the new right. Or is it? Linguistic identity in Russian writers' weblogs" analyzes the weblog *tanyant* by essayist and public intellectual Tat'iana Tolstaia. She examines how Tolstaia's metalinguistic reflections on blogging correspond to the language of her postings. "Her blog permanently ranks among the fifty widest read blogs in Russia, and some of her posts receive over a thousand reader comments" (108). Although Tolstaia claimed in an interview: "I try to avoid this schoolteacherism as much as possible. But I do try to show the essential things in both men and women" (Laird 1999: 113), Ruten concludes that, in practice, she reveals herself as a schoolteacher through and through. For example, on her blog Tolstaia states a comment as an imperative: "Bljat' pišetsja čerez 't', 'bljad' — čerez 'd'. Bljad' — suščestvitel'noe, bljat' — meždometie" ("Bljat' [fuck!] is written with a 't', 'bljad' [whore] with a 'd'. 'Bljad' is a noun, 'bljat' an interjection") (103–04).

Ingunn Lunde starts her paper, "Performative metalanguage: Negotiating norms through verbal action", with a duponism, *Slova i vešči ne ostaoljajte bez prismotra* ('Do not leave your words or things unattended'), where *vešči* can mean both 'things' and 'luggage'. (Duponisms are unexpected juxtapositions of sounds and meanings, the distortion, abbreviation, and dissociation of words with the aim of de-

stroying the customary algorithms of thinking and speech.) Lunde explains that some metalinguistic comments address language explicitly, whereas others are concerned with concrete linguistics practices. Examining word-formation practices, the genre of duponisms, linguistic humor, and the Russian used in Internet discourse, Lunde provides a characterization of modern Russian negotiating norms.

“The old man’s new language: Semantic shifts and linguistic countermeasures in Aleksei Slapovskii’s *Oni*”, by Tine Roesen, analyzes the perception of the linguistic norm by Slapovskii’s 67-year-old character Mikhail Mikhailovich Nemeshev. In struggling with ideological language, the partisan (or paranoid) Nemeshev shows a deep understanding of linguistic behavior. Citing examples of Nemeshev’s perceiving language, Roesen illustrates who, for this character, the real enemy is and why. On the one hand, Nemeshev is consoled by the thought of foreign words as an external enemy that only fortifies the Russian soul. On the other hand, he thinks that the real danger is in changes in language performance perception—*rodnye slova budto kto-to podmenil* “it’s as though our native words have been switched by someone” (133). This is done by the real enemy—“the invisible they.”

Dirk Uffelmann’s article, “The compliance with and imposition of social and linguistic norms in Sorokin’s *Norma* and *Den’ oprichnika*”, deals with the setting of norms on the example of two works by Vladimir Sorokin, one of his earliest and a recent one. *Norma*, written over several years around 1980, Uffelmann suggests might be subdivided into sociological and metaliterary parts, where the norm is first imposed by Soviet state power and then by the entire life of Soviet man from his *normal’nye rody* ‘normal birth’ to *normal’naja smert’* ‘normal death’. (Uffelmann’s discussion of the use of the adverb *normal’no* ‘normally’ reminded me of my brother’s answer. “normal’no” when on his medical school application he was asked about his attitude toward the Komsomol. This being 1988 or 1989, the committee only smiled.) The second work Uffelmann discusses was written in 2006. Here Sorokin displays social norms in a neo-totalitarian society. Uffelmann discusses the nature of linguistic and social norms in the two novels, analyzing their commonalities and differences.

In her paper, “When non-negotiation is the norm: Sorokin’s *Tridtsataia liubov’ Mariny* and Tsvetaeva’s *Krysolov*”, Karin Grell compares works by Sorokin and Tsvetaeva and claims that Sorokin’s Marina in *Marina’s thirtieth love* (written between 1982 and 1984) is

“somebody modeled upon or referring to the author Marina Tsve-taeva” (175). Grelz argues that “both works can be interpreted as declarations of a non-negoti[able] standpoint when it comes to the aesthetic dimension, and as demonstration of the artist’s ability to escape, by the force of his or her own word, the world of social and ideological conflict and value-laden social languages” (168).

The focus of Peter Alberg Jensen’s essayistic paper, “‘Mir, kotoryj stal sam ne svoj’ v èstetike molodogo Pasternaka” (“‘World that became not itself’ in the aesthetics of young Pasternak”) is the radical philosophy of Pasternak’s work. If the nature of life is continuous motion and change, then the meaning of culture is something fixed and stable. Jensen states that Pasternak’s creative search arose from his desire to leave culture and to enter the world of nature or real life. Jensen analyses Pasternak’s texts “Pervye opyty”, exploring the psychological and literary implications of realizing the norm. Jensen comments on Pasternak’s youthful experiments as “aesthetic phenomenology” or “phenomenology of lyric work,” noting that although he does not use the word *norma* in discussing reality as perceived by an artist in moments of inspiration, he uses other words that are potential substitutes, such as *podčinenie*, *kontur*, *očerk* ‘subordination, contour, outline’ (185–86). Jensen concludes that Pasternak succeeded in naming things, thus making them free from words.

Heinrich Kirschbaum’s contribution, “‘Opolzen’ Opojaza’: Obraz opolznja v rabotax formalistov” (“The Opojaz landslide: The image of landslide in the works of the formalists”), reconstructs the history of the notion *opolzen’ normy* ‘the landslide of the norm’, its usage in criticism and self-criticism of the Russian formalists, and its conceptual and terminological potential. The St. Petersburg Opojaz (the Russian acronym for Society for the Study of Poetic Language) was, like Linguistic Circle of Moscow, a group of Russian formalists. It emphasized the functional role of literary devices and had an original conception of literary history. It propagated a “scientific” method for studying poetic language, to the exclusion of traditional psychological and cultural-historical approaches. *Opolzen’* ‘landslide’ is a geological term which describes downward movement, connoting slow, inexorable decline. Kirschbaum examines the image of the landslide in prose and its place in the ideology of the Opojaz movement, the landslide of norms and life (*byt*) in general, and the landslide of the norm in particular. Kirschbaum concludes that “v istorii upotreblenija obraza opolznja

normy zastyl tragedičeskij opolzen' samogo Opojaza" ("in the history of the usage of the image of the landslide of the norm is embedded the tragic downfall of Opojaz itself") (211).

Susanna Witt's paper, "Pasternak's *Iskazhenie* and the practice of creative evolution", sends the reader back to the literary practice of the Russian and Soviet poet, novelist, and translator Boris Pasternak. It might seem that this paper is misplaced, better grouped with Jensen's Pasternak paper. But on reading one notices that in her interpretation Witt uses formalist motifs that would not be fully understandable without the preceding contribution by Kirschbaum which views the landslide phenomenon in the literature of the 1920s.

Boris Norman's paper, "Sdvig v značenii, osnovannyj na formal'nom sxodstve slov" ("Shift in meaning, based on the formal similarity of words"), brings into the discussion the notions of creativity, language play, and originality. Using literary excerpts as well as examples from newspapers and advertisements, Norman shows how words show varying degrees of similarity. A lot depends on a word's phonetic realization and morphosyntactic structure, semantics, lexical meaning, and pragmatic connotations. All these strategies are creatively employed by Russian writers, journalists, and copywriters. For example, in Yekaterinburg a student newspaper is named *studen'* 'aspic'; this has nothing to do with that food, only with the formal similarity to the word *student* 'student'.

In his contribution "Sudebnaja èkspertiza i vklad lingvista v interpretaciju zakona" ("Forensic expertise and the contribution of the linguist to the interpretation of the law"), Daniel Weiss presents cases in Russian legal procedure where linguistic analysis is in order. He seeks to clarify what norms are considered in interpreting laws, as well as in the treatment of linguistic practices that might break the law. A newspaper headline cited in Lunde's paper (115) is an example of the playful language that characterizes the goals of Weiss' work, namely, *Urok prava pisanija: Na kakom jazyke i s kakimi ošibkami pišutsja rosskijskie zakony*. Note that *prava pisanija* is ambiguous between 'orthography' and 'the right to write'.

Gasán Guseinov's article, "Instrumenty opisanija nepolnoj komunikacii v blogosfere" ("Tools for describing insufficient communication in the blogosphere") discusses the phenomenon of 'insufficient communication' (*nepolnaja komunikacija*) or pleonasm. Guseinov discusses two of those tools, *liturativy* and *ètrativy*. *Liturativy* are words

that are crossed out (struck through) which convey a blunt, sometimes obscene, part of the message while ostensibly canceling it. *Ėrrativy* are deliberately misspelled words, e.g., *afftar* for *avtor* and *krosavčeg* for *krasavčik*, intended to give the communication a more playful tone.

In “How upright is the vertical? Ideological norm negotiation in Russian media discourse”, Lara Ryazanova-Clarke examines the semantic development of the word *vertikal’* ‘vertical line’ in post-Soviet public discourse. *Vertikal’ vlasti* refers to the vertical structure of authority whereby regional leaders are appointed by the president (289). The expression became especially popular during Vladimir Putin’s presidential term, both in official pronouncements and in the discourse of the opposition. The author states that the counter-meanings for ‘vertical of power’ arise “from engaging with the dominant senses in order to reveal their unspoken, underlying assumptions” (305). An example to illustrate this: *Vertikal’ vlasti—ona ž na to i dana, čtob ee porezat’ na kusočki i tolknut’ nalevo* (“The vertical of power has been given to us so that it can be cut into pieces and sold on the black market’ [311]).

The final article, “We speak Russian! New models of norm negotiation in the electronic media”, by Michael S. Gorham, is devoted to the analysis of the metalinguistic discourse of the radio program *Govorim po-russki!*, which he says is “one of the longest running and most successful of the lot” (316). It is worthwhile to mention that this radio program started in December 1998. Due to that fact, Gorham proposes, it might show “the shape and impact of norm negotiation and folk linguistics in the age of mass and new media,” as well as “some of the trends and dominant aspects of the discourse on language over the past ten years” (316–17). Gorham provides examples of topics for discussion on normative language that have quite a broad scope: “from the set-piece archaisms, foreign loans, and vulgarisms... to forays into the history of the Russian language” (320–21). The author also exemplifies the role of the audience in language topics negotiation via folk-linguistic practices.

The collection of papers ends with notes on the contributors and a name index. The current review has outlined and specified several points that make Russian language issues—such as discussion of its ‘standards’, ‘norms’, and ‘landslides’ in the post-USSR—relevant for general (socio)linguistic research on language use, change, and development. It is my educated guess that, in addition to the change of so-

cio-political and sociolinguistic circumstances, a closer look at Russian language use and dynamics in post-Soviet countries would also be useful. This is one among several reasons why an investigation of the modern Russian language norm and its negation by both common users and local linguistic authorities in post-Soviet space can provide a substantial pool of empirical data necessary for advancing the general theory. Research on Soviet language development and trends would gain a lot if real Russian spoken and written language data could be collected and more data-driven case studies conducted in order to enable a comparative view of the modern Russian language 'norms', their negotiation and creation in the whole post-Soviet space. Hopefully, in the nearest future, contributions to Russian language data from post-Soviet republics will appear and new norms and traditions will become known to scholars.

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