**Legitimacy of Russian English**

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Abstract

The paper substantiates the argument that though oriented towards the British or American model in education, proficient Russian users of English speak Russian English, which is a variety within the family of world Englishes and cannot be associated only with stigmatized Ruslish spoken by uneducated communicators from Russia. As an exonormative variety, Russian English is characterized by a greater variability of standards (as compared with varieties native to their speakers). It is systematically distinct from other varieties, usually has certain traces of the Russian language native to its users, and is underpinned by the Russian culture and mentality. As such, it is used as a secondary means to single out Russian identity in intercultural communication.

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1. *Introduction*

With its global spread as the language of intercultural communication, English has reached the majority of the countries, acquiring an ethnic name and serving as a means of local culture expression to the international community. This has resulted in the emergence of new varieties of English, which occur in three circles as singled out by Braj Kachru 1985 [1]: in the Inner Circle, not only British and American Englishes, but also Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, Irish Englishes; in the Outer Circle, Indian, Philippine, Singapore, South African, Nigerian, Ghanaian, and other Englishes; in the Expanding Circle, German, Italian, Sweden, Finnish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other Englishes.

While the status of Englishes in the Inner Circle is immaculate, varieties of the Outer Circle are still raising some questions about their standing, though fewer and fewer lately; however, legitimacy of the Expanding Circle varieties is an issue of great controversy and debate (for example, see Seargeant and Tagg [2]; D’Angelo [3]), although the argument that nowadays English belongs to all those who use it is rarely impugned. Heated debates, for example, take place every time I speak about Russian English at conferences held in Russia, for we are more inclined to accept other Englishes than our own. The old educational postulate that we study and speak British (or at least, American) English is in the minds of Russian teachers and learners who are still not ready to recognize that their English is none the less different from the model they teach or learn. In this case a variety is confused ex facto with a model of teaching, i.e. “a linguistic ideal which a teacher and a learner keep in mind in imparting instruction or in learning a language.” (Kachru [4: 117]). Though most schools in Russia are oriented towards the British English model, the output of the learning process does not coincide with its input. As B. Seidlhofer put it rightly: “…the English that is taught, it is usually not the English that is learnt, and… it is the English that is learnt that is put to use in international communication” [5: 194]. I dare to claim that the output of Russian education is Russian English, which should not be regarded as a stigmatized phenomenon. Quite the other way around, Russian English is a variety characteristic of educated Russian users who are able to maintain English-language intercultural communication, especially when talking about themselves and Russian culture [6].

*2. Russian English as a variety*

To characterize Russian English as a variety, let us first regard the criteria that underlie this concept.

According to a linguistic dictionary, a variety is defined as “any form of a language seen as systematically **distinct** from others” [7: 236]. In general, Russian speech in English can be easily recognized by an accent, intonation, sometimes choice of words and collocations, word order or word forms. Distinctive features of Russian English have been characterized as traces of the Russian language transfer (e.g., ***Mornings*** *we usually spent at the beach*, with the object fronting; *International* ***scientific*** *journal****“Philological Sciences (Scientific Essays of Higher Education)”,*** with the substitution of the words *scholarly, research* by *scientific, science* ofthe more general meaning; ... *way to safety, constancy,* ***tranquillity,*** with asyndetical connection between the parallel parts of the sentence; *Poklonnaja mountain is the most significant monument constructed in honour of victory in the* ***Great Patriotic War****,* with the expression *the Great Patriotic War* translated from Russian). Distinctive features are also due to the fact that Russian English serves to express Russian culture and reflects Russian history (as is seen in the example above). Like other varieties of English, Russian English is sometimes characterized by creative innovations as they reflect a specific Russian worldview (*home task; groupmate; Palace of Culture; gubernatorial election*) and allow linguistic play on words (*We are not MaiDOWNS*; *Духless*, a novel by Sergei Minaev).

By pointing to the specific linguistic features that are attributed to Russian English we by no means claim that these features are typical of all Russian speakers of English. Any variety is generalization of the language of a speech community, with average indexes serving as distinctive features on this or that level of the language structure. As the representation of speech of the entire community, a variety is not homogeneous. To reveal this, the World Englishes Paradigm has borrowed the concepts of three lects from Creolistics, placing them along the bilingual cline, or continuum “both in terms of *proficiency* in English, and in its *functional* uses” [8: 77]: 1) acrolect corresponds to the near-native performance in a formal setting with the emphasis on observing rules of International Standard English; 2) mesolect is part of the continuum that is used by educated speakers of English in an informal setting or it may be characteristic of a formal setting when due to some reasons (fatigue, nervousness, or stress) educated speakers partly lose control over their speech; 3) basilect is typical of not well-educated users of English; therefore, basilect is associated with broken English. Normally, the description of distinctive features of a variety is based on the mesolectal part of the continuum that has most of the features, innovative and deviative from the norm. These linguistic features, viewed as typical mistakes in erratology [9; 10], which is an ELT discipline, are just trends revealing the language potential development. But since they are productive and systematic, they are signposts of a certain variety, in our case of Russian English that is not a deficient form of the language but embraces all three lects of the continuum. Russian English includes acrolectal, mesolectal, and basilectal forms and usages depending on the user’s proficiency, state of mind, and context of situation.

Awareness of the distinctive features of a variety is of great importance in intercultural communication. If we expect certain features in the speech of our interlocutors, we can more easily understand them, so the problems of intelligibility can be better solved. On the other hand, since distinctive features are average of the speech community, anyone of the speech community, knowing about these deviations, can take better control of their speech to less deviate from and to perform closer to the norm. Thus knowledge of distinctive linguistic features of the variety can have an important educational function.

In considering a variety to be a typical representation of the speech of a community, we should highlight another criterion of a variety – its social nature. It is not an individual phenomenon, not an idiosyncratic language, not an interlanguage [11; 12]. A variety is a sociolinguistic phenomenon. Therefore, it is characterized by typical variety-specific and productive features.

*3. Variety in the normative aspect*

Sometimes the Expanding Circle varieties are denied the status of a variety per se because they have no their own norms and standards [13; 14]. However, no language exists without norms and standards. The specificity of the Expanding Circle varieties is that they have exonorms.

While categorizing all Englishes into three groups according to the three circles, Kachru [15] argued that varieties of each of the circles are differentiated not only by the range of functions but also by their norms. The Inner Circle varieties are norm-providing, or endonormative, i.e. they have their own norms borrowed by other varieties. The Outer Circle varieties are norm-developing and the status of their norms is disputed. New norms are emerging in these varieties [16] but their recognition is not a onetime process. The Expanding Circle Englishes are norm-dependent, or exonormative. They use codified forms that are regarded as norms in other Englishes.

However, the specificity of the Expanding Circle Englishes is that they can use a greater variety of codified forms than any endonormative variety. For example, Russians mainly use the norms of British and American English, sometimes even not being clearly aware which norm is which. Those Russian students who go to Australia to study, adopt Australian norms (not only in grammar and lexis but even in pronunciation). If a Russian has to stay in Singapore, no wonder that s/he takes some features of both Standard Written and Standard Spoken Singaporean English, for the concept of norm entails, on the one hand, prescriptivism and, on the other, “conformity with the usage of the majority of native speakers” [17: 69] of the country of residence. So the norms that speakers of the Expanding Circle adopt are much more variable than those in the Inner or Outer Circles. The challenge consists in selecting the appropriate norms and adapting them to the context of communication. Unlike English-speaking Russians, it is hardly probable that people speaking British English, American English, or Canadian English reconsider their language norms and adopt, for instance, Australian norms when they move to Australia or still less when they participate in intercultural communication at home. Russians communicating in English have a greater option of exonorms that might be used consistently or inconsistently depending on the speaker’s knowledge and personal preference. Thus, greater variability of norms is one more feature of Russian English as an Expanding Circle variety.

Variability of standards used by educated users of English and their dynamic flexibility observed in different varieties has led to the gradual shift of meaning in the term *native speaker* that nowadays implies a native speaker of this or that variety of English (e.g., a native speaker of Irish English or Indian English and even a native speaker of China English or Russian English, however strange it might still sound now) [18]. In this case, we are talking of functional nativeness rather than genetic one, as defined by Kachru [19: 92]. Functional nativeness in a variety of English makes it possible for a user of English to function competently in a great range of domains of use and speak confidently about the specifics of his/her variety of English - what is appropriate and what is inappropriate in it.

This idea also correlates with Penny Ur’s definition of a “fully competent” user of English who speaks “a variety which comprises a range of standard forms comprehensible and acceptable to other fully competent speakers worldwide” [20] or a “successful user of English” in terms of Luke Prodromou [21: ix].

*4. Variety as a means of cultural identification*

One of the most important criteria for singling out varieties, including those in the Expanding Circle, is that they are underpinned by certain cultures, ethnic or regional, and are used as secondary means to express linguacultural identity of their users. The specific features of Russian English are observed mostly in culture-loaded words on the lexical level. This can be demonstrated by a text sample from the Internet – the text introducing Russian culture and Russian way of life to international guests:

*There’re many kinds of bread in Russia, but you can divide this into two main groups: ”white” bread (from wheat flour) and “black” bread (from rye flour). “Black” or “brown” bread is made from rye and is traditionally Russian bread. It has specific taste and aroma and you can taste it only in Russia.* [22]

The author of this text evidently knows that the English equivalent to the Russian *black bread* is *brown bread.* However, s/he uses the near-Russian equivalent, along with the English phrase, to emphasize the Russianness of the cultural phenomenon and its typicality of Russia. *Black bread* is thus an expression to identify Russian culture. Interestingly, the Google search provides over 19000 cases of “Russian black bread” as compared with 611000 of “brown bread”.

Russian culture has always been a focus point of Russian educational programs and textbooks. Our Ministry of Education has always insisted on the necessity to include Russian-culture based texts and information in course-books and curricula used in this country. Sometimes, especially when living behind the Iron Curtain, we overdid it, imposing the Bolshevik ideology onto English learners (see, e.g., Sussex [23]). Nowadays, the majority of secondary school textbooks are written by collaborating teams, including Russian teachers and British or American authors, which presupposes the inclusion of Russian themes and Russian culture-bound words into the texts and exercises (see, for example, coursebooks *New Opportunities* compiled by M. Harris, D. Mower, A. Sikorzyńska, I. Solokolva, О. Melchina, I. Larionova [24]; *Spotlight*  by V. Evans, J. Dooly, B. Obee, O. Afanasyeva, I. Mikheyeva [25]; *Starlight* by K.Baranova, J. Dooly, and V.Kopylova [26]; *Forward* by M.Verbitskaya, O.Mindrul, S. McKinley, B. Hustings, I. Tverdokhlebova [27]; *New Millennium English* made by the auspice of the British Council by two Russian teams: N. Derevyanko a.o. (5-7 grades) and O.Groza a.o. (8-11 grades) [28; 29].

Competent Russian English-speaking authors of textbooks, as well as competent English teachers using these textbooks in class, are the best proofs that Russian English in its acrolectal form is a teaching standard employed in Russian schools.

Interest in Russian English lexical layer is also manifest in a number of special reference books – *The Dictionary of Russia* by Kabakchi [30]; *Russia. Russian-English culture dictionary* by Burak et al. [31], various guidebooks, and on Internet sites. The latter, however, often need editing, for not infrequently they are compiled by amateurs with a great desire to inform the international public about Russian sightseeings, customs and traditions, but their level of English is not high enough, and at classes of English as a Foreign Language they focused their attention more on British or American cultures rather than Russian (which, as we see, was not excluded from the TEFL programs but did not make the major corpus of the material under study.) Today it has become urgent to include classes on Russian culture into English departments, so that university graduates will not be embarrassed to talk about their own culture and values in English.

Russian English as a linguacultural phenomenon is an umbrella term. Since the word *Russian* has two meanings – a broad one: pertaining to Russia as a federal state; and a narrow one: pertaining to an East Slavic ethnicity, the use of the term *Russian English* might beambiguous. When used in its broad sense, Russian English is a regional variety, spoken by over 100 ethnic groups, and each of them may have its own distinctive features as a variety. These features are hardly to be encountered on the grammar level or in pronunciation (due to the rigid standardization at our schools and to the Russian-ethnic bilingualism of the speakers). The distinctive features become evident on the lexical level first and foremost: thus Tuvians speak about *khomus music* or *throat singing*, the Buryat speak about *datsans* (their Buddhist monasteries), the Bashkirs – about honey pastries *chak-chak*, and so on. Which of the words of Russian ethnic cultures have been used in English and are known worldwide can be a theme for special linguistic research.

“The English language is different from other languages in that it ‘extends’ the meaning of particular words beyond the culture-specific connotations because of the international demands made on it” (Lyons quoted in [32: 13]. It is thanks to English serving as a lingua franca that many culture-loaded words have become international and are used in various cultures, like it happened with the Japanese *karaoke, sushi, kamikaze* and many others adapted to Russian and other cultures. Russian words like *matryoshka, babushka, kasha, sambo* have become international thanks to their spread by English.

Since we have become aware that we use English for expressing Russian identity, we have reached the divide between the varieties. If we remember the history of how well-known varieties were formed – even those from the Inner Circle – we can definitely say that association of English with a non-British identity facilitated the recognition of varieties distinct from British English. For example, American standard emerged for American linguacultural identity. Just to remind you the well-known quote from Noah Webster (1789), the outstanding American lexicographer: “As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as in government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be *our* standard.” (Cit. by [33: 361]). Similar claims are heard in the Outer Circle now.

All over the world, a local variety of English is employed to spread an indigenous culture and thus to express and maintain linguacultural identity of its speakers in the face of globalism.

*5. Functions of Russian English*

In the Expanding Circle, the major function of English is providing intercultural communication. However, it is not the only function. The turn of the century has seen a rapid increase in the range and functions of English in Russia. For example, we can definitely see and hear English in commerce and advertisement; in mass media, with the increase of online production in English; in pop-culture, with performers picking up English names for their bands, writing lyrics in English or code-mixing English and Russian; in fiction, where Russian emigrant authors write novels, stories, and essays in English (Nabokov, Brodsky, Ulinich, Vapnyar, Grushin, Shteyngart and others), and in Russia domestic authors play with English that serves as an additional creative tool [34]. In one of her interviews, Olga Grushin, whose novels are published in the USA and Great Britain, said,

I did attempt **to imbue my English with a Russian feel**, since I wanted the novel to convey a very Russian sensibility overall. I often retained Russian cadences in my sentences (hopefully while staying within bounds of English grammar), made stylistic allusions to the Russian classics, and in general tried to portray through my language the way of thinking of the entire generation of Russian intelligentsia of the sixties—a somewhat exalted, earnest way of relating to the world, when lofty words like "soul," "beauty," and "truth" were filled with everyday meaning. [35]

Her words as well as possible testify to the ability of Russian English used by a talented bilingual writer to express Russian cultural identity.

*6. Conclusion*

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that we, Russians, should not be embarrassed to recognize Russian English as a variety we speak. The concept should not be associated with a stigmatized deficient broken English used by learning beginners or fossilized smatterers. It is a sociolinguistic entity that might be characterized by distinctive linguistic features due to the L1 transference and adjustment to and reflection of the Russian culture. Full legitimacy of Russian English will become true only after we, its users, will admit that it is the means to express our self-identity in the intercultural setting and a creative linguistic tool for the domestic use.

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