

THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIALIZATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ST. PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Irina Pshenichnikova, St. Petersburg State University

© 2003 Irina Pshenichnikova All Rights Reserved

The copyright for individual articles in both the print and online version of the *Anthropology of East Europe Review* is retained by the individual authors. They reserve all rights other than those stated here. Please contact the managing editor for details on contacting these authors. Permission is granted for reproducing these articles for scholarly and classroom use as long as only the cost of reproduction is charged to the students. Commercial reproduction of these articles requires the permission of the authors.

The phenomenon of language socialization has often been the subject of scholarly research, and every new case attempting to achieve its specific goal gives additional insight into this complex subject. This paper reflects upon a pilot study of professional language socialization undertaken amongst undergraduate students at the School of Management, St. Petersburg State University.¹

The author's teaching experience of giving lectures and seminars, supervising course-papers, student presentations and discussions has shown that many of the concerns and challenges new students face are determined by a process of socialization - adaptation and integration into a new academic environment, new professional settings, new organizational climate and corporate culture. This process has broad implications for educating students, developing future successful managers (Adler 1991, Trompenaars 1993, Kamoche, 2000) and building effective business teams (Donnelon 1996). For a growing generation of new "market economy minded" managers in post-Soviet Russia, this issue is of crucial importance (Holden 1992: 95-101; 1998-157, Persikova 2002).

Language as a main tool of the socialization process is used in communication practices of acquiring new knowledge, building new identities and establishing a sense of belonging and social order (Leontyev, 1997). E. Ochs formulates several trends in studying language socialization among which are "the principles of indexicality, and local and universal culture concerning the indexing and socializing of culturally relevant information through the scope of these practices across human societies" (Ochs 1996-409). Ochs' findings can certainly serve as a foundation for further investigation, yet this pilot study had two initial goals: to determine the main characteristics of language socialization at the School of Management, and to define possible ways to overcome obstacles in

this process. Following E. Ochs and B. Schieffelin's statement that "novices in society acquire tacit knowledge of principles of social order and systems of belief through the exposure to and participation in language-mediated interactions" language socialization is examined in this paper in two ways: as "socialization through language and socialization to use language" (Ochs and Schieffelin 1990-3). The research is based on oral and written discourses of first and second year students: class presentations, course papers and 150 essays entitled "Business is my choice" assigned for the course "Russian Language and Communication" (Spring semester 2001).

The decade of economic and managerial reforms in post-Soviet Russia have led to the establishment of new colleges and majors in the system of university education. The School of Management of St. Petersburg State University is one good example. Since the first day of its establishment in 1993, the School of Management has been characterized by several crucial traits that differentiate it from other faculties and universities providing a business education. These traits influence the socialization process.

The School of Management was established as the first in-house business school at the oldest Russian classical university (St. Petersburg State University will celebrate its 280th anniversary in 2004). The innovations taking place in this school are to be coordinated with the academic traditions and practices of the university. The School of Management was built in accordance with world educational standards. It has an international advisory board, a close partnership with the Hass School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley and belongs to consortium of North European Business schools. It offers and implements a new model of business education following international norms and requirements, which is

not typical for Russian universities. Students take mid-term exams, fill in evaluation forms for all their courses and take final exams in written form only. The Master of International Business program is taught in English; it meets the accreditation of the Russian Federation as well as the Community of European Management Schools and is unique within the Russian business education system. The establishment of the School of Management itself has been a distinguished project with a proper business plan and effective management (Katkalo 2002).²

During the first 10 years of its history, Russian and Euro-American systems of business education have been synergistically combined, producing a unique organizational culture at the School of Management with a specific means of communication. Since language is the basic instrument of translation and delivery of the faculty corporate academic culture, it constitutes the main challenge for the new students. The socialization process takes place in two linguistic channels: Russian and English.

Socialization to use language

Socialization to use language is determined by the necessity to effectively acquire new knowledge and information encoded in linguistic forms and to adequately present it. Students successfully socialize into Russian and acquire native business terminology, derived from the Soviet period. The essays of the first year students reveal sufficient knowledge of basic managerial and economic concepts. New students describe their plans for the future in terms of *прибыль, доход, предпринимательство, управление* (profit, entrepreneurship, management).

A psycholinguistic associative experiment undertaken by the author in 2001 aimed to check the level of linguistically acquired professional knowledge. First year students were asked to give 3 – 5 words associated in their minds with the word *деньги* (money). The results showed that 70% of respondents suggested terms connected with their field of study: *банк, инвестиции, евро, доллар, прибыль, акции, биржа* (bank, investment, euro, dollar, profit, share, stock). These associations are different from those received during the same experiment with non-business people undertaken by Karaulov: *большие, случайные, тратить, не хватает*

(big, sudden, to waste, not enough) (Karaulov and Ufimtseva 1997). The real challenge begins when students study market economy management disciplines in greater depth, when they write course papers, which require them to read English or other foreign language sources, and when they prepare presentations.

The key position that the English language occupies in the School of Management can be explained by the important role English plays in the educational process. The competitive character of the educational market demands that the academic curriculum of the School of Management must reflect the newest trends in a modern management. Thus, professors work a lot with international bibliographic sources and databases while designing their courses. They also use their experience of training and teaching abroad in partner universities. A lot of translation is done by the professors due to the lack of proper Russian textbooks and case studies in management. Moreover, English is the language of today's global business, influencing local national business systems (Crystall 2001), while the realities of the market economy and management are still new to Russian economic and managerial discourse and its vocabulary.

The language situation causes a lot of problems for students. New knowledge is acquired and encoded in Russian through English. The process of learning an extensive terminology in many cases leads to chaotic and unreasonable usages, for example such barbarisms as: *хедхантер* (headhunter), *рекрутер* (recruiter), *тимбилдинг* (team building), *акцептировать предложение* (to accept an offer). Meanwhile, the situation in the School of Management reflects the macro language situation in Russia. Nigel Holden describes it as a "language deficiency" and argues that Russian is "underdeveloped as a language of management". It "suffers from semantic voids pertaining to a wide range of market economy concepts and functions" (Holden 1998 - 191).

The data from course papers and presentations proves that all levels of the Russian language system are influenced by the absorption of management concepts and words from the west. The students as well as the professors meet the challenge of using and integrating English language structures and terminology into their

mother tongue and native communicational practices.

The coexistence of transcription and transliteration as two main ways of adapting a foreign word to the graphic and orthographic principles of the Russian language leads to doubling the forms of the term, as for instance in these examples: accounting, advisor - *экзаунтинг, эдвайзер* (transcription) and *аккаунтинг, адвайзер* (transliteration).

The competing phonetic variants of pronunciation of soft / hard consonants in a position before the front-row vowel *-e-* reflects the initial stage of integration of a foreign word into the accepting language system (Academic Grammar of the Russian Language, 1970; Bulanin - 1971). For example: management (*менеджмент*) is pronounced by different people as /*мэнэджм'энт* - *м'ен'эджм'энт* - *м'энэджм'энт*/. This process can in its turn be traced in the different ways of spelling a word: brand (*бренд* – *брэнд*).

The morphemic level of the Russian language system also exhibits the influence of English. The different versions of morpheme spellings, as *дистрибьютер* (distributor-normative for Russian) – *дистрибутор* (distributor - normative for English), and differences in the meaning of morphemes, which are unknown for a Russian speaker and thus seem to be the same, as in *рекрутинг* – *рекрутмент* (recruiting – recruitment), often become a real puzzle for the students.

The vocabulary of the modern Russian professional language is thus strongly influenced by English. Some of the student course papers examined demonstrate the hardships of a translation process complicated by inter-language paronymy and homonymy. For instance, in a course paper on marketing and branding, the concept “brand essence” was translated into Russian as *эссенция бренда* which literally means in Russian “brand vinegar”, instead of the proper translation *квинтэссенция*, or simply *сущность бренда*.

In many cases, the obstacle to absorbing and using an English term depends neither upon the level of English or Russian proficiency, nor upon the skills of translation. During the Soviet period, most of the terms and concepts associated with the market economy and with

management thinking and behavior either did not exist or were distorted for ideological reasons (Holden 1998). For example, terms such as promotion, merchandising, consulting – *промоушн, мерчандайзинг, консалтинг*. The case becomes even more complex when an English word (for instance, challenge as *испытание* or *вызов*) gets a Russian equivalent, the semantic structure of which is diachronically enriched with different connotations (religious for *испытание*, socio-cultural for *вызов*),³ which might influence the initial lexical meaning of the English original or prevent the possibilities of translation or paraphrasing.⁴

The differences between the analytic and synthetic grammar structures of Russian and English also cause students a lot of problems. The term *marketing communications* is usually translated into Russian as an attributive word combination *маркетинговые коммуникации*, using the Russian neologism *маркетинговые* – an adjective derivated from the noun *marketing* with the Russian suffix *-ов-*. One of the examples taken from student course papers shows the tendency of analytical structures to compete with the original Russian synthetic grammar structures. The term *marketing communications* was translated into Russian as *маркетинг коммуникаций* (with Genitive plural), which literally means “marketing of communications”, i.e. “communications are being marketed”, instead of the proper meaning “communications of marketing” i.e. used by/in marketing. The same situation happens when both students and professors attempted to translate Geert Hofstede’s term “power distance” into the Russian language (Hofstede 1991). The author of this paper found the following versions in student papers and presentations: *дистанция власти, властная дистанция, дистанция от власти, дистанция до власти*.⁵

Many Russian linguists and public figures have negative opinions about the increasing number of anglicisms absorbed by the Russian language. This process is sometimes seen as an externally imposed language and mentality change, an invasion into the Russian culture (Kolesov 2000, Kostomarov 2000, Savelieva 1999). At the same time, research data from France proves that in spite of the protectionist measures of French language policy, the French business lexicon contains a great number of absorbed English terms, which dominate the French variants (Kruchinina 2001).

It is obvious that today's process of linguistic change in Russia can serve as an exciting object for sociolinguistic research. Nevertheless, students majoring in business and management often do not see it as a challenge or as fun, but as a serious obstacle in their professional socialization. The situation reveals that the modern Russian language is now in the process of developing a new functional style within the existing stylistic system of its literary language. N. Holden defines it as "the language of management – a set of linguistic symbols... and incorporating standardized terms and informal elements (such as oblique reference, humor, pretence, etc.), necessary for conceptualization, description and execution of management tasks and sharing of management information" (Holden, 1998 – 191).

There is an urgent need for a normative dictionary of modern business Russian, which would provide proper definitions, demonstrate systems of meanings, possible connotations, orthographic and grammar characteristics, typical contexts for the key terminology and give recommendations for its proper usage. This task cannot be resolved by existing encyclopedic and bilingual dictionaries. Methodologically the barrier of the Russian / English language proficiency and proper acquisition of terminological lexicon can be improved in business education if introductory courses on management terminology are included into the curriculum of first year students, and if the level of literacy and professional linguistic competence both in native and foreign languages is increased through the education process.

Socialization through language

Socialization through language is another aspect of the socialization of new students in the school of Management in St. Petersburg State University. While socializing through language, students consciously or subconsciously aim to apprehend the corporate culture of the School of Management as well as managerial culture at large. They learn behaviors, value orientations and norms of the professional community that are embedded in the acquired linguistic resources. Thus students build their new professional identities.

The informal title of the School of Management is *SOM*, the Latin abbreviation of its initial letters. This is widely used in internal

communications, on the web-site and in a school newsletter. Since their first day at the school, new students learn that they have become students of *SOM*. They can join a football team or theatre group, named *SOM'ы*.

The Latin abbreviation *SOM* is equal by its letter and sound composition to the Russian word *сом* [som] - *catfish*, which in the Russian mind is positively associated with strength, power, big size (Dal 1991). Thus the first assumption newcomers acquire is that the place where they study is not just a school of management - "*факультет менеджмента*", but it is The School of Management – a big, strong and powerful institution. The Latin graphic abbreviation combined with a homophonic form of the Russian word with its metaphoric meaning and positive connotations produce a positive image of a leading Russian school, which provides business education in accordance with high international standards. The freshmen are proud to be the students of this School, as they state in most of their essays. This creates a sense of belonging and shared corporate values.

Another challenge of professional socialization through language is determined by the new communication channels, provided by the informational technologies. Due to the Internet, students are able to communicate with professors by e-mail, which is still unusual in secondary and high schools in Russia. The scholarly community at the School of Management preserves a certain level of social distance in communication between professors and students. Being supported by St. Petersburg University's culture that cultivates Russian academic traditions of interpersonal collegial relationships, this social distance at the same time does not diminish at all the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. Status difference requires a certain communication register and proper means of communication between professor and student: *Вы*—forms of address to both participants, first name and patronymic for professor; politeness strategies and etiquette formulas as *Уважаемый/-ая* (starting the message); *С уважением ...* (ending the message); *Не могли бы Вы...* (while asking for something).

As mentioned by N. Petrova and M. Bergelson, e-mail and chat communication often reduces the difference between oral and written

forms of speech. The pragmatic tendency to save mental effort and time leads writers to disregard the rules of grammar and orthography (Petrova – 1998; Bergelson - 2002), as well as the usual stylistic constraints. Freshmen mostly experience virtual communication from informal chat and e-mail. In the context of collegial e-mail communication, this approach can cause communication conflicts, because messages can sometimes be perceived as impolite and disrespectful towards professors. Among the numerous examples are: subjects of messages defined in English as “Hello” (when e-mailing a draft of a course-paper), or in Russian “От пропавшей подопечной” (from a student who had missed a lot of classes). E-mail addresses derived from first name diminutives are also inappropriate for the academic business communication, for example anechka@.....ru or katusha@.....ru. Once, a message from a student who used the address sun_dragon@.....com was nearly deleted by its recipient, because it looked like spam. Future sociolinguistic research on this new phenomenon and concrete recommendations and textbooks on emailing in different settings will greatly help to overcome this barrier in professional socialization.

E.Ochs mentions that many linguistic features of discourse (including both grammatical and conversational structures) “...are culturally organized and as such expressive of local conceptions and theories of the world” (Ochs and Schieffelin 1990-3). The analyzed data proves that while socializing through language students of the School of Management tend to attain a global business culture. A strong desire to belong to it moves students to learn more about leading companies and prominent business people. In their essays, novices describe their plans to become top-managers in international corporations, or to stay in Russia and establish new Russian companies, based on socially responsible management, free of criminality and favors (unlike the practices described by Ledeneva (1997) and Volkov (2002)). Two thirds of the essays make reference to responsibility (*ответственность*) as a key concept of the Russian market economy management: «Тот, кто выбирает бизнес, возлагает всю *ответственность* за свое будущее на себя» (The person who chooses business (as a career – I.P.) puts all the responsibility on his/ her own shoulders). This type of organizational behavior is new to Russia. During the Soviet period people learned the

opposite type of behavior. They learned to avoid tasks and to reduce the scope of their business activities to the bare minimum (*функциональные обязанности*) (Naumov – 1994).

«Кем я буду через 20-30 лет? Русским Биллом Гейтсом или простым маркетологом в мелкой фирме? Все это зависит от меня и от моих усилий. Но я твердо знаю, что моя работа будет связана с моей страной. После 1990-х годов только от меня и только от всех нас зависит, что будет дальше с нашей страной и с ее бизнесом» (Who will I be in 20-30 years? A Russian Bill Gates, or just a marketing specialist in a small firm? Everything depends upon me and on my efforts. But I know for sure that my career will be inseparable from my country. Since the 1990s, the future of my country and its business has depended upon only me, and on all of us).

The inadequate rhetoric and generalizations of the authors notwithstanding, the data in their essays indicates cultural dynamics taking place within Russian society (within the Russian organizational paradigm studied by A. Naumov 1994). Younger people do still share the traditional collectivistic values of the national culture, often indexed by pronouns *мы (we)*, *наш (our)*, for example, *наша страна*; the noun *народ (nation)*. Yet at the same time, the texts of the essays reveal the tendency to express new cultural assumptions: an orientation towards achievements and results, to doing versus being, and a controlling rather than adaptive attitude towards the environment. These are all assumptions that are considered by scholars to characterize mostly the US and some West-European cultures (Hofstede 1991, Trompenaars 1993).

Socialization into the global business culture is also evidenced by another common linguistic practice, used in 25% of the essays. These texts demonstrate a proper knowledge of Russian and international management terminology, but at the same time they contain English words included into the Russian text without any translation:

...Главное здесь - это стремление и желание, получение удовольствия и самореализация, ну и mission, конечно. (The most important things here (in a business career

– I.P.) are to strive, to desire, to experience pleasure, self-realization, and mission of course).

...Я действительно хочу что-то изменить, и здесь моим девизом является американское *just go for it*. (I do really want to change something (in Russia – I.P.), and my motto is the American “just go for it”).

Мое будущее в бизнесе - это работа в компании, идущей по краю передовых разработок или имеющей своим девизом, как *Apple Computers* фразу «*Think different*»! (My future in business will be a job in a company that is at the cutting edge, or which has a motto like Apple Computers’ “Think different”).

The inclusion of Anglicisms into the Russian language discourse, to my mind, can be explained by the following reasons. First, it demonstrates students’ assumptions about shared professional knowledge. They might believe that it is not necessary to translate a keyword or phrase which a professor knows for sure, especially if the English original version conveys all the connotations and associations of the encoded concept better than the Russian translation (*mission - миссия, vision - видение*) due to the reasons discussed in the first part of the paper. Secondly, it indicates a sense of belonging in the global business community and indicates corporate values, mentioned in the essays (*IBM, Apple Computers, Coca-Cola etc.*). Finally, it illustrates the process of building a new identity according to international managerial cultural assumptions and behavioral practices (*think different, just go for it, create your mission*).

Conclusion

Socialization into the School of Management of St. Petersburg State University is very challenging for its new students. They have to integrate into a new academic and corporate environment with its specific values and behavioral practices, to successfully perceive new professional knowledge and to present it in effective communication with their classmates and professors by different communication channels. Due to the educational standards of the School of Management, students have to study and prove their acquired professional skills by often using both Russian and English. The competitive advantage of speaking two languages makes the socialization process even

more challenging. In these circumstances, language socialization goals and accepted linguistic codes interact and tend to be interdependent. Students fulfill local educational and cultural tasks while socializing in Russian. Socialization into English and through English is the path by which the Russian students step into the global world of business and the international professional community. An organizational managerial discourse in the School of Management of St. Petersburg State University and in many Russian companies operating on the international level is characterized by the coexistence of the elements of the Russian and American - English languages. This coexistence produces a new sub-language that has the potential to develop as a self-sufficient functional variation within the system of literary Russian. When incorporated into the curriculum and textbooks as well as into managerial communicative habits in accordance with the norms and standards of Russian language, it will fulfill the social, economic and linguistic demands of the new generation of managers in market economy Russia.

References

- Adler N. (1991) *International Dimensions of Organization Behavior*. Boston: Mass. PWS-Kent.
- Bergelson M. (2002) *Iazykovyie sapekty virtualnoi kommunikacii./ Vestnik MGU. Seria 19, Linguistics and Intercultural communication*. 2002 – 1.
- Bulanin L. *Fonetika sovremennogo russkogo iazyka*. L.
- Grammatika russkogo iazyka v dvukh tomakh*. (1970). M.
- Crystall D. (2001) *Anglijskij iazyk kak globalnyj*. M.
- Dal V. (1991) *Tolkovy slovar' zhivigo velikoruskogo yazyka*. M.
- Donnelon A. (1996) *Team Talk*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hofstede G. (1991) *Culture and organizations: Software of the mind*. London McGraw-Hill.
- Holden N.J., Cooper C., Carr J. (1998) *Dealing with the new Russia: management cultures in collision*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England.

- Holden N.J. (1992) Creating a new Russian manager: implications for designing a cultural intervention. /Creativity and Innovation Management. 1(2) 95-101.
- Kamoche K. (2000) Developing Managers: the functional, the symbolic, the sacred and the profane. /International journal of human resource management. Issue: July, 2000.
- Karaulov Y. (1996) Tipy kommunikativnogo povedeniia nositelia yazyka v situatsii lingvisticheskogo eksperimenta. / Etnokulturnaia spetsifika yazykovogo soznania. M..
- Katkalo, V. (2002) Fakultet menedjmenta SPbGU: Rezultaty pervyh desyati let. / Vestnik SPbGU 1-2002.
- Kolesov V. (2000) Zhizn' proiskhodit ot slova. S.Petersburg.
- Kostomarov V. (2000) Yazykovoii vkus epokhi. M.
- Kruchinina A. (2001) Anglitsizmy vo frantsuzskom ekonomicheskom diskurse. / Tekst i diskurs: Problemy ekonomicheskogo diskursa. St. Petersburg.
- Ledeneva A. (1997) The Russian Economy of Favors: Blat and Networking. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Leontiev A. (1997) Obschenie i deiatel'nost' obschenia. M.
- Naumov A. (1994) Hofstidovo izmerenie Rossii. /Menedzhment, 1994 – 1.
- Ochs E. (1996) Linguistic resources for socializing humanity. /Rethinking linguistic relativity. Eds. by J.Gumperz and S.Levinson. Cambridge University Press.
- Ochs E. (1990) Language socialization across cultures. Eds. by b. Schieffelin and E.Ochs. Cambridge University Press.
- Persikova T. (2002) Mezhekulturnaia kommunikatsia i korporativnaia kultura. M.
- Petrova N. (1998). Russkii Internet kak otkrytoie folklornoie soobshchestvo. Internet publication //http://www.visualtech.ru/vculture/folklor/Folklor.html
- Savelieva E. (1999) Ekologia russkogo slova. M.
- Trompenaars. F. (1993) Riding the waves of culture. London.
- Ufimtseva N. (1996) Russkie: opyt escho odnogo samopoznania. Etnokulturnaia spetsifika yazykovogo soznania. M.
- Volkov V. (2002) Silovoe predprinimatel'stvo. SPb.

Endnotes

¹ I would like to thank my students who inspired me to write this paper demonstrating the numerous examples of language socialization and who presented their essays for my fieldwork. A special thank you goes to Nancy Ries (Colgate University) for her encouragement and valuable comments on the first version of this paper.

² By 2002 enrollment at the School of Management was 1300 students (compared to 33 in 1993).

³ *Бросить вызов, вызвать на дуэль* (in 19th century Russian); also *вызов мировой буржуазии* – in Soviet political discourse.

⁴ The case of the word *challenge* is of special linguistic interest. The phonemic composition of the word is different from the Russian language sound system, thus it prevents direct absorption. The Russian word *вызов* suggested by mass media discourse does not coordinate fully with the semantic volume and content of the original. As a result, usage of the English word is restricted to professional managerial and student slang, where *challenge* is sometimes used even as a masculine noun (*Это был такой челлендж!* – *It was such a challenge!*)

⁵ I believe that these variants also demonstrate attempts to transform and adapt this foreign methodological concept to native Russian cultural assumptions and attitudes towards power by linguistic spatial means (*om, do + noun – object - Genitive*). Compare with the folklore proverb “До Бога

высоко, до царя далеко” (God is too up high, and the Tsar is too far from the people).