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**THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE
CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE OF MASS MEDIA**

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The article deals with the problem of language development and the language of mass media in particular. The on-going process of globalization appears to affect all aspects of social life, including language development and the language of mass media above all. This influence results in the language of mass media becoming increasingly international.

The democratization of social and everyday life over the past few decades, radical changes in the field of public relations have greatly contributed to democratizing the language of mass media. Whatever its negative consequences might be, the democratization of the language of mass media is an objective reality, a reflection of the current state of affairs. But the point is not only grammar and vocabulary defects found in the language of mass media. It is a common worldwide problem. There is an objective reason. The genre demands that information should be passed on to the consumer as soon as possible. There is too little time to correct and edit texts (speeches), which leads to journalists' getting used to these standards and to lowering requirements for the precision and accuracy of their messages.

There are perhaps more advantages than disadvantages arising from the process of democratization, which can best be seen in the language of mass media. And it is probably the language of mass media that is crucial to language development.

Key words: globalization; the internationalization of language; language development; the language of mass media; the process of democratization.

There was, is and most probably will be a lot of disagreement about different aspects of language. This will be the case as long as it remains a means of communication. The disagreement is not only of a professional, but very often also of a political nature. Of course, linguists are primarily (but not exclusively) interested in language as a linguistic category. From that perspective, the on-going disputes about language seem to be brought about by the fact that it comes in several and, as it seems, hardly compatible categories, as well as in several types (spoken, written, scientific, professional, etc.).

Language is said to be a mirror of the society, an impartial witness of its level of development, the national character of its people, peculiarities

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of its history, cultural traditions and many other things. So why is there so much controversy about what is supposed to be an indisputable objective reality?

On the one hand, language is quite a stable and conservative system. It could not be otherwise, since it is a means of communication, a link between generations, centuries, thousands of years. After 100, 200, 300 years people still read the written heritage of their predecessors. Even today the English can read Jeffrey Chaucer's works from the 14th century as well as William Shakespeare's masterpieces from the 16th – 17th centuries, in the same way that Italians can read Dante Alighieri, who started creating his masterpieces as far back as the 13th century.

On the other hand, however, language is a living being. It keeps developing all the time and cannot help doing so, because it is society as a whole and every single person in particular that is constantly developing. Each generation wants to (and indeed, it does) contribute to language development. But there would be no division into conservatives and reformers (modernizers) if the former did not try to preserve whatever is already familiar and easily recognizable, well-established, fully-fledged, and if the latter did not seek a constant renewal in different fields of life, including language. What seems an impermissible contamination, barbarization and even vulgarization of the language to some, is welcomed by the others as a natural process of language development and enrichment. Besides, there are both moderate modernizers and reforming conservatives in between these two extremes.

However, it is also within the language that tensions arise. Whereas vocabulary keeps growing and is actually going far ahead, drifting away from its original quality as a standard language, say Chaucer or Pushkin's language, grammar and spelling remain a lot more conservative. Vocabulary changes leave modifications in word or sentence structures and spelling far behind. English might be the most vivid example. If the vocabulary development has been really explosive in the past decades, English spelling still remains as notorious as it used to be, although there is also a certain reasoning behind it. Anyway, philosophically speaking, quantity will be transformed into quality in the long run. Revolutionary changes in the vocabulary may call for a grammar reform of the language.

But if language is a mirror of the society, the language of mass media is a diagnosis of the language situation as such, not to mention its importance as a tool of ideological, political and other types of campaigns. Almost all the problems related to language as a phenomenon are expressed most thoroughly and, perhaps, most acutely in the language of mass media, this is where they are also reflected. Nowhere else could you find such a close link between language and social life. The language of

mass media shows not only positive and negative aspects of language development, but also the contradictions of that development. As a matter of fact, language is a tool of communication, and as such it is supposed to be neutral to different people (belonging to various social and professional groups, parties, classes), just like a typewriter, computer, fax, e-mail, etc. At first sight, this does indeed seem to be the case. Irrespective of their education, profession, status and so on, people normally tend to speak and write in a way that they can be understood by others. Should they fail to get their message across, it is their personal problem caused by poor education, speech defects, etc. Even if, say, an English-speaking foreigner would sometimes have difficulty trying to understand a Scott, Irish or American from the Southern states, it is not a language problem but the problem of deviations from standard English in certain regions or English-speaking communities.

Nevertheless, given that language is just a tool of communication, why should there still be occasional controversy and fierce battles about it not only among linguists and literary critics, which would be understandable, but also among politicians? The influence of English within a country has often been condemned. For instance, in present-day France the language problem has turned into a national problem of almost crucial importance and is all about opposing the “Americanization” of French. In French-speaking Québec, English advertisements, shop names, and traffic signs have been changed in an effort to stop the advance of English in the province. There have been anti-English movements in several other countries, as well.

Obviously, language is not just a tool, like a typewriter or a computer, a dictaphone or a tape recorder. It is rather a collective product of a nation, of an infinite number of generations. It is a means of communication used by the people. As such, it has a social coloring, so to speak. In some cases, it is just slightly discernible, in some – clearly expressed. But nowhere does it show as explicitly as in England. What is meant is not only, and not really, cockney – a jargon, or rather, a special language spoken by the lower classes of East End in London. What is meant is the language itself. It is the pronunciation, oral speech as such – not the clothes, cars, etc. that indicated the social group – if not the social class – the person belonged to. Although democratization of almost all fields of life sweeping across the West, including England, has done a lot to level off the society, the language can still be used to identify the academic background of a person, – even though BBC did for a long time promote and popularize “classical” English among the British and has been quite a success in this sense.

But apart from the social function, language also performs a cultural one. As philosopher Martin Heidegger said, “Language is a home of

reality”¹. It is the native language that national culture, religion, etc. is related to. Metaphorically speaking, to deprive a nation of its language would mean taking its soul away. It might be the reason why the French have upgraded a campaign against an influx of foreign (English in particular) words into the French language, against bills, posters, signs in English, to an official policy. In fact, though, all their efforts are aimed against the Americanization of social and cultural life in France, rather than against the English language as such. According to Heidegger, “reality lives in the innermost part of culture – that is, in the language”².

But since language is also a battlefield for ideological, political rivals, etc., it sometimes gets so much ideologized and politicized that it ends up turning from a means of communication into a means of ideological campaigns. And supposing such a language crossed the borders of politics and became common in school and university textbooks and additional materials, supposing it were introduced in the system of education aimed at bringing up new generations, became part of their everyday lives and (at least, to some extent) a language of fiction, it would be etched on mass consciousness. In this case one could, of course, try and prove the opposite. There might be an argument, for instance, that language as such remains a tool of communication in all the above cases. But like any other tool, say a surgeon’s scalpel or a builder’s hammer, it can be misused to do harm to others. We can talk about various approaches to language – linguistic, philosophical, cultural, etc., thus shifting the focus of vision. But science benefits from having different schools, different approaches to the same problems, different solutions.

Speaking about the language of mass media as such, the discussion is still centred round the same old themes. The language of mass media – the subject of a relatively young branch of knowledge – Media Linguistics, which studies the functioning of language in the sphere of mass communication [Dobrosklonskaya, Edlichko, 2017: 187] – is claimed to be stylistically uneven and grammatically imperfect, with plenty of vulgarisms and explicitly obscene vocabulary, contaminated with foreign words and so on and so forth. Let’s assume it is true. But it is not the main point – either if we choose to speak about the language of mass media in general, or if we refer to the current situation, where the on-going process of globalization appears to affect all aspects of social life, including language development and the language of mass media above all. “Globalization today has involved all countries; it has invaded all spheres of life, and has now become an essential factor in the development of modern society” [Cherezova, Yakukhnova, 2019: 148]. This influence results in

¹ *Filosofskii ehntsiklopedicheskii slovar’*. 1983 [Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy]. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya. P. 753. (In Russ.)

² *Ibid.*

the language of mass media becoming increasingly international. In fact, the ever-growing trends we are now witnessing in Russian are a mere reflection of global trends.

Every year we tend to find more and more common words in almost any European language. Accelerated scientific and technological process, radical changes in the field of public relations have brought about a great many new words and notions, which are mostly adopted by other national languages as calques from English. The simple reason is that more often than not, the notions expressed by those words emerge in English-speaking countries, especially in the USA which is leading the way in many aspects of progress. Since language is rational by nature, it cannot function in any other way, because it would take dozens of words instead of one to express many new notions in the native language. These are notions, like, for example, "Internet", "cloning", "PR", "HR", "fax", "disc", "CD", "marketing", etc.

Accelerated development of the world economy, ever-growing business activities of multinational corporations, the rapid spread of electronic media have all given rise to a sort of "new Esperanto" spoken by businessmen from different countries. The process of creating this language has been greatly assisted by extensive business contacts developed through the Internet. As a result, communication on the Internet has become almost impossible without knowledge of English, or rather that "new Esperanto" as its substitute. But the internationalization of the language of mass media is also reflected in the newly emerged trends common to the world community (or at least, the community of developed countries). The democratization of social and everyday life over the past few decades, revolutionary changes in relationships between and within sexes, changing attitudes to marriage, family, etc. have greatly contributed to democratizing the language of mass media and accepting words and expressions previously considered as obscene, rarely used and just unthinkable in the field of public relations.

Of course, there is still a certain split between serious, respectable mass media on the one hand and the mass media commonly referred to as "yellow" journalism, on the other hand. It is hardly possible, for instance, that *The Times*, *The Financial Times* or BBC would stuff their readers or viewers with vulgarisms or obscene words. The same is not only possible, but rather, highly probable when it comes to *The Sun* or other tabloids.

Yet, we should not generalize or take all the aforesaid to extremes. For example, in post-Soviet Russia, "language emancipation" is dominated by youth newspapers, such, for instance, as *the Moskovsky Komsomolets*. To say nothing of the language of advertising, the Internet, including that of mass editions distributed free of charge, which is inherently rude and

explicitly obscene. However, words and expressions produced by that “emancipation” ultimately make their way into rather conservative newspapers, as well. Moreover, “emancipated language” also comes into fiction. But the world has already seen the peak of “language emancipation” and is currently witnessing campaigns for purification and elimination of vulgarisms and the like (there can and should be no turning back to the former state, of course).

Whatever its negative consequences might be, the democratization of the language of mass media is an objective reality, a reflection of the current state of affairs. This process fits into the current period. But at the same time, it would be strange if the negative consequences of “language emancipation” did not cause any outcry among Russian philologists, literary critics, specialists in culture, etc.

We must admit that the standards of Russian in the Soviet mass media were higher than in post-Soviet Russia. The language quality requirements set forth by the chief editors of periodicals and the management of electronic media appear to be too low. It is not only the bad style or the use of vulgar words and expressions that is meant here. Many writers and speakers obviously have trouble with cases. There are examples given by some authors, such as “опасение возможной победы оппозиции” (“fear with the potential victory of the opposition”), “сожаление тем, что” (“regret with... ”)³ [Komissarov, 2001]. Many journalists and political scientists do not have – and do not even try to get – a feeling for good Russian.

But the point is not only the grammar and vocabulary defects found in the language of mass media. It is a common, worldwide problem. And there is an objective reason. The genre demands that information should be passed on to the consumer (reader, viewer, or listener) as soon as possible. It leaves too little time to correct and edit texts (speeches), so that journalists end up getting used to these standards and lowering requirements for the precision and accuracy of their messages.

Yet, the features we have been focusing upon so far are not essential to the modern language of mass media. There are going to be more advantages than disadvantages arising from the process of democratization, which can best be seen in the language of mass media.

It is probably the language of mass media that is crucial to language development. Why? First of all, the language of mass media is the first to respond to any innovations related to social progress, even though it has accelerated so much that the amount of knowledge doubles every ten years. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that progress would be possible

³ *Komissarov S. My zaputalis' v padezhakh i oborotakh* [We are confusing cases and constructions] // *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, no. 14. 27.01.2001. (In Russ.)

at all if the mass media did not introduce any new phenomena, notions, names, etc.

Secondly, it is primarily the language of mass media that contributes to vocabulary enrichment.

Thirdly, vocabulary will sometimes increase by leaps and bounds, which, metaphorically speaking, could make it difficult for the grammar systems of some languages to cope with the pressure, resulting in a conflict between vocabulary and grammar. If this really happens to be the case, it should be treated as evidence that the language is badly in need of a reform, and indeed, it soon turns out to be high on the agenda.

Fourthly, democratization of a language (going hand in hand with the democratization of the society), accompanied with an influx of dubious and explicitly vulgar vocabulary, including jargons, special criminal language, etc., ultimately contributes to broadening the field of standard language. Both English slang and local jargons, as well as criminal language, are not mere products of a specific social environment. They can often be seen as a challenge to official (standard) language, if not the establishment as a whole; the attraction that vulgar vocabulary has for the youth is similar to that of a forbidden fruit and is all about copying “big guys”, etc. The contemporary language of mass media, especially youth media, meets the demands and caters for the needs of those dissatisfied with standard language.

But given the so-called “pendulum pattern” of development, the trend towards broadening the scope of language is bound to give way to – and is already giving way to – a campaign for language purity, – this, however, already based on new vocabulary and with some innovations in the grammar system of the language. We are now witnessing the emergence of simplified linguistic constructions – probably, under the influence of English among other things. For instance: “Он обратился к избирателям поддержать его на выборах” (“He called on his electorate to support him”). From the point of view of standard Russian, the words “с призывом” (“with an appeal (call)”) or “с просьбой” (“with a request”) are missing here. There are some authors strongly opposed to simplifications of this kind⁴. But these simplifications are consistent with the rational nature of the language. The English for it would be just that: “He called on his electorate to support him”. It is its amazing flexibility and rationality that proves to be the strong point of English (putting aside English spelling and pronunciation) and largely accounts for the worldwide increase in its popularity and its triumphant “conquest” of the Earth. It will easily adopt any number of new notions and words and can hardly be damaged by any borrowings. The linguistic contribution of American presidents would

⁴ Ibidem.

not be unwelcome in this connection. For instance, speeches, statements, etc. of one of the most popular US presidents Theodor Roosevelt who influenced the vocabulary of American English and enriched it with new words, expressions, and phraseological units [Shukunda, 2019: 62].

However hard language purists might try to eliminate some new vocabulary that does not sound elegant enough to their ears or to remove increasingly widespread deviations from the existing grammar rules, both should actually be seen as language development. Very controversial and far from being linear, of course. But development is always controversial. What seems to be a violation of the language laws today is likely to be treated as the norm tomorrow. Had each new period failed to leave its trace in the standard language, we would still speak the language of the age of Classicism today.

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ПРОЦЕСС ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ЯЗЫКА СМИ

Федеральное государственное бюджетное образовательное учреждение высшего образования

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В статье рассматривается проблема развития языка и, в частности, языка СМИ. Язык – это довольно устойчивая и консервативная система. И только такой она и может быть как средство коммуникации, как связующее звено поколений, веков, тысячелетий. Но в то же время – это вечно живая материя. Он беспрестанно развивается и не может не развиваться, поскольку развивается само общество, отдельно взятый человек.

В настоящее время процесс глобализации оказывает огромное влияние на все стороны жизни общества, в том числе и на развитие языка, и в первую

очередь языка СМИ, ибо нигде нет такой тесной связи языка с жизнью общества, как в СМИ. Это воздействие проявляется в том, что язык СМИ все больше интернационализируется.

Резко ускорившийся научно-технический прогресс, радикальные изменения в сфере общественных отношений вызвали к жизни огромное множество новых слов и понятий, которые входят в национальные языки как кальки главным образом с английского языка. Интернационализация языка СМИ проявилась и в общих для мирового сообщества тенденциях.

Произошедшая в последнее время демократизация общественной и бытовой жизни, революционные изменения в отношениях между людьми, изменения точки зрения на многие устоявшиеся понятия, ценности, существующие институты и т.д. сильно содействовали демократизации языка СМИ, приходу в него слов и выражений, ранее редко употребляемых и просто невысказанных в сфере публичных отношений. Демократизация языка СМИ, какие бы она не имела негативные последствия, – это данность, отражение объективного хода вещей. Этот процесс адекватен нынешней эпохе. Скорее всего, больше плюсов, чем минусов в процессе демократизации языка, наиболее отчетливо проявляющемся в языке СМИ. И, возможно, именно язык СМИ играет решающую роль в развитии языка.

Ключевые слова: глобализация; интернационализация языка; развитие языка; язык СМИ; процесс демократизации.

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