Russian Journal of Linguistics
ISSN 2687-0088 (print), ISSN 2686-8024 (online)

2023 Vol. 27 No. 1 173–193
http://journals.rudn.ru/linguistics

https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-31179
EDN: WTWAJF

Research article / Научная статья

Transgressive Russianness: Claiming authenticity in the Russian woman assemblage

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Abstract
The question of sociolinguistic authenticity has been widely researched with reference to authentic linguistic production and authentic language users. Globalization and intense language contacts have brought increased attention to the question of authenticity as it applies to what linguistic and cultural production is considered authentic and what facets of linguistic and cultural production are most salient to authenticity. The study examines the notion of authenticity in relation to the linguistic presentation of Russian womanhood by the Tajik-Russian singer Manizha in her song *Russian woman*. We aim to show how linguistic and cultural transgression underlying her performance prompted contestable interpretations and opened up the evaluative divide among the audience. Using Pennycook's semiotics of transignification (Pennycook 2007), we analyze the performance at different levels (pretextual history, contextual relations, subtextual and intertextual meanings, and post-textual interpretations). We juxtapose the song, the singer's post-performance interviews, and the viewers' online comments in order to reveal the authenticating and deauthenticating discourses of gender and ethnicity. We have identified the opposing conceptions of Russian womanhood in the performance, both of which can be deemed authentic or inauthentic. We argue that authentication and deauthentication of this textual assemblage are driven by different ideologies and often depend on a single textual level or element. Moreover, authenticity may be recontextualized and renegotiated through discourse. The study highlights the co-existence of multiple and competing authenticities within a single multimodal performance and demonstrates how semiotics of transignification may be used to un-cover these competing ideological orientations.
Key words: Russian woman, transgression, gender, ethnicity, authenticity, discourse analysis

For citation:
Gritsenko, Elena S. & Alexandra O. Laletina. 2023. Transgressive Russianness: Claiming authenticity in the Russian woman assemblage. *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 27 (1). 173–193. https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-31179

Трансгрессивная русская женственность: дискурсы аутентификации и деаутентификации

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Аннотация
Вопрос социолингвистической аутентичности широко исследовался с точки зрения аутентичности текста и аутентичности говорящего. Глобализация и интенсивные языковые контакты привлекли повышенное внимание к вопросу аутентичности в аспекте того, насколько текст и социокультурный перформанс можно считать аутентичными и какие аспекты перформанса наиболее важны для установления его аутентичности. В статье рассматривается социолингвистическая категория аутентичности применительно к понятию русской женственности. На материале онлайн дебатов вокруг исполнения российско-таджикской певицей Манижей песни Russian woman («Русская женщина») на конкурсе «Евровидение – 2021» раскрываются противоположные концепции русской женственности. Цель работы – продемонстрировать, как языковая и культурная трансгрессия, лежащая в основе выступления, вызвала противоречивую реакцию и раскол в оценках среди зрителей. На основе сопоставления текста песни и интервью певицы, в которых она дает свою интерпретацию конкурсной композиции, а также комментариев зрителей, поддерживающих и критикующих ее, выявляются и описываются аутентифицирующие и деаутентифицирующие дискурсы гендера и этничности применительно к песне, исполнительнице и созданному ею образу. В качестве методологической основы исследования используется семиотика транссигнификации А. Пенникука (Pennycook 2007), в соответствии с которой текст песни и ее исполнение анализируются на разных уровнях: дотекстовая история, контекстуальные отношения, подтекстовые и интертекстуальные значения и посттекстовые интерпретации. Проведенный анализ показал, что аутентификация и деаутентификация текста песни, ее исполнения, визуальной и музыкальной составляющих созданного образа определяются разными идеологиями, при этом определяющую роль может играть отдельный уровень или один текстовый элемент. Более того, аутентичность может быть реконтекстуализирована и обоснована в посттекстовой дискурсивной практике. Исследование выявило сосуществование нескольких конкурирующих аутентичностей в одном мультимодальном представлении и продемонстрировало, как семиотика транссигнификации может использоваться для раскрытия этих конкурирующих идеологических ориентаций.
Ключевые слова: *русская женщина, трансгрессия, гендер, этничность, аутентичность, дискурс анализ*

Для цитирования:
Gritsenko E.S., Laletina A.O. Transgressive Russianness: Claiming authenticity in the Russian woman assemblage. *Russian Journal of Linguistics.* 2023. V. 27. № 1. P. 173–193. https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-31179

1. Introduction

The question of sociolinguistic authenticity has been widely researched with reference to authentic linguistic production and authentic language users (Boucholz 2003, Coupland 2003, Coupland 2014, Johnstone 2014, Heller 2014, Lacoste et al.

2014). Globalization and intense language contacts have brought increased interest to the question of authenticity as it applies to what linguistic and cultural production is considered authentic and what facets of linguistic and cultural production are most salient to authenticity (Terkourafi 2010, Dovchin 2015). This study examines the notion of authenticity in relation to the linguistic presentation of Russian womanhood by the Tajik-Russian singer Manizha in her song *Russian woman* at the 2021 Eurovision song contest.

The national selection for the contest in Russia was marked by highly contestatory interpretations and overall mixed reception. The song *Russian woman* performed by Manizha polarized the viewers and sparked heated social debate over the globalized musical aesthetics, transgressive language and lyrics, but, most importantly, the controversial representation of Russian womanhood. Some socially active groups filed a legal claim that the song is "grossly insulting, humiliates the dignity of Russian women, and violates national harmony in Russia" (Tass 2021). Yet, the song had a considerable number of enthusiastic supporters within and outside of Russia and was nominated for the Eurostory best lyrics award as it "doesn't just describe the strength and march of the Russian woman, but also deals with (subconscious) sexist stereotypes all over the world" (Koning & Soes 2021).

Validation and acceptance of this performance were largely determined by whether it aligned with what the audience perceived as an authentic representation of Russianness and Russian womanhood. The debate illustrated the complexity of ethnic and gender beliefs in present day Russia and proved that the concept of Russian woman may have different interpretations. In this paper, we examine how Manizha presented her *Russian woman* assemblage and negotiated its authenticity in post-performace interviews. We juxtapose it with viewers' comments as they accept or reject her representation and, to an extent, the lyrics and the musicality of the song. Our analysis suggests that authenticity is multifaceted and authentication goes along multiple vectors simultaneously. As a result, authenticity may be granted or denied based on a single level of signification or a single textual element. The paper contributes to the discussion of how authenticity is situationally determined and discursively constructed.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. The sociolinguistic context of the study

Linguistic and cultural landscape in present-day Russia has a combination of discourses inherited from the Soviet times and global discourses[1] introduced into the country after the USSR breakup. Although Western feminist ideas came to

[1] We use the term 'discourse' here in the same sense as N. Fairclough does in his book Language and Globalization: "particular ways of representing aspects of the world (e.g. different political discourses – Liberal, Social-Democratic, Marxist, etc)". (Fairclough 2006:10) This understanding of discourse is widespread (Bila & Ivanova 2020: 223) and refers to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice.

Russia in the early 1990s and contributed to shaping gender studies as an interdisciplinary academic field, they did not develop into a widespread public debate over women's rights largely due to the Soviet egalitarian policies which explicitly proclaimed and advanced gender equality (Kirilina 2021). By contrast, the traditionalist trend, the "patriarchal renaissance", grew stronger in the 1990s "as a backlash against Soviet models of androgynous worker-women and the blurring of sex roles" (Rand Lyons 2007: 25). Three decades later globalist and traditional concepts of gender coexist in Russia, with globalist trends oftentimes being openly opposed (Kirillina 2021).

Nationality and ethnic identification have also undergone a shift in social perceptions. Nationality has been ousted from the national passport. Post-Soviet censuses in Russia allow for self-reported ethnic identification, with over 190 ethnic groups reported on the 2010 Russian census (Federal State Statistics Service, n.d). The notion of Russianness acquired new nuances. The term *rossiyskiy* replaced the panethnic category of *Soviet* to make a distinction from the word *russkiy*, although both terms are translated into English as *Russian. Russkiy* refers to ethnicity, language, food (as in Russian cuisine), culture (Russian ballet), and traditions (Russian hospitality), while *rossiyskiy* (from Rossiya – Russia) denotes the relationship to the nation-state as in the Russian Federation, Russian citizenship, Russian flag, Russian hymn, Russian sports (education, healthcare), etc. Based on linguistic associative experiments, in layman perceptions *russkiy* and *rossiyskiy* belong to different categories: socio-economic problems, education, science, sports and mass-media are linked to the concept of *rossiyskiy*, whereas culture and arts are perceived as *russkiy* (Alekseeva 2017). Nouns *rossiyanin* (male), *rossiyanka* (female), *rossiyane* (plural) were introduced in the early 1990s as encompassing terms for all ethnic groups living in Russia. Outside Russia, for example in diaspora, the distinction is non-existent and the word *russkiy* denotes all manifestations of Russianness (Zhdanova 2008).

Based on the definition of independent nation-state, ethnicities of the former Soviet Republics are now perceived as foreign, or Other. Since 2014, foreign citizens seeking residence or work permits in Russia have been legally required to demonstrate the knowledge of the Russian language, history and civics (Dolzhikova 2015). The socio-political context of the law relates to the influx of labor migrants from Central Asia with little, if any, knowledge of Russian. Studies of the linguistic landscape of Russian cities highlight the prominent role of English in urban space (Rivlina 2015) and the absence of migrant languages (Baranova & Fedorova 2019).

Russian and English are the dominant languages in the music industry (Aleshinskaya & Gritsenko 2017). Many Russian artists choose English or use Roman script for their stage names and perform in English, Russian, or English-Russian translanguaging. Other ethnic languages, for instance, Georgian and Tatar, are also popular. Since 1994, Russia's entrants at the Eurovision song contest have represented different ethnicities (Bulgarian-born, Ukrainian, Karachay-Cherkessya, Udmurt, Tatar) and sang in different languages, including Russian, English,

Ukrainian, Udmurt, and Spanish. However, in neither prior case there was so much social contention over the language of the song, its performance, and the singer's ethnicity. This study describes semiotic resources shaping Manizha's representation of Russian womanhood and attempts to reveal how authentication or rejection of the song is connected to the above discourses of identity (national/ethnic, gendered) and authenticity.

2.2. Theoretical considerations

We ground our analysis of the pop music performance in the following three theoretical concepts: translingual, or transgressive practices, cultural assemblages, and sociolinguistic authenticity as a discursive construct. In the context of increased global population mobility and the global spread of English, popular music artists have embraced translingual practices in their lyrics and performances (Alim et al. 2009, Terkourafi 2010). Linguistic transgression became "a means to convey a cultural message, a means for meaning-making, and a means of gaining fame" (Lumbau Batu & Sukamoto 2020: 308). Defined as the "conduct which breaks the rules or exceeds boundaries" (Jenks 2003: 3), transgression involves "hybridization, the mixing of categories, and the questioning of the boundaries that separate categories" (Jervis 1999: 4). Our analysis will show how linguistic and cultural transgression underlies Manizha's performance and manifests itself at different levels, both linguistic and non-linguistic. This transgression prompted contestable interpretations and opened up the evaluative divide among the audience.

In addition to linguistic features, music performances encompass other heterogeneous elements (tone, costume, staging, etc.) and call for a more integrated semiotic analysis. The idea of semiotic assemblages brings up "the dynamic relations among objects, places and linguistic resources" (Pennycook 2017: 12). Pennycook suggests that language plays a mediation role in the vitality of many assemblages, however, the goal of the analysis is not to identify the linguistic patterns or name these assemblages but to understand which material and semiotic resources intersect at a given place and time and what type of interactions they create (Pennycook 2017). Manizha presented her song twice at two different venues and times (the national selection round and the final Eurovision contest). Momentary practices at those particular times and spaces and discursive practices in-between the performances created distinctive patterns of semiotic possibilities around her Russian woman assemblage and its authentication.

From the sociolinguistics perspective, authenticity is "a relational concept which accounts for the many ways in which a speaker or agent can be authentic in a given situation in relation to a particular aspect of his or her environment" (Lacoste et al. 2014: 1) and serves as an indexical meaning of validation that is always at stake in interaction and emerges in clusters of attributes (Coupland 2014). Although authenticity may be elusive, its key aspects may be successfully manipulated to reach political or economic goals (Heller 2014). Authenticity is

"commonly contested" because being rendered authentic implies inauthenticity of competing targets (Coupland 2014). Following Coupland (2014), we focus our analysis on both, the meanings of linguistic forms used in the song lyrics that "index group belonging in more or less consolidated and authenticity conferring ways" (p. 36) and the discourses authenticating and deauthenticating the performance and the performer.

3. Methodology

In this paper, we analyze Manizha's first performance of her song *Russian woman* in March 2021 during the national televised selection (Eurosong contest 2021(a)) and the second performance at the final Eurovision contest in Rotterdam in May (Eurosong contest 2021(b))**.** Other data sources include the singer's interviews on national television (Urgant 2021) and Youtube channels (Gordeeva 2021; Super 2021) and social media comments in her Instagram account under her posts related to these performances (Manizha 2021(a), 2021(b)). Overall 4191 comments were collected for the first post and 8390 comments for the second post. We searched for all comments containing the word root *русск (russk*)* or *росс (rossi*)* to create a pool for in-depth analysis. We also thematically coded and analyzed the first 100 hundred comments under each post with the following categories in mind: evaluation (positive/negative), medium of expression (text/ emoji/ text & emoji), and language of the textual comment. Excerpts from Manizha's interviews, totalling 120 minutes, were transcribed and coded for recurring themes.

We used a "transtextual analytic framework" (Pennycook 2007, Dovchin, Sultana & Pennycook 2015) to analyze the data. Within this framework texts "have meaning not in themselves but only when used; they need to be understood productively, contextually and discursively; because they have histories, they are contextually influenced, and they occur within larger frameworks of meaning" (Pennycook 2007: 53). The data were analyzed through a set of interpretive and discursive tools involving pretextual history, contextual relations in which the use of the text occurs (where, who, referring to what), subtextual patterns of meaning linked to the discourses and ideologies within which it operates, intertextual "echoes" (associations with other texts), and post-textual interpretation (Pennycook 2007: 53–54).

Analysis of pretextual history and the context of the event uncovered the varied linguistic and cultural resources integrated within the performance and meanings ascribed to the Eurovision contest in Russia. Unpacking of subtextual meanings and intertextual links enhanced the understanding of the wider socio-cultural and historical implications, backgrounds, and factors guiding various interpretations. The post-textual analysis based on Manizha's post-performance interviews and the audience's comments revealed how her claims for authenticity are connected to what it means to be a Russian woman and viewers' interpretations of the concept.

4. Findings: Multilayered transgressiveness and authenticity

4.1. Russian woman, Manizha, and Eurovision: pre-text and context

The title of the song *Russian woman* set up specific expectations of the audience because the concept is both an important one in Russian mentality and worldview and intriguing for people both in Russia and abroad. In Russia, the Russian woman is a collective and largely idealized image rooted in folk ideologies, literary and art canon. Paremiology, or the study of proverbs, literary works, lexicography, and associative experiments provide the data on how the Russian woman has been defined historically and is perceived nowadays.

A distinctive feature of Russian folk ideology is the inclusion of the female voice (Kirilina 1999). Proverbs attribute the following qualities to Russian women: sharp mind, strong will, physical and moral strength, independence, warmth, care, and responsibility, with inner beauty being more important than physical beauty (Kirilina 1999).

Russian literary works which are mandatory in the national school curriculum include female characters prototypically associated with the concept of Russian woman and her attributes: strong character and high moral standards of Tatyana Larina from Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin"; humility, selflessness, and commitment of Sonya Marmeladova from Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment", and the strength and beauty of Russian peasant women from Nekrasov's poems. Instagram comments evaluating Manizha's performance serve as evidence that this literary canon is well familiar to the audience as commenters repeatedly cite Nekrasov's lines about Russian women.

Recent associative experiments indicate that the qualities associated with femininity in Russia include the characteristics of the traditional image as well as the features related to everyday women's experiences and behavior, such as compliance, emotionality, whimsicality, responsibility, strength, intellect, and strong will (Tochilina 2014). Another associative experiment indicated that the Russian woman is an idealized concept as participants did not mention any negative features. Regardless of their gender identification, respondents associated Russian women with intelligence, patience, kindness, hard work, beauty, maternal love, and dedication (Kirilina 1999).

Unlike the concept of the Russian woman that is deeply rooted in the mentality of the Russian people, Manizha is a newly emerged personality on the Russian cultural scene. Prior to winning the national selection for Eurovision 2021, she was largely unfamiliar to the broad audience in Russia. She performed in local festivals and appeared on a national TV channel a few times but her songs had never been charted or nominated for national music awards. Yet, she had a loyal audience on Instagram. She had also participated in several social activist campaigns opposing family violence, focusing on body positivity, LGBTQ rights, and migrant workers' rights. Although she positions herself as a Tajik-born singer, she performs in Russian and English, and her stage name is always written in Latin script. In her

songs she mixes both languages and merges various musical genres, such as hip-hop, ethno-pop, soul, and gospel. The audience were expecting Manizha's performance to recreate a highly elevated image of the Russian woman, especially given the timeframe of the show which was aired on a national holiday – International Women's Day.

International Women's Day has been an official national holiday in Russia since March 8th, 1965. The holiday has outgrown its political underpinnings and is regarded as an affirmation of femininity and motherhood. The Eurovision national selection contest was aired on March 8th since the audience would be more likely to watch prime-time shows on their day-off. The broadcaster, Channel One Russia, is freely available on the territory of Russia in HD quality and has a diverse audience of more than 250 million viewers worldwide (Channel One Russia, n.d.).

Another relevant component of pretextual history and context is a highly sensitive attitude to international contests in Russia. Although the Eurovision started as a music festival TV broadcast in 1956, for some people in Russia the contest affirms countries' worth in a political and cultural arena, similar to sports competitions. Those who disliked the show assesed it through the prism of the nation's loss using inclusive "we": "*That's a shame! We won't make it to the finals!; … we have lost already."*[2]

Viewers who liked the song appealed to Eurovision history where unusual and daring performances were more likely to win: "*Folk elements have always been loved at Eurovision; In my opinion, Manizha is the best match because she is daring and extraordinary".*

Thus, the attitudes of the viewers are shaped by the immediate context of the performance, which is evaluated through this normative matrix of what is perceived to be a winning shot for the first prize and how accurately the song represents the concept of the Russian woman.

4.2. Ideological propositions: subtext

The song and the performance represent a spectrum of different ideological commitments and underscore a long-lasting ideological struggle between the traditional and the modern, the Russian and the Western. Language, gender, and ethnicity became the primary domains of this ideological divide.

4.2.1. Language Choice

The audience were divided in evaluating the language of the song lyrics. Some viewers received the Russian lyrics favorably as an attempt to overthrow the hegemony of English in Eurovision: *"Great song and performance! Finally, in Russian"; "What's the difference if someone understands it or not? Why should we sing in English at all."*

[2] For reasons of brevity, we have translated all comments and interview excerpts into English.

For others, Russian lyrics limited the chances of being understood and/or appreciated by multilingual audiences and, therefore, restricted the opportunity to win: *"Better in English!!! With Russian you may not get into the final"*. Thus, the long-standing debate over the cultural orientations Russia should be taking – orienting to the West or following its own path – turned into discussions over the language choice, local cultural distinctiveness, and authenticity.

When asked in an interview if she would consider changing the lyrics of the song and perform in English, Manizha answered "no", stressing the freedom to make artistic choices: *"To sing in English? What for? To bend? To fit into the frame as it's a custom there?"*. In another interview, she emotionally defended her right to identify as Russian: "*I have the right to feel this way. I have lived in this country for thirty years, I know the culture, and I think and feel in Russian!"*. Yet, in her songs she routinely mixes Russian and English claiming that it helps her to better convey her message to the audience: "*Previously, when I was mixing languages in songs, I thought 'People won't understand me', now I am confident in what I am doing. I stopped seeing the boundaries between languages"* (Gordeeva 2021). Her chosen stage name, which is written in Latin script, also manifests this transgressive mindset. Another form of trangressivity is choosing her grandmother's surname (Sangin) and using it as morphologically unchangeable (normally, Russian surnames have gender and case distinctions).

In the Eurovision performance, linguistic transgression was emphasized by printing the English title of the song *Russian woman* on the back of Manizha's costume in a mix of Latin and Cyrillic letters (Figure 1). This dual script indexes Russlish (a humorous/ludic way English is spoken in Russia) and signals orientation to the English-speaking audience at the same time.

In everyday life (TV comedies, ads) such instances of "russification of English" are common but in the context of the international show and with reference to an iconic cultural concept, it was rejected by the audience: *"I respect the Russian language and I don't understand why it [the word "Russian"] is written as "рашн" (rushn). It mocks Russian culture and offends me as a culture bearer"*.

Fig. 1. Translingual representation of the song title on the back of Manizha's stage constume

4.2.2. Russian: russkii or rossiyskii?

The English title of the song is intentionally ambiguous because it combines the terms "*russkii*" (related to ethnic, cultural, and historical associations) and "*rossiyski*" (indexical of the nation state). Thus, the concept of Russianness as presented in the performance becomes another transgressive element with multiple open interpretations. In her interviews, speaking about herself, Manizha consistently uses the adjective *russkiy* and omits the word *rossiiskii*. Some of her supporters also use the word "*russkii*" to refer to people of different ethnic origins living in Russia: *"Russia is a multinational country and it is unfair to call Manizha an immigrant. She speaks Russian, lives in Russia, and most likely has Russian citizenship. Of course, she is Russian ("russkaya")!"* Although most such comments are in Russian, given the nature of social media, it is unclear whether the commenters live in Russia or belong to Russian diaspora abroad where the word russkii tends to be used "in reference to all manifestations of the Russian presence in the world: political, linguistic, national and religious" (Zhdanova 2008: 243). For Manizha's opponents, the distinction between the concepts *russkii* and *rossiiskii* remains relevant: *"You should be singing about Russia's women, not about Russian women. You can be rossiyanka, but not russkaya!".* Likewise, mainstream media, both Russian and international, tend to preserve categorial boundaries and refer to Manizha using the word "*rossiyskaya*" as in "Russia's Eurovision entrant" (Roth 2021), "Russian singer of Tajik origin" (Inform Buro 2021).

Strong resentment of the audience was caused by Manizha's appeal to Russian women from the position of the ethnic 'Other' during the national selection round. Her request *"Hey, russkii zheshin, davay golosui za menya!" ("Hey, Russian woman, come on, vote for me")* was pronounced in a highly accented and morphologically ungrammatical way, imitating the accent of migrants from Central Asia. It reminded the audience of an obtrusive and ostentatious attitude Russian women may encounter on farmers' markets where many sellers are male migrants from Caucasian and Central Asian countries. Apparently intended as self-irony, this statement insulted many female viewers. Manizha removed the phrase from the final performance in Rotterdam and replaced it with a different appeal ("*Hey, Russian woman! Don't be afraid, girl")* and a series of English slogans projected on the background screen, which matched up with the Western feminist discourse of female empowerment ("*Be strong", "Rise up", "Be honest", "Be creative", "Be yourself", "Break the wall", "Be the change"*).

Though ethnicity is at the core of all discussions, some experts believe that the Russian woman in the song is "not an ethnic category" but rather a category that "reflects the life experience of the singer, the experience of her lyrical heroine whom she empathizes with and whose image she constructs" (Kashapov 2021).

4.2.3. Woman's life experiences

Women's life experiences presented in the song include beauty standards, intimate and maternal relations. The text contains several propositions linked to

these spheres. The song starts with the first person narrative of a young female waiting for help to cross the field. The speaker uses the feminine adjective "*mala*" ("*small*"), an affectionate appellative "*devochki*" ("*girls*"), and deictic shifts between indefinite personal "you" ("*How to cross the field if you are alone*?") and plural "we" ("*We've been waiting for the ship*") to build women's solidarity and stress familiarity of this experience. The transition to refrain is a daring statement. The vernacular phrase "*A cho zhdat'? Vstala i poshla!*" ("*But why to wait? Stand up and go ahead!*"), pronounced by the performer with a defiant intonation as she sheds a stylized Russian outfit from her shoulders, represents a transposition of verbal forms. Worded as a past tense, the statement may literally be interpreted as the narrator's past experience. However, in everyday moralizing conversations it rhetorically functions as an imperative. The ambiguity of this verbal form gave rise to contestable interpretations: some viewers perceived the phrase as a sign of empowerment and overthrowing patriarchal stereotypes, while others heard it as a rude and patronizing remark associated with vulgar verbal behavior ("*Dirty banter. Vulgarity*").

The second part of the song shifts from first personal narrative to a dialogic interaction with a set of questions and imperatives addressed to the narrator:

(1) What's the showing off for?	*Chto tam khorokhorit'sya?*
Oh, what a beauty you are!	*Oi, krasavitsa*
Are you waiting for your young fella?	*Zhdesh' svoego yuntsa?*
You're over 30 already!	*Oi, krasavitsa*
Hallo? Where are your kids?	*Tebe uzh za 30, allo, gde zhe deti?*
You are quite fine overall	*Ty v tselom krasiva,*
But losing weight would do you good	*No vot pokhudet' by*

All the statements represent traditional assumptions around female appearance and motherhood. The use of second person singular *("Tebe")* indexes familiarity and disrespect, rather than intimacy and partnership; the overall tone is blunt, and inconsiderate ("*Hallo, where are your kids?")*. The response is equally abrupt and offensive:

(2) Listen up, really!	*Poslushaite, pravda,*
We ain't a herd	*My s vami – ne stado*
Hey, crows, shoo!	*Vorony, pyshch-pyshch, proshu,*
Leave me alone ('fuck off')	*Otvalite-e-e*
Now get it straight	*Teper' zarubite sebe na nosu*
I don't blame you	*Ya vas ne vinyu,*
But damn do I love myself	*A sebya ya chertovski lyublyu*

Negating "herd" mentality references women's rights to make independent decisions. Inclusive "we", which corresponds to the first part of the song (us-girls), affirms the power to make decisions for all women.

The affirmation "*I damn love myself*" echoes a popular coaching technique of building self-confidence and dismisses the idea of selflessness traditionally

attributed to Russian women. Moreover, the phrase contains a substandard intensifier "*chertovski*" ('*damn'*), derived from the noun "*chort*" ('*devil'*), which is a profanity when it does not refer to the mythological creature. While there has been an increase in the use of profane, obscene and criminal slang in everyday Russian communication (Karasik & Slyshkin 2021), it goes counter an elevated image of womanhood and maternity. Manizha transgresses the unspoken expectations to uphold language standard and routinely uses substandard vocabulary in her song and interviews (Super 2021, Gordeeva 2021).

The English language refrain, which is stylistic repetition (3), follows the same self-affirmation discourse reminding female listeners of their strength. Yet, the modal verbs expressing necessity position Russian women as disempowered, indecisive, and weak, which conveys a patronizing attitude: "*Every Russian woman needs to know …. Don't be afraid!... You must be strong!"*

(3) *Every Russian woman needs to know*
You're strong enough, you're gonna break the wall
Every Russian woman needs to know
You're strong enough, you're gonna break the wall
Hey, Russian woman,
Don't be afraid, girl
You're strong enough
You're strong enough
Don't be afraid

The song references women's experiences as a tension between social expectations and women's agency, metaphorically worded as the wall ("*strong enough to break the wall"*). While these perspectives have been extensively represented in Russian paremia (Kirilina 1999) and beauty and motherhood themes are reminiscent of traditional patriarchal views of femininity, self-affirmation discourse combined with substandard language choices transgress traditional ideals of moral strength, grace and inner beauty. Thus, the debate over the song and authenticity of the Russian woman representation is rooted in oppositional discourses of tradition and modernity defying the tradition.

4.3. Intertextual connections

Intertextually, representation of Russian womanhood taps into historically local ideas of femininity (through such cultural concepts as "field", "(waiting for) a ship", and "strength") and also asserts global gendered discourses. The concept of "field" in Russian culture belongs to the domain of life and death. In poems, proverbs, and lyrics, it symbolizes a life path. Working in the field was the primary activity for Russian peasants growing crops and making hay supply for the cattle. Women performed multiple types of fieldwork. However, unlike the character in the song, who found herself alone in the field, fieldwork was never performed by individual workers but self-organized groups of community members. Multiple

proverbial statements emphasize collectivity and community, for instance, "One warrior in the field will not win the battle". Thus, the metaphor of the field as a dangerous path in the song lyrics ("*how to get across the field of fire*?") makes only a partial connection to Russian mindset and culture – it confused the listeners: "*Why is the field on fire?*"

Waiting for a ship is another contestable intertextual connection. In the first part of the song the performer uses inclusive first person "we" to state that all women, including her, are "*waiting for a ship*". In the second part, the stance shifts to the second person ("you"*)* asking if the woman is waiting for her young man. The image of a woman waiting for a ship symbolizes the patriarchal idea that woman's life is not complete without a man, which is well established and represented in traditional fairy tales and Disney movies, such as Cinderella. While this idea is true for most patriarchal societies, including Russian, these allusions miss out on the culturally specific aspects of the concept and thus are only partially authentic for the Russian audience. Many were likely to link the ship metaphor to Alexander Grin's book "Scarlet Sails", in which the main female character Assol was awaiting a ship with scarlet sails. However, this romantic illusion was a coping mechanism for Assol who was a social outcast in the village and along with her father experienced perpetual bullying. A ship with bright red sails symbolizes chasing a dream and pursuit of happiness – it has become an emblem of the biggest Russian festival for high school graduates in Saint Petersburg.

In Russian culture waiting for a ship also symbolizes marital commitment as suggested by a popular song of the "Lyube" group which presents two voices – navy crew in distant seas and their families ashore – and emphasizes that familial support helps crew members get through the storms and return safely to their homes. Women's self-sacrifice and commitment to their spouses is a value deeply ingrained in collective memory as it was embodied in Decemberists' wives. In December 1825 a group of noble revolutionists made an unsuccessful attempt to change the political structure in Russia. Their wives followed them into thirty years of Siberian exile and became Russian ideals of spousal commitment.

Thus, the song invites the listener to think back to traditional concepts representing women's experiences, such as working in the field along other women, having a dream and following it, honoring their husbands and supporting them. Allusions to these experiences represent the strength of Russian women, as conceived in proverbial sayings and lay people's associations, and found support with the audience ("*Foreigners won't get the idea. It's us who know that 'There are women in Russian villages…").* Yet, the subtextual affirmations defying these concepts result in an ideological clash. Assertion that a woman should not wait (for the ship) but rather start acting independently reaffirms woman's agency but also implies that ideals of marital commitment should be cast aside, which is not the discourse some viewers support.

4.4. Authenticity: post-textual commentary

Post-textual comments fall under two categories: supporting and cheering on, or condemning and criticizing the performance, the performer, and her representation of the Russian woman. We have discussed the controversy over the issues of language and ethnicity in prior sections and would like to pay more attention to the discussion of authenticity in viewers' comments and Manizha's post-performance commentaries.

After the national round of the contest, the dispute over the song fell along the lines of Russianness. Denial of authenticity was grounded in visual and acoustic performance and the concept of the Russian woman presented in the song. Viewers indicated that Manizha's outfit had little, if any, resemblance to traditional Russian dress or the contemporary version thereof. The red jumpsuit invoked images of "*American prisoners*" and "*factory workers*", and the colorful headband resembled "*a towel*" or "*African women's headwear*": "*Where do they wear stuff like that? Not in Russia!*". Some comments pointed to her inappropriate moves on the stage and overall "cocky" performance: *"I've never seen a Russian woman with such inmates-like manners";"You showed a monster, not a Russian woman"; "Trashy show with poor vocal of a whorish matron".* Manizha's vibe was defined as unfeminine*: "… running around the stage with bulging eyes and screams".* Commenters tried to disassociate themselves from the image presented in the song ("*Who voted for this weird song? It's terrible. I am a Russian woman and this awful song is not about me")*, renouncing Manizha's version of its message ("*Your song is not about the strength and beauty of the Russian women. Your song is about yourself"*) and questioning her sincerity *("It's clear that you did it for promotion"*) and authenticity (*"You are fake, not real … You have nothing to do with Russian aesthetics"*). In several instances even supporters acknowledged that Manizha's presentation was in sharp dissonance with ideas prevailing in local communities: "*The song is cool, but does not match the character of a Russian woman*". Some angry viewers even claimed Manizha should not represent Russia at an international contest.

Those who found Manizha's performance authentic followed her in transgressing linguistic and ethnic boundaries by mixing English and Russian (*"Za tebya! za russkikh vumen"* / "*To you! to Russian women")* and using the word *"russkaya"* in an expansive and evaluative meaning as a symbol of strength and daring *("Vpered, russkaya! Go ahead, Russian woman!"; "You are the coolest Russian woman! Thank you!").* Oftentimes, her supporters spelled the words "Russian woman" in English or in transliteration: "*Ty nastoyashaya Russian Woman!" (You are authentic! A real Russian Woman!!!); "Ty vs'o smogla, ty nastayashaya rashn vuman!" (You could do anything, you are a real Russian woman).* This creates yet another opportunity of a twofold interpretation blurring the boundaries between *Russia's* ("rossiyskaya") and *Russian* ("russkaya") and suggesting a new type of authenticity that transgresses historic and cultural canon: "*Manizha, it was a crazy performance! Thanks to you we saw a new Russian ('russkaya') woman".*

Having polarized society around her song, Manizha gave interviews on TV and YouTube to explain herself and claim her authenticity as a Russian woman. She grounded her argument in her life story as a child whose family had to flee from the civil war in Tajikistan. Having lived in Russia most of her life and speaking Russian as her primary language, Manizha asserted her right to represent Russia: *"It is unfair to say that if you are of a different nationality, you have no right to represent the country"* (Gordeeva 2021). Explaining the message of her song, which Guardian called "a feminist ballad", she shifted the focus from gender stereotypes to the strength of Russian women.

Her understanding of Russianness transcends ethnic categorization because she uses the word metaphorically, with Russian meaning strong, brave, and daring. As part of one of her interviews, she invited a group of women to join her at a tea party conversation (Gordeeva 2021). Her guests live in Russia and identify as Russian, although none of them claims to be ethnically Russian. They take part in some activist social work primarily around women's life experiences. When asked about the qualities of a Russian woman, Manizha and her guests describe the Russian woman as *"strong", "brave", "resolute", "with extensive energy and generous spirit", "upright and resistant", "whose love is strong enough to fight injustice", "heroic", "straightforward", "a peaceful atom"*.

Viewers' comments after the final performance align with this interpretation*: "You showed that the Russian woman is a STRONG woman"; "Russian women are the strongest in spirit! Your strength in the song showed it. We are not giving up*". Some commenters use the word *"nastoyashaya"* ("real", "authentic") and identify Manizha as a Russian *("russkaya")* woman based on her strong character and daring performance: "*You are a real, strong Russian woman!!! An example for many. Yes, you got up and went, and they heard you!!"; "Like a real Russian woman, you withstood everything!"*. Yet, others point to the discrepancy between the traditional understanding of strength as a salient feature of Russian womanhood and Manizha's representation of strength through a call for women's empowerment: "*Russian women are beautiful. And they don't lament about anything. They are strong in themselves and do not need someone to tell them to 'get up and go'"*.

In interviews before the final performance, Manizha repeatedly mentioned that her costume would be made "*from scraps of fabrics of the peoples of Russia*", thus highlighting Russia's cultural diversity and ethnic inclusivity. During the final performance, collages of the paintings by avant-garde Russian female artists were projected on the background screen alternating with images of women of different ages, views, and ethnic backgrounds singing along with the performer. This video sequence also underscored the diversity of Russian women and emphasized Russian women artists' contribution to the world cultural heritage. These recontextualizations achieved their purpose and after the final there were very few, if any, negative comments openly attacking Manizha's ethnicity and her right to represent Russia in the contest.

Overall, Manizha's post-textual commentaries after her initial performance, which caused public controversy, focused on clarifying the message of her song as a way to defy stereotypes and assert her reading of the concept of the Russian woman as a strong, resilient and daring femininity. Her multiple interviews legitimized this view and, to an extent, shaped her performance in the Eurovision final.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Drawing on the two performances of the same song at different stages of the Eurovision song contest, we sought to analyze how authenticity was claimed by the performer and was granted or denied by the audience. Overall, the transtextual analytic framework illustrated the layers of linguistic and cultural authenticity and different paths for semiotic interpretation along the lines of acceptance and rejection. Our analysis demonstrated that interpretation of both performances is largely guided by the pretextual and contextual aspects. In the first performance, Manizha was seeking to address a broad national audience for the first time in her career and positioned herself as a singer with distinct Central Asian roots. In the final contest, she represented the country and addressed the international Eurovision audience. Her second performance was preceded by a series of extensive interviews and media appearances addressing the performance, its meaning, and the performer's life story and worldview. Although the song components (music and lyrics) have been left intact, or unchanged since the first performance in March, other semiotic aspects were strikingly different and meshed into a distinct assemblage guiding the audience's interpretation, with the second performance being more positively received.

The common theme for both performances is the rejection of gender stereotypes and advancement of a modern, down-to-earth, true-to-life womanhood as an alternative to the traditional cultural ideal. As a symbolic act, Manizha sheds off the heavy coat and Russian shawl in the first performance and gets out of a giant cage-like Russian-style dress in the second, remaining in a red jumpsuit and headband, which some viewers interpreted as an allusion to a WWII-time US poster "We can do it!". Her overall performance was a statement of transgressive identity of a contemporary Russian (not necessarily a Slavic) woman living in a global world and accepting its values and linguistic practices. As Coupland (2014) noted, "being inauthentic in relation to an attributed or assumed identity can have many attractions" (p.19). Manizha may have deliberately constructed her Russian woman assemblage to disassociate from the traditional understanding of Russian womanhood and push for rethinking of familiar concepts and attitudes in rapidly changing society. The viewers who share these values and ideologies authenticated her image while a more traditional part of the audience rejected it.

The contestable interpretations stem from the transgressive character of the performance where Manizha brings together local and global associations of womanhood and Russianness, mixes languages, speaking styles, and musical

genres. Taken together, her two performances represent what Pennycook labeled as "exploration of the boundaries of thought" (2007: 43). Certain elements of the first show (such as accented remarks suggesting ethnic Otherness) were revised and replaced in the subsequent performance by catchy English slogans to mitigate references to interethnic relations in Russia and strengthen the globalized discourses of womanhood. Following the principles of authenticity in performative arts ("keep it real"), Manizha was singing and performing her hybrid identity. In and between the performances she was seeking to legitimize her representation of the Russian woman and affirm her authenticity as a Russian female performer although she never negated her Tajik origin.

There are several potential explanations as to why despite all efforts the audience remained divided. One explanation would be that Manizha's supporters and opponents proceeded from conflicting understandings of authenticity. Some were evaluating the song through the lens of authenticity as a static (intrinsic) feature and, as a result, rejected the performance as inauthentic on one or more textual levels. Others seemed to approach authenticity from a more dynamic perspective – as a partially "constructed" and "negotiable" entity (Lacoste et.al 2014: 2). For this part of the audience, Manizha's post-textual commentaries as a response to initial criticisms legitimized her representation of the Russian woman.

Another explanation would address the grounds for authentication. As shown by Blommaert and Varis (2013), a wide range of features reflected in various semiotic representations can be used to display a certain authenticity, yet not all features of a given identity are needed to pass as authentic. Sometimes a "homeopathic dose of resources" would suffice for authentication; the main thing is that it should be "enough to produce a recognizable identity as an authentic someone" (Blommaert & Varis 2013: 6–8). Most Manizha's supporters authenticated her performance based on a salient feature of the Russian womanhood – strength and perseverance. But for a locally oriented audience, it was not enough to identify her representation of the Russian woman as authentic. Denial of authenticity has occurred at a single or multiple levels (language, costume, stage manners, ideological and cultural mismatches with the traditional conceptions).

Finally, the lack of uniformity in the reception of her performance may point to what Coupland (2014) labeled "heightened social reflexivity". With globalization "detraditionalizing" social life, social identities are less stable as they are less rooted in social structures while society becomes less confident in what these identities would mean and less trusting of their representations (Coupland 2003). Current discourses of identity in Russia as far as ethnicity and nationality are concerned reflect that there are multiple dimensions along which identity is negotiated: traditional vs. modern, Russian vs. Western, Russian vs. Other (from the former USSR). Coupled with gender identity and performer's identity, they create a collection of ideological propositions which serve as authenticating and deauthenticating criteria.

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Article history:
Received: 09 June 2022
Accepted: 04 December 2022

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