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Research Article

From Intercultural Communication to Transcultural Creativity: A Study of Russian-American Fiction

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Abstract. The world has been growing more globalised, people have been moving and absorbing different cultural peculiarities. Now intercultural perspective might seem insufficient to describe the extent to which local cultures and identities are linked globally. As a result, language contact and communication between and across cultures have been changing. The present paper aims at studying modern Russian-American fiction from intercultural and transcultural perspectives emphasizing the translingual features and transcultural changes. The paper discusses the phenomenon of creative translingualism, which means writing in one or two languages that are not the native tongues. Contemporary American literature may be proud of its modern writers of Russian and Soviet descent: Olga Grushin, Sana Krasikov, Lara Vapnyar, Anya Ulinich, Irina Reyn. All the authors changed their country of birth and moved to the USA and as a result, they chose English as the language of their creative writings. However, the English of their works reflects the Russian language, culture, and identity of the writers making the English text not truly English. The research primarily studies the linguistic tools (borrowing, code mixing, code-switching and broken English) used by the writers to render Russian culture by means of the English language as well as the transcultural shift that has been inevitable and has become an inalienable part of new cultural identities.

Key words: intercultural communication, translingual writers, transculturality, transcultural creativity, cultural/transcultural identity

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Научная статья

От межкультурной коммуникации к транскультурному литературному творчеству (на примере русско-американской художественной литературы)

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Аннотация. Настоящая статья посвящена вопросам изучения современной русско-американской художественной литературы с межкультурной и транскультурной точек зрения. Особое внимание уделяется транслингвальным особенностям и транскультурным изменениям, происходящим с современными авторами-транслингвами. Исследование в первую очередь направлено на изучение языковых средств, используемых писателями для передачи русской культуры средствами английского языка, а также транскультурных изменений, которые стали неизбежными для писателей и определили их новую культурную идентичность.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация, транслингвальные писатели, транскультурное литературное творчество, культурная/транскультурная идентичность

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Introduction

Traditionally language contact and cultural interaction have been studied from an intercultural communication perspective. Prominent Western (M. Bennett, E. Hall, etc.) and Russian linguists (S. Ter-Minasova, V. Kabakchi, etc.) have developed their theories which describe the interaction of two different cultures and languages. *Interculturalism/ interculturality* concentrates on relationships between individuals, belonging to different cultures, and aims at overcoming problems existing between cultures, which has been an object of the theory of intercultural communication [1. P. 157]. Interculturalism does acknowledge diversity but, in the end, aims at integration understood as something not very far from assimilation [2]. Cultural anthropology sees intercultural communication as interpersonal interaction between various groups, which differ in their knowledge and behaviour models including speech models as well [3. P. 172]. Intercultural communication is also perceived as a mechanism whereby people of different groups perceive and try to

make sense of one another [4]. And very often intercultural communication refers to interactions between speakers who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures [5. P. 118].

In addition to the terms *interculturalism* and *intercultural communication,* it appears to be important to define *multiculturalism*. Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in a society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context [6]. As it becomes obvious from the definitions, both terms, intercultural communication and multiculturalism, describe the multiplicity of forms of cultural life that coexist within a specific society.

However, the world has been growing more globalised, people have been moving and absorbing different cultural peculiarities. As a result, language contact and communication between and across cultures have been changing. Now intercultural perspective might seem insufficient to describe the extent to which local cultures and identities are linked globally. Thus, a *transcultural* perspective, which sees people not in between two cultures but through and across, has become central to contact linguistics. It goes a step further in questioning the 'inter' aspects of intercultural communication and attempting to understand cultural practices that are not necessarily linked to any single identifiable culture [7. P. 3]. The concept of *transculturality* emphasizes the need for the individual to acknowledge the foreign within oneself in order to comprehend others [8. P. x]. Transculturality refers not to the spread of particular forms of culture across boundaries, but to the processes of borrowing, blending, remaking and returning, to processes of alternative cultural production [9]. The transcultural approach as opposed to intercultural views people not in between two cultures but through and across. "On the level of transculturality.... differences no longer come about through a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures (like in a mosaic), but result between transcultural networks, which have some things in common while differing in others, showing overlaps and distinctions at the same time" [10. P. 202]. In contrast to the concepts of *multiculturality/muliculturalism* and *interculturality, transculturality* fosters an inclusive understanding of culture as characterized by differences [8. P. x].

Contemporary scholars are also talking about transcultural communication, which builds on intercultural communication approaches that examine how cultural references, practices and identities are constructed and negotiated in interaction. Participants of transcultural communication are moving through and across cultural and linguistic boundaries and in the process transcending those boundaries [7. P. 3], experiencing cultural transformations and changing their identities. In this respect, the term "transcultural communication" as defined by S. Ting-Toomey (1999) seems to be lacking the idea of a new identity formation. Ting-Toomey understands the transcultural communications competence as 'an incremental learning journey whereby intercultural communicators learn to mutually adapt to each other's behaviours appropriately and flexibly' [11]. In the present paper, we understand the phenomenon of transculturality as the formation of multifaceted, fluid identities resulting from diverse cultural encounters [8. P. ix].

Discussion

The way new identities are shaped is best seen in the imaginative literature which offers a powerful means of exploring transcultural experiences. Many literary works published over the past three decades (by such authors as Andre Makine, Joseph O'Neill, Monica Ali, Ha Jin, Gary Steingart, etc.) reflect a preoccupation with transcultural encounters against the background of globalisation and increased migration. Literary criticism can make a valuable contribution to understanding of transculturality and the reconceptualization of collective and individual identities [8. P. xi]. However, it is linguistic aspects which technically trace the transformations occurring in the language and identity of transcultural authors that are of particular interest. In this respect, it is essential to define the concept of *transligualism*. Z. Proshina sees translingualism as not only a juxtaposition and interaction of different languages and cultures, but their flow from one linguaculture into another [1. P. 160].

As far as the present paper deals with purely linguistic features of transcultural writers, it is important to define the term "translingual" as opposed to "interlingual". Interlingual is understood here as related to or existing between two or more languages (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The term translingual conceives of language relationships in more dynamic terms: the languages mesh in transformative ways, generating new meanings and grammars [12]. Pennycook discussing the translingual model of language points to the relationship among interlingual resources (what language resources people draw on), colingual relations (who says what to whom where) and ideolingual implications (what gets taken from what language use with what investments, ideologies, discourses and beliefs) [13. P. 306]. The present paper sees *interlingual* as dealing with rendering sense between two languages using the form and tools of the target language, and *translingual* as dealing with rendering linguistic, cultural, ideological features and identity using the tools of the language a translingual speaks, and there is no source and target language in translingualism.

Taking into account the value of literary works in the search of translingual peculiarities and transcultural transformations, we accept the definition of such literature given by S. Kellman. The scholar coins the term *literary translingualism* and defines it as the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language, which is other than their primary one [6. P. 9]. Translingual literature calls into question the transparency of language, reminding the reader of its contingency and instability [8. P. xxiii]. Transligual writings demonstrate how languages, cultures and identities are mixed. Such texts are perfect evidence that code mixing and code-switching, sampling of sounds, genres, languages and cultures are normal.

Russian-American fiction

Literary fiction produced by contemporary Russian-American writers have become extremely popular among American readers who are fascinated by the novels and short stories told by Russian immigrants (NOVAYA GAZETA, June, 2012). American literary critics are welcoming their writings: Gary Shteyngart's *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* got Stephen Crane Award for First Fiction, the Book-of-the-Month Club First Fiction Award and the National Jewish Book Award for Fiction. Anya Ulinich has Goldberg

Prize for Emerging Writers of Jewish Fiction Winner (2008) and National Book Foundation's "5 under 35" Winner (2007). Olga Grushin's *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*, her first novel (published in 2005), won the 2007 New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, was chosen as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and a Washington Post Top Ten Best Book of the Year. And the list is not full.

The aim of the present research has been to study the works of Russian-American female writers from the transcultural perspective, tracing translingual techniques used by the authors to render their transformed identities. The following literary fiction produced by contemporary Russian-American writers have been chosen for the study: "The Dream Life of Sukhanov", "40 Rooms" by Olga Grushin, "Petropolis" by Anya Ulinich, "Memoirs of a Muse" by Lara Vapnyar, "What happened to Anna K." by Irina Reyn, "One More Year" by Sana Krasikov.

All the writers under study have Russian as their primary language and English as the language of their creative writings. All of them have acquired fluency in English in the USA and are functionally bilingual. Their Russian underlies the English surface and can be apprehended in borrowings, instances of code-switching, definitions of Russian terms and other techniques of creative interference.

Borrowings

The first thing which translingual writings are abundant with is borrowings. These, unlike code-mixing and code-switching, involve mixing the language systems, because an item is borrowed from one language to become the part of the other language [14]. Usually borrowings from the native tongues are italicized; sometimes writers leave them without explanation.

(1) David's skin smelled of pastry, like the fresh *rugelach* her grandmother used to bake...[15. P. 134].

(2) All through the burial, the *kelekhi* supper, Gogi had watched her with an adult's appraising seriousness [16. P. 36].

Jewish pastry product *rugelach* reminds us of Irina Reyn's Jewish roots. The writer resettled from Moscow to New York by the Jewish American refugee nonprofit programme. *Rugelach* is defined as "a pastry made with cream-cheese dough that is rolled around a filling (such as nuts, jam, or chocolate) and baked" by Merriam Webster and appears at different American recipe websites. Sana Krasikov grew up in Georgia and in the USA where she moved at the age of 9, and the use of Georgian word *kelekhi*, which means a dinner after burial, shows the part of her identity which belongs to Georgian culture. *Kelekhi* hasn't been fixed by any English language dictionary, but its meaning can be easily found at the English-language websites describing Georgian culture. Although both writers ethnically belong to different cultures (Jewish and Georgian respectively), the US readers know them as Russian-American novelists, which can be explained by marketing reasons: Russianness sells better on the modern literature market [17].

Apart from lexical borrowing modern translingual writers tend to borrow Russian phonetic peculiarities in order to render Russianness of their characters:

(3) "Your name, miss?" he'd ask me every single time.
"Tatyana."
"Tat'ya what?"

"Tatyana."

"There is a *Tatti Anna* for you, sir". [18. P. 136]

(4) I told her about my tour of Dieter's business.

"Ah, *biznis*," said Larisa. "I remember it used to be very exciting." [16. P. 199].

"Example (3)" shows the character of the novel transcribing her Russian name, and the English words she uses to make it comprehensible for the English-language speaker. In "Example (4)" the character pronounces the word "business" with a Russian accent, which Sana Krasikov shows with transcription.

Many borrowed words, both fixed by the English language dictionaries and not, assimilate to the English language: form plurals and possessive cases, become parts of compound words or function as attributes in attributive clusters.

(5) ...and many-armed, troll-like silhouettes shifted feverishly in the lit windows of neighboring *dachas*, engaged in some dim, ugly activities of living [19. P. 238].

(6) I can feel the *dacha's* peaceful darkness behind my back [20. P. 34].

(7) ...the color of morning mist above the waters of our *dacha pond* [20. P. 8].

Olga Grushin shows many cases of the assimilation of the loan word *dacha*, which means "a Russian country cottage used especially in the summer" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Code-mixing

In addition to borrowing, we observe multiple examples of code-mixing which refers to the mixing of various linguistic units from two language systems within a sentence [21].

(8) "Sit still, *Ba*," I said, turning away from her stare. I called her a short and intimidating "Ba" instead of a long "Babushka." I loved to bully her. "Sit straight, Ba, you don't want to spill your soup." [18. P. 8].

(9) "So, what happened next, Grandma?" [18. P. 16].

Lara Vapnyar uses the short form *ba* to say "grandmother", and she explains it in the text. But at the same time in "Example (9)" she tends to use interlingual variant — grandma — at the same page in the same dialogue, which shows the simultaneous use of both translingual and interlingual tools.

(10) Larisa only shrugged. "He called me his *Turgenyevskaya jenshina*, his Turgenev woman. I guess that's what I am. In one lifetime I can love only one man. And my heart will always be given to him" [16. P. 209].

"Example (10)" contains a very personal transcription of the Russian word женщина, a woman, with a Russian sound щ, which is usually transcribed via *shch* cluster. A "Turgenev girl" or "woman" is a particular type of female character invented by the 19th century Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev woman is usually described as having delicate manners and being modest, refined, simple, romantic, living in their dreams (Russia Beyond, December, 2015). Sana Krasikov seems to be using the technique of inner translation to add to her Russianness.

Code-switching

Multiple examples of code-switching are also one of the characteristics of translingual writings. Unlike code-mixing, code-switching is the use of different linguistic units (words,

phrases, clauses, and sentences) from two language systems across sentence boundaries within speech event [21].

(11) "Did you know that we have another Stalin and he has practically the same name?"..."*Nu i shto*, Papa, we know, we know."

(12) "*Poterpi, dushen'ka. Poterpi*," he whispered softly, interrupting the cacophony of his panting and moans. "*Poterpi, dushen'ka*." *Poterpet*! The silent Polina revolted. All the great love she hoped to find came down to "*yield and endure*"?

Irina Reyn in "Example (11)" switches codes saying "so what" in Russian, whereas Lara Vapnyar uses full sentences in Russian to explain what exactly the character felt in "Example (12)". Russian word "poterpet", explained as "yield and endure" by the author, means a lot for the Russian culture and carries certain cultural connotations: great patience, tolerance toward sufferings and endurance are a part of Russian mentality [22].

Another example of code-switching is calque translation of idiomatic expressions.

(13) ...three consecutive violin instructors declared Sasha profoundly *tone deaf* and musically uneducable. "*A bear stepped on her ear*," Mrs. Goldberg complained to the neighbors...

The Russian expression "a bear stepped on her ear" means "have no ear for music", which is explained by Anya Ulinich in the context with an English expression "tone deaf". It is interesting to note that the author combines interlingual instruments of rendering idioms (searching for the adequate idiom in the target language) and translingual techniques — in this case, it is calque translation of the Russian phraseological unit.

(14) "If you're admitted, you'll be going three days.... a "District 7 is *all the way up the devil's horns*," replied Sasha, trying hard to hide her relief "Example (14)" contains a Russian idiom meaning "the back of beyond" which becomes clear from the context. Horns are the most recognizable devil's feature, that is why when in Russia one describes something that is far away, they talk about this place as being up the devil's horns.

Broken English

Broken English or contaminated speech is the process by which one word or phrase is altered because of mistaken associations with another word or phrase (Collins dictionary of English). Russian-American writers use it as a translingual device to show hesitant or sometimes poor English of their characters:

(15) "*Hoa... where... you*?" he said in English when I walked in. "What?" I said. "*How where you*?" "Where were you?" I said, trying to clarify. Misha shook his head. "*How where you*?" he repeated slowly. From the day he'd picked me up at the airport, he'd been testing his English on me. He'd mentioned winning some English-language award when he was in high school sometime in nineteen fifty — something, and I didn't have the heart to discourage him. "You mean, how are you?" I said. "*Da*!" Misha nodded, and slapped his hands together. "I am good," I said, speaking as slowly as he'd spoken to me. "How are you?" "*I ... yem... faine*," Misha answered, and broke into a wide grin. [16. P. 198]

The dialogue in "Example (15)" from Sana Krasikov's short story "There Will Be No Fourth Rome" shows a mispronounced English-language question "How are you" and

the answer "I'm fine". The author uses wrong spelling and wrong words to show the character's errors.

Transcultural creativity

Translingual novels are products of transcultural experiences and a source of transcultural creativity, which demonstrate a blend of two cultures and a new identity shaped. The linguistic proof for that are the translingual devices used by the authors to incorporate Russianness into the English language of their works. Among the main tools are borrowing, code mixing, code-switching and broken English.

The research showed that translingual devices used by the authors technically mark their transcultural experience and provide a transcultural creativity toolbox to be used during creative writing or translation courses. Not the interaction of two cultures, but the mix that brings to life a new identity and such transformations must and will be studied from a transcultural point of view and a broader interdisciplinary perspective.

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