

Title: Gramota.Ru: Language Monitoring, Folk Linguistics, and the Battle for Norms in the Contemporary Russian Mass Media

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Russian language mavens commonly look with disdain to the contemporary mass media as the main cause of what they perceive to be the pollution (*ogrjaznenie*) or distortion (*iskazhenie*) of the “great and mighty” national tongue. From the infusion of vulgarity and foreign loans to the near viral spread of “*albanskiy jazyk*” (or “*jazyk padonkov*”, e.g. *prived*, *krosavcheg*, *afftar*), both old and new media have been tagged by many as a wholly negative influence on post-Soviet Russian language culture. This paper challenges this common assumption by examining one media-based response to the “linguistic lawlessness” (*jazykovej bespredel*) that has come to be associated with the 1990s and early 2000s.

Since its inception in June 2000, the internet site “Russkii iazyk” (more commonly known by its web address, “Gramota.Ru”) has marketed itself as a “portal” for the Russian language. With generous state funding, it has established itself as the premier online authority for issues in language usage, policy, and monitoring. In addition to serving as an interactive reference source for users with questions about proper usage, the project serves as a venue for scholarship, competitions, games, and a wide range of language-related news and discussions. Despite its widely recognized reputation as the go-to authority for all things language-related (underscored by its self-proclaimed status as “portal”), few have examined the extent or nature of such a resource’s actual influence. To what extent can “Gramota.Ru” be seen as a successful player in the ongoing process of linguistic normalization? In what ways does its new-media based platform enhance its influence on contemporary language culture?

In this paper I provide some preliminary answers to these questions through a metalinguistic examination not only of the body of knowledge that constitutes the portal, but also of the individuals and institutions foremost involved in both the production and reception of that knowledge. Given the pretense of interactivity of such a resource, I pay particular attention to what Deborah Cameron (1995) has called “folk linguistics” and its role in both “Gramota.Ru” and the broader debates over contemporary Russian language usage and norms.

References:

Deborah Cameron. 1995. *Verbal Hygiene*. London: Routledge.