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The Language of Protest, Belonging and Exclusion: Russian Anti-Election Campaigns in Europe (2011-2012)

Abstract. *This article focuses on specific protest language formed during the row of anti-election activities of 2011-2012, which were performed by Russian migrants currently residing in London, Berlin and Barcelona. The phenomenon is analysed from three standpoints (its linguistic variability and potential creativity, symbolic repertoire and communicative purpose) and provides a vivid example of how the processes of inclusion and exclusion – here expressed through activities of these groups within the wider context of Russian protest movements – influence the self-identification of Russian migrants regarding their homeland and former compatriots, other Russian communities worldwide and new host environments of Western Europe.*

Key words: protest language, belonging, exclusion, migrants, civic activism.

Introduction

Following Russian parliamentary elections on December 5, 2011 and the presidential election on March 4, 2012, the rise of anti-election mass meetings and related forms of civic action achieved such an unprecedented level that the whole phenomenon was immediately attributed the title of ‘Snow Revolution’ and became subject to academic scrutiny.¹ In parallel to the protest campaigns in Russia itself, there was a considerable wave of activities held by Russian citizens currently residing in other countries worldwide that, however, attracted only very limited interest from the Russian media and academia alike.² Yet, as will be discussed in what follows, these activities present a relevant and, in many ways, unique example of the way contemporary Russian communities abroad exist and function in different host cultures, while at the same time positioning themselves in relation to ‘mainland’ Russia as their ‘homeland’.

¹ Cf. Digital Icons (2012), (2013); Forum for Anthropology and Culture (2012). One of the examples of an on-going academic project focusing on various folklore forms of the ‘Snow Revolution’ is the on-line platform for storing, structuring and archiving the ‘protest language’ of the campaigns, <http://24december.visantrop.ru/>.

² For a rare example of auto-ethnography of Russian protest campaigning in France, see Nikolaeva 2012.

Moreover, when it comes to international representations of the Russian protest movement, it was a photo taken during an anti-election meeting in London, and not Moscow or elsewhere in Russia, which made its way into Google Zeitgeist 2011 – a collection of the most searched-for images, compiled annually by Google as a snapshot of the passing year (Google Zeitgeist 2011). Yet, in Russia, the contribution to the general protest of communities abroad seemed almost invisible. Starting with this paradox, I aim to look at the recent anti-election campaigns of Russians abroad from the perspective of linguistic anthropology, focusing on the way in which certain broader processes of self-identification, belonging and exclusion are expressed through linguistic resources employed by protesters.

I will examine this phenomenon from three interlinked standpoints. Firstly, I will discuss the protesters' language repertoire, or rather, the linguistic choices made by them in a given multilingual setting, with particular focus on the active 'vocabulary of protest' outside Russia and its relation to the protest language found in the Russian 'mainland'. Secondly, I will examine and compare the use of particular international, non-Russian cultural imagery and discourses by Russian protesters in Russia itself and those living abroad, with particular focus on the transnational complexities of an emergent 'protest folklore'. Finally, I analyse the protest activities of Russian migrants as a specific communicative act – including its potential and actual addressees, and its distinctive channels of transmission - while taking particular notice of a certain communicative 'noise' characteristic of its environment.

Methodology and analytical frame

Shared language is considered one of the key factors that bring a group together and influence the way identities are (re)produced in communication with representatives of other groups (Gumperz 1982). It is especially so for the migrant communities to which 'language loss almost inevitably results in assimilation into another, dominant culture' (Montgomery 2005, p. 29). The issue of linguistic competence thus becomes one of the crucial dimensions along which the processes of inclusion into or exclusion from a group are constructed. Speaking the language of a particular group becomes a significant claim of one's (possible) belonging to this group or an important symbolic means of expressing one's solidarity with the group's views.

The notion of language in this respect does not limit itself to a strictly linguistic concept as a set of grammatical rules and their practical application - as, for example,

‘Russian’ or ‘English’. It also refers to a variety of dialects and codes, jargons and vernaculars that characterize distinct social, ethnic, religious or political groups. Moreover, this term also describes set discourses that specify particular fields of communication linked to certain issues of social life or expertise. It also deals with the construction of boundaries and the issue of linguistic resources deployed to build them, as well as the ‘semiotic mobility’ these resources may have in various social, cultural or political contexts (Blommaert 2010, p. 47). Using linguistic resources in multilingual contexts for building a community’s identity draws in the idea of the basic opposition of the ‘we-code’ and the ‘they-code’, in the classical elaboration by Gumperz.³ However, in the case of the transnational nature of current migration, the idea of migrants’ ‘we-code’ also relates to their embeddedness in their home culture and, most specifically, their belonging to quite specific social or cultural groups within the wider population of their motherland. My intention here is to examine how using a certain language as a discursive practice works within wider processes of inclusion, exclusion, recognition, identity-building and expression of belonging vis-à-vis transnational migrants in a multi-linguistic setting.

I also see this example as illustrative of the way ‘mainland’ Russian society conceives its diasporas worldwide - in particular, the way it responds to the political action of Russians living abroad and the way in which it thereby delimits its boundaries of national ‘sovereignty’. The fact of who speaks a particular language to whom and when provides a better understanding of the way Russian public opinion views the possibility for involvement of Russian citizens abroad. Building on Habermas’ notion of the ‘public sphere’ as an (idealized) source of ‘public opinion’ necessary for legitimating power in any functioning democracy (Habermas 1989), Russian political analysts have recently developed the idea of ‘the public muteness syndrome’, which is said to be characteristic of Russian post-Soviet public communication (Gladarev 2013). In what follows, I will thus also examine the way the Russian public sphere influences ways of speaking to authorities and the peculiarities of this specific ‘protest talk’, in particular.

³ In particular, Gumperz argues that the semantic value attached to the two languages of a bilingual speaker is that of the ‘we code’ and the ‘they code’ : ‘the tendency is for the ethnically specific minority language to be regarded as the “we code” and become associated with in-group and informal activities, while the majority language serves as the “they code” associated with the more formal, stiff and less personal out-group relations’ (Gumperz, 1982, p.66). This semantic potential is then said to be part of the cultural and linguistic knowledge and ‘retrieved’ in occasions of code-switching (Ibid).

Russians abroad: In search of the voice to be heard

Russian anti-election campaigns spread globally in a matter of days and, along with the first mass meetings held within the country, more than 30 cities worldwide supported Russian rallies by way of local demonstrations. Coordinated through a common group on Facebook⁴ supported by special groups and events set up specifically for local activities, Russian citizens abroad created an efficient and flexible way to organize their further moves. In what follows, I focus my discussion on three cities in which protest activities were organized regularly, paralleling the main events of the ‘mainland’ Russian protest – namely, London, Berlin and Barcelona.

Each of the migrant communities in question is interesting for being exposed to a very different host language and culture within the broader area of Europe. Moreover, each of them has its own distinctive history and character of Russian-speaking migration. Germany has been for decades the most popular destination for Russian-speaking migrants – with its special status as the capital of the first-wave ‘White’ emigration, Berlin is still well-known for its Russian-speaking diaspora.⁵ Despite the fact that Spain’s Russian-speaking communities are considerably less numerous than those of Germany, Barcelona’s Russian-speaking group is particularly vibrant and community-oriented, with various ways of socializing both off- and on-line.⁶

Great Britain, in its turn, with a rich history as a favorite destination for political refugees from Russia, has provided the headquarters for a number of Russian-language political movements and societies that have come to be considered ‘the professionals of protest’: the regularity and mode of their public activities present consistent reactions to all political events in Russia itself, forming a specific ‘protest text’ that reflects their political programs and wider outlooks. Some examples of these campaigns held before the first mass meetings abroad include well-thought-out political art happenings. The most vivid examples include ‘Halloween 31’ - the symbolic juxtaposition of a British costumed holiday and a regular monthly campaign for the freedom of gatherings in Russia, also known as ‘Strategy 31’. Also included is ‘The Russian Democracy’s Funeral’, which is a purely artistic demonstration that took place the day after the parliamentary elections on December 5, 2011,

⁴ Fair vote for Russia. An international group on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/fvfrinternational/>).

⁵ On history of Russian migration to Berlin, see Shlegel 2004; for contemporary Russian-speaking migration to Berlin, see Darieva 2004; Dietz 2011.

⁶ For an actual example of on-line organization the Colinfo portal seems perfectly relevant: <http://colinfo.ru/>.

although it was organized well beforehand. The linguistic and symbolic resources these activists employ most regularly include internationally understandable slogans and signs that use less linguistic pragmatics and more worldwide symbolism based on stereotypical notions – for example, the Russian government (a medieval monarch's garment with a scepter and an orb used in 'Halloween 31') or democracy as a Western value (a Westernized business suit for a 'Russian democracy' that was 'buried' during its 'Funeral' after the parliamentary elections). Their slogans tend to be small in number and rather laconic, while exploiting some of the best-known 'global English' cliché phrases: for example, the 'Trick or Trick?' slogan (a pun on the phrase 'Trick or Treat?', the ultimatum given by children who call on houses to solicit gifts at Halloween) printed across a doubled photo of Vladimir Putin on a poster used at the 'Halloween 31' happening.

Right before the parliamentary elections in December 2011, the Russian part of the Internet, the Runet, was full of information on the details of the forthcoming voting system, and, in particular, how to vote abroad. The effect was obvious – the attendance numbers at the parliamentary elections were sufficiently higher than those in 2007, attendance levels for the presidential elections in March went even higher⁷, and those who wanted to vote had to wait in long queues outside Russian Embassies.

The wave of mass protests that arose right after the December elections immediately crossed the Russian state borders, involving most Russian-speaking communities abroad. According to the most approximate estimations available on-line⁸ and reported by the attendees themselves, the most numerous mass meetings took place in Berlin (with over 1,000 people during the first rally and up to 400 at the last one in late February). London campaigns started with up to 400 participants, ending with only around 50 during the March campaign). In Barcelona there were approximately 100 protesters, but this number remained stable throughout the three months of regular activities.

The main sources of data for my analysis include online reports, reviews and photo archives of different levels of formality⁹ (personal blogs and twitter accounts, events and groups on Facebook, as well as other, mostly Russian-speaking, social networks, reviews and articles in various media, both in Russia and worldwide). My analysis is also based on a series

⁷ For example, in Great Britain 2150 voters took part in December parliamentary elections in 2011 (with 1300 of voters at the previous elections in 2007) whereas for the presidential elections in March 2012 the number of attendees was 4860.

⁸ E.g. data presented at events' pages on Facebook or rather loose calculations provided in bloggers' reports.

⁹ All of them are freely accessed by any Internet user.

of semi-structured interviews and e-mail questionnaire surveys carried out with key organizers and some participants of the campaigns in London, Berlin and Barcelona.

Language choice, multi-linguistic protest and language-games

In contrast to the protesters in their country of origin, Russian citizens abroad were initially put in a bi- or multilingual context where their choice of linguistic resources from those available tended to be crucial. Driven by the move of unity with those protesting in Russia, their first intention was to maintain the universality of language and modes of speaking – hence the obvious thematic homogeneity of all the posters, slogans and texts, especially those presented during the first mass meetings (December 10, 2011 and December 24, 2011). This unity was also expressed through linguistic means: a considerable part of the slogans presented was in Russian, with the rest being very close translations or full replicas of these same texts in English or (less often) in languages of the host countries.

One of the most common themes for the posters was the *‘России – честные выборы’*, ‘Fair votes for Russia’ slogan (with its analogies in German and Spanish for Berlin and Barcelona respectively), or – less frequently – ‘Russians united for fair vote’ (with the theme of unity of all citizens being emphasized in those ones). The slogan had another significant alteration in Russian, with no translation to any other language, which was *‘Мы за честные выборы’* (‘We are for fair elections’), the notion of ‘we’ therefore expressed only in the native language. Other widespread slogans would include the *‘2x2=49’*¹⁰ – ‘Only in Russia’ posters, or protesters’ claims that their voices were stolen at the ballots, or the ‘Russia without Putin’ slogans. Due to prompt online distribution, the main bulk of pre-designed posters became available to all potential participants worldwide and thus made them engaged into the overall protest chorus.

This communicative unity with Russian protesters was also maintained by responding to recent quotes of Russian political or public speakers and thus creating a ‘quasi-dialogue’ with the Russian authorities and their supporters. One of the quickest (and most ironic) ‘responses’ of this kind, the question *‘Нас здесь тоже купили?’* (‘Have we been paid here as well?’), was presented on a poster at the Barcelona demonstration (December 24, 2011) and addressed Putin’s speculation (made during his interview on December 15) about those participating in Moscow meetings as ‘students who are paid a little money to go out for

¹⁰ Variant: 4% + 9% = 49%.

riot'.¹¹ Another response of this kind was addressed to a political pro-Putin activist from a youth organization supporting the '*Edinaia Rossiia*' (United Russia) party, S.Kouritsina (better known as 'Sveta from Ivanovo') who became infamous all over the Russian-speaking Internet in hours after her improvised interview where she explained all the benefits of Putin's regime and party policies. Her phrase '*Мы стали более лучше одеваться*' ('We dress more better now') was parodied in a 'reply' poster by two girls in Barcelona on December 24, 2011, saying '*Мы готовы менее лучше одеваться*' ('We are ready to dress less better'). Here this careful citation – of the official's claims or the original 'broken' Russian – reduces the distance between the speakers as in a purely linguistic, if not political, sense they speak the same, idiosyncratic tongue.

Thus, the issue of the Russian-speaking migrants' belonging is reconsidered from two different standpoints: the simultaneity of anti-election campaigns creates one united arena for the protest worldwide and refers to a general communicative context by producing 'replies' to public figures in Russia and opening up a transnational protest dialogue. Russians living abroad thereby claim their place within the general protest movement. Demanding that their voice be heard among others, they perform their right to feel as cheated as their compatriots back 'home'.

At the same time, existence in a multilingual environment may also be potentially creative, as 'constant interaction between a speaker's multiple languages creates new structures and emerging properties that are not found in monolingual systems' (Todeva and Cenoz 2009, 5). The ambiguity and polysemy that are inherent in multilingual utterances could be used to intensify an expression or to add some new levels of meanings to a concept in use. For Russian-speaking protesters, the English language occupies a special place in this sense: engaging it in their 'protest talk', they create a new kind of 'language-game' that helps them to make their statement more versatile. However, this language-game is rarely employed, since it requires a certain level of competence in several languages from both sides involved in the 'game'. The main purpose of the protesters 'speaking out' is their inclusion in the general political claim, rather than in creating a polylogue. Consequently, the necessity of readability and easy comprehension outweighs their urge for creativity and 'ludicity', and complicated, multi-layered, multi-linguistic utterances (that may also address the specific realities of Russian migrants abroad) are therefore barely used.

¹¹ The double irony of the response being that it was presented by a man obviously well in his 50-s.

Some of the rare exceptions include posters from London, where the sound of the surname Putin is explored in different variations. The most popular of these is “Put in trash” with its ‘translation’ into Russian as ‘Putin is trash’¹² and “Put in/Put out” (09 December 2011). Another way to initiate this kind of language-game is to rephrase well-known or cliché phrases in English, in order to provide them with a hint of ambiguity by referring to the context of the Russian political protest. Examples from London mass meetings (December 10, 2011; February 4, 2012) include posters with the ‘It’s ok to say the F word – Fraud’, ‘Putin spoiled his ballot’ and ‘In Putin’s Russia, government votes for you’ lines.

Yet another way to involve the potential of multi-linguistic environment is by using English ‘untranslatables’ to evoke a series of online discussions on possible analogies of these phrases in Russian. The most popular of the examples for this strategy was a poster from the London meeting (December 10, 2011) saying ‘Putin cheats at math’ and setting off arguments on the best translation of this phrase into Russian with all the variety of contexts expressed in it.¹³

All these examples, however, are infrequent within the general picture of the Russian protest abroad, which can be explained by several factors. The most evident of these is quite pragmatic, as it requires high-level, almost native-speaker proficiency in a number of languages and a specific taste for linguistic creativity in a given social context that needs to be familiar and manageable for all the communicants. However, if the main reason were in their insufficient level of competence in any foreign language, there would most likely have been a number of examples of this ‘language-game’ at work in their native Russian. But this was also not the case – such examples were also quite rare, the most remarkable one being a poster from Barcelona (December 24, 2011) with the word ‘*Выборы*’ made into the phrase ‘*Вы воры*’ (‘Elections’ changed into ‘You thieves’).

Another reason for this under-use is arguably the context of communicative distance between the speakers in this dialogue. The researchers focusing of the ‘Snow Revolution’ folklore within Russia (Forum 2012) have tended to extensively adopt Bakhtin’s concept of ‘the culture of folk humour’, which, introduced initially in his analysis of Rabelais’ and

¹² ‘Путин треш’ in Russian. The word ‘треш’, an obvious borrowing from English, has, however, transferred its meaning over time from original ‘rubbish, waste’ towards ‘horror, nightmare’ in Russian.

¹³ From a post of one of the organizers of that meeting: “Всем Твиттером думали, как перевести правильно. Так и не придумали. Самое близкое - "Путин сжульничал с математикой" или "Путин - читер в математике". Ну никак не перевести на 100%. Чтобы и глагол был детский. И математика была одновременно и уроком, и системой подсчета голосов. В общем, больше вот таких лозунгов и все будет хорошо :)” (<http://moscowlondon.livejournal.com/2011/12/11/>).

Gogol's works (1976),¹⁴ made its way to a broader field of cultural studies, anthropology and literary critics. The 'culture of folk humor' of the protest talk within Russia was a predominant tool for preserving a distance between the speakers - i.e., protesters - and their intended opponent - i.e., the authorities.¹⁵ The intention of the Russian-speaking protesters abroad was, however, quite the opposite – namely, to *reduce* this distance between them as part of the overall movement and the Russian government as the explicit target of the protest and one important addressee of the protest messages. The need to 'bridge the gap' and express their belonging to a wider cultural context is also expressed through the specific symbolic interpretation of Russian-speaking protesters abroad.

The symbolic repertoire of the Russian protest abroad: Local specifics vs. cultural universals

Following the discussion of the linguistic resources at hand as an important indicator of how the protest of Russian citizens abroad is conceived and realized by them, my next step is to examine more closely their symbolic repertoire of the movement and how it relates to symbols used in the 'mainland' Russian protests, considering also how this bears upon the identities of Russian migrants. My starting point in this exploration is the rich and well-developed corpus of symbols, references, themes and their interpretations, which defined anti-election campaigns in Russia and were actively re-produced and transformed in different campaigns of the protest movement, having become an essential part of the so-called 'protest folklore' (Lurie 2012).

However, somewhat surprisingly, a part of these symbols that were originally introduced into Russian-language usage from other cultures – say, the British one – was not adopted by Russian-speaking protesters in these countries. For example, the whole set of popular images from the Harry Potter series that was employed extensively in the Russian context of the 'Snow Revolution'¹⁶ was 'lost in translation' for the Russian-speaking protesters in Britain – none of these were used during London anti-election campaigns. This is also true in relation to Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy and Kipling's Mowgli, however, in

¹⁴ For Bakhtin, the essence of this humor culture was expressed in medieval and Renaissance culture, whereas afterwards there were only particular elements of this carnivalesque culture taking forms of spectacles in marketplaces, any parodies, or abusive language.

¹⁵ For discussion of the 'folk talk' of the Russian opposition and its 'laughing' nature see articles by M. Akhmetova, M. Aleksevsky and A. Moroz in Forum 2012.

¹⁶ For the introduction and further development of the images from Harry Potter, see Forum 2012, or thematic sections of <http://24december.visantrop.ru>.

these two cases, the initial sources of images used by the protesters were not the original texts but their re-workings for the screen - a Hollywood movie and a Soviet cartoon respectively - and the initial British origins of either of these were less obvious.¹⁷ With considerably less attention to any German¹⁸ or Spanish cultural realia given by the protesters back in Russia, the idea of adopting any of them by Russian-speaking migrants locally, in countries they originally came from, seemed almost impossible.

A rather different way for Russian migrants to express their protest could have been to employ some of the themes that widely circulated in their communities about the host cultures they lived in. Indeed, most of those who organized the first anti-election campaigns abroad were journalists writing for Russian-based newspapers, bloggers, well-known cultural figures, or just particularly active members of online Russian-speaking forums. All of them, in their existing discourse, adopted a very particular point of view, presenting a foreign country through the eyes of a compatriot to their mainland audience, an example of naïve ethnography, or a kind of ‘traveler’s diary’ kept on a regular basis and regularly referring to a set of stereotypical themes related to the cultures they describe. However, when it came to their engagement in the protest, they seemed to abandon this particular vantage point, preferring instead to assume a more ‘universal’ set of protest images already established both in Russia and globally, without making the protest in any way locally specific.

The opportunity to add a new, international aspect to the protest of Russian citizens and perhaps prompt British, Spanish or German host communities to pay more attention to the recent events in Russian politics was initially noticed by organizers and participants. For example, a joint blog by two journalists with a name ‘gap-the mind’, was widely used as a channel for transmitting all the latest updates on upcoming activities and for posting extensive reports afterwards. In their preparation for the meetings, its authors claimed that they wanted to appeal to the host community.¹⁹ However, this strategy was, in fact, not employed by any of the Russian protesters abroad – locally specific symbols or motives were not brought into play. The only way any cultural specificity of the host countries was developed in protest talk was by engaging the most widespread, the most well-known and cited realities of the cultural contexts in which they were currently located. For the Barcelona mass meetings, this was

¹⁷ The Russian protest folklore was also rather attentive and welcoming to any events or characters which might be considered quite regional, or at least with little impact on Russian political or cultural life (to name a few, the British group ‘Radiohead’, the former Czech president Vaclav Havel, the German mathematician Johann Gauss, etc.).

¹⁸ The only exception was various comparisons of Putin to Hitler (with the neologism ‘Putler’ as its peak) which might have been considered inappropriate in Germany.

¹⁹ See, e.g. <http://gap-themind.livejournal.com/79095.html>.

revealed through the sporadic mentioning of the Real Madrid FC (December 24, 2011), while the protesters in Berlin referred to the German movie title 'Goodbye Lenin!', remaking it into the poster 'Goodbye Putin!' (February 4, 2012).

For the London mass meetings, this meant using imagery from an international mass-media culture, which is on the whole more American than British. Typical examples might be the posters for the London meetings (December 10 and 24, 2011) portraying the well-known American cartoon hero Kenny ('Bastards, they stole my vote'), those reworking the title of the Hollywood movie 'Dude, where's my car?' into 'Dude, where's my vote?', or re-interpreting the cliché 'Wild West' poster 'Wanted: Fair elections'.

This tendency of copying the very sound of speech and the image of foreign language most Russian speakers would share, but not its actual cultural realities or local symbols, also seems relevant to Spanish- and German-speaking environments. In Barcelona, this language specificity is tightly connected with the idea of any Spanish-language realia being adequate and coherent in the environment of Spain-based culture in particular – for example, the image of Cheburashka, a Soviet cartoons character, is presented with attributes of Che Guevara, who is seen as originally 'Spanish' (December 24, 2011). For Berlin, the predominance of language in the view Russian migrants have on German culture at large is reproduced through the way a quote from the Soviet film 'Kin-dza-dza' (1987) becomes re-actualized due to its resemblance with the sound of German speech: the expression 'etsikh (s gvozdiami)' is used in a longer slogan, '*ЦИКУ – пожизненный эцих с гвоздями*' ('to CEC – a life-long 'etsikh' with nails', December 10, 2011).

This tendency exemplifies the most common language attitudes that Russian-speaking migrants share and reproduce, the way they perceive the languages of the host cultures and construct and experience the images of local languages in which they might not always be highly proficient. On the other hand, the fact that the Russian protest movement abroad does not rely on local symbolic resources, that it uses only the most popular and widespread among them, and only in their most stereotyped forms, without going deeper into the cultural context of the host country, suggests that the protest discourse, as such, seems to elide, obscure or sidestep much of its local 'situatedness'. This could also be explained by the wish of protesters abroad to become included in the wider Russian protest by speaking a 'common language', not only in the strictly linguistic way but also in a wider sense. In fact, this homogeneity of the protest discourse stems from the strategy of finding solidarity and unity by defining 'commonplaces' and thus perceiving the reality of migrant life through the eyes

of their former compatriots back home.²⁰ This intention to speak the same language and be included in the context of the protest shows how Russian migrants' idea of their embeddedness in their home country's culture reveals and works in critical situations, which can, potentially, have an effect on their self-realization as a group or community, as well as play a part in their wider identity-building process.

Communicating protest: From all-national solidarity to autocommunication

Having analyzed the way linguistic and symbolic realms interrelate to shape Russian protest abroad, I will address the broader communicative context of these anti-election campaigns with particular focus on how they affect Russian migrant communities and their relationship to Russia as their original home. My assumption here is that, however short and episodic the very phenomenon of the Russian protest in Europe was, it passed a number of consequent stages that (analyzed as one prolonged communicative act) give an idea of how Russian migrant community exists in European settings. By employing a standard scheme of a communicative act and by responding to the key questions – to whom exactly, and through which channels, was the Russian protest abroad addressed – I will analyze the way Russian community sees itself in relation both to its host environment and to their compatriots in Russia.

From the perspective of protest communication, one can note three distinct stages that Russian migrant communities passed, irrespective of their overall numbers in a given host country, participant volumes at mass meetings, or existing levels of community development. During the first stage, Russian protesters abroad tried by all means to be involved in the Russian nationwide protest - first of all, by setting the linguistic and symbolical unity and clarity. This meant sharing a code: a specific set of ideas, ways to express them and more general values verbalized through common communicative channels. In classical studies of code-switching in bilingual communities (those by Gumperz, for example), this traditionally means setting the commonly shared 'we-code' and switching to one's own language to set the boundaries and base the common identity. In the case of Russian protesters abroad, joining the opposition voice of their native country meant sharing this 'we-code' from a distance while re-forming the community trans-locally. Thus, it seemed quite logical to these

²⁰ This idea of constructing unity (of language and discourse) through searching for commonplaces corresponds with B.Gladarev's view of the Russian public sphere on the whole based on the same strategy (in contrast to two other kinds of political grammars as postulated by L.Thevenot – the grammar of common wealth and the liberal grammar, see Gladarev 2013).

communities to appeal to the Russian authorities in order to express their dissatisfaction, thereby performing their right to join the protest-group as a whole.

However, as mentioned above, their protest was barely replicating the discourse of 'mainland' Russians, thus being more a gesture of solidarity than the expression of original outrage. In fact, the way protesters abroad addressed the Russian government was rather timid, and the main (though not always explicit) addressee of their slogans were their rioting compatriots. Hence, the less straightforward way of addressing the authorities – no direct objections or claims (in contrast to one of the main slogans of the protest within Russia, 'You can't really imagine/represent us'),²¹ more doubting questions (e.g. 'Aren't you ashamed?',²² London, December 9, 2011, or 'Have we been paid here as well?', Barcelona, December 24, 2011). The variety of ways to address the common 'we' is also remarkable – from the most common 'We are for the fair elections in Russia' (London, Berlin, Barcelona) to the less precise statements about the essence and borders of the 'we' mentioned, 'Let's return fair elections to Russia' (Barcelona, December 24, 2011).²³

This stage was the one that mobilized the greatest numbers and was the most eventful, with 2-3 mass meetings in December and the following demonstrations in January. Since what was important here was the very idea of being included in the general protest, the actual location of the meetings, their programme, or the distribution of duties seemed unimportant – the gesture of protest itself was of the only one of significance.

The end to this initial stage came in early February, with various factors playing their role in bringing it to its conclusion. Firstly, the original enthusiasm of numerous migrants wore out as time passed and as local 'protest professionals' made way for more informal coordinators to take charge of these meetings. The other crucial reason for re-directing the whole idea of protest was the lack of acknowledgement from the protesters within Russia. Feeling themselves excluded from the in-country movement and directed by the experienced protesters, Russian migrants made an attempt to say their word locally, addressing primarily the authorities of their host countries and involving other political activists and local communities. At this point, protest posters start to address this 'third party' in an attempt to

²¹ Which in its Russian original, '*Вы нас даже не представляете*', contains quite an ambiguity of meaning based on the polysemy of the verb used which stands for both 'to imagine', 'to realize' and 'to represent', e.g. in the Parliament.

²² A similar way of addressing the authorities was also characteristic of some provincial Russian cities (e.g. 'Do you see us from up there? We are here', '*Вам нас там видно? Мы есть*', used in a protest meeting in Perm, December 2011). This uncertainty and loosing the grip may be symptomatic of periphery location – the further from active centers, the less confident and stable the 'we' identity is.

²³ Interestingly, as was mentioned before, all the slogans containing this 'we' are only in Russian.

involve it in the protest debate by appealing to their possible interests in the way Russian politics is being conducted. This included direct calls to government representatives, such as a poster addressing A. Merkel, the German Chancellor (Berlin, February 4, 2012), to less obvious ones, such as ‘Democracy = Gas’ (Berlin, February 4, 2012) or ‘Are you ready for another Russian revolution?’ (London, February 4, 2012). With this turn, the very mood of these meetings became more politicized, involving more frequent imaging of Putin both as a central figure of the coming presidential elections and the symbol of the current political situation in Russia (the poster ‘No Putin – No Cry’ (Berlin, February 4, 2012) is one telling example).

This realization that being in another country gives them a chance, as well as a commitment, to reach out to those with whom they are living side by side came as the presidential election in Russia approached. Most of these demonstrations moved to politically ‘significant’ urban locations – in front of Russian Embassies, or local government buildings, or other politically symbolic spaces that would invite interest in the wider public of the host country. The organization of these meetings became more structured, with a particular outcome after each of the sessions (a letter to the Prime Minister in London, or a video to be distributed online afterwards). Yet this period of self-perception within local settings was quite chaotic and ill-developed, and most of the amateur protesters stepped out at this stage.

Finally, the third stage of this communicative act was aimed mainly at the community itself as a function of constructing or performing this community as such. Interestingly enough, those events were quite country-specific, reflecting the existing, established community practices of Russian migrant groups within particular host cultures. For example, Russian citizens in Berlin organized a ‘Maslenitsa Fair’, a mix of purely stereotypical reproduction of Russianness supplemented by a slight political touch (Putin’s masks and bears as symbols of the governing party in Russia). In London, the logical ending for the protest campaigns was drawn by two days of performances by the ‘Citizen Poet’ project – a politically oriented theatrical recitals of D. Bykov’s poems performed by actor M. Efremov.

These three stages of the protests illustrate a complex and ambiguous path of self-identification of the Russian-speaking protesters as a group. First, they state that they are a part of a larger group of Russians by showing their solidarity with this group – creating what might be called ‘trans-meetings’.²⁴ Then they perform as representatives of the Russian diaspora abroad, who know how to speak the language of the host country, how to play a

²⁴ As the participants themselves called them, see e.g. here: <http://erisena-tenecka.livejournal.com/113962.html>.

protest by the rules of the state they live in, but who also have the right to feel attached to their country of origin because they know the current situation in Russia from the inside, as if they were still there, though without being there physically in the present moment. And finally, they face their community itself – in reality an amorphous, by no means clearly-defined group, which is constructed, in fact, by this very act of communication. As a whole, these three communicative stages present a purely performative act – in the classical terms of J. L. Austin (1962), an illocutionary act which does not make a statement *about* reality, but *itself* performs or enacts it.

Russian protest abroad as perceived from ‘mainland’ Russia

The development of the Russian protest movement abroad was influenced not only by the characteristic of the diasporic community itself but also in interaction with Russian society and Russian government as two key communicants or addressees. In contrast to the majority of the polling stations in Russia itself,²⁵ the ones abroad were not subject to any violations; on the contrary, the election procedures were followed impeccably and the results seemed to escape any falsifications, which were repeatedly noted in the various reports that Russian migrants produced shortly after the elections.²⁶ The only problems that were experienced during the first parliamentary elections in December (namely, the slowness of the Russian Embassy’s capacity due to unexpectedly high numbers of voters) were considerably improved upon during the second elections in March, which, ironically, were perceived by the Russian migrants as a case of neglect by the Russian government and, paradoxically, a denial of their right to protest – their numbers in the overall Russian population being so insignificant, within a statistical error limit, these exemplary elections procedure was viewed as an act of mockery.²⁷

²⁵ On massive violations of election procedures during the parliamentary ballots in December 2011, see Berliand and Stupakova 2012.

²⁶ For example, a detailed report on the presidential elections see here: <http://rkabalin.livejournal.com/13036.html>.

²⁷ See, for example: «Формально мне жаловаться не на что: на моем участке не было зарегистрировано ни единого нарушения и жалобы - если не считать нескольких десятков граждан, которых сбили с толку капризы ЦИКа насчет того, по какому паспорту можно голосовать. Оглядываясь назад, я понимаю, что даже эта иллюзия относительно честного голосования - такое же циничное издевательство, как и весь этот спектакль, который мы наблюдаем последние несколько месяцев. На всех трех британских участках проголосовало чуть больше 2000 человек - это статистическая погрешность, ради которой никто не будет заморачиваться с завозом через Хитроу чартерные рейсы наших с открепительными. Какая разница, если чернокнижник Чуров потом вырвет из своей бороды волосок - и цифры в протоколах магическим образом изменятся на нужные.» (<http://gap-themind.livejournal.com/79524.html>)

One of the possible ways to address this perceived ‘neglect’ from the Russian authorities was to respond to it by an ironically polite appreciation of the way elections were carried out locally. For example, during one of the campaigns in Berlin (February 4, 2012) one of the posters would say ‘*Спасибо посольству РФ за честные выборы*’ (‘Thank you to the Russian Embassy for the fair elections’).

The second level of ‘invisibility’ was caused by the negative response to their actions by the protesters in mainland Russia who refused to accept the diaspora’s right to contribute to the overall protest. One of the arguments against any participation of Russians abroad in protest campaigns was based on the idea that, as a consequence of their departure from Russia, they relinquished certain rights - namely the moral right to speak on behalf of the population still resident there. This, of course, stands against the legal rights and duties of Russian citizens abroad, especially the right and duty to participate in the state elections. Furthermore, they were also sidelined by the poor Russian media coverage of their demonstrations. Thus, what was initially an attempt to revive a common language, to restore the unity through a careful reconstruction of the ‘we-code’ was transformed into an act of solidarity, which yet was bluntly rejected by their compatriots.

The essence of the reproach addressed to Russian protesters abroad is best expressed by the words of one political activist from Russia who pleaded with them to avoid organizing or participating in any mass meetings, claiming they were utterly shameful since their demonstrations were ‘like washing dirty linen in public’.²⁸ Russia is here presented as a quasi-home, while protest activism abroad is construed as a matter of giving too much publicity to an issue that should be considered private. In this respect, ‘the kitchen talk’, a specific genre of Russian-speaking semi-private discourse emerging in the late Soviet period,²⁹ may occur and be relevant for Russian speakers in diverse social contexts that would otherwise be considered public; whereas the boundaries of private space may coincide with the Russian state borders. This will also mean the lack of language to address internal state affairs for those who reside abroad, since they are out of the space here; they become ‘mute’, at least regarding their motherland matters.

²⁸ In Russian the expression ‘to take litter out of the house’ was used.

²⁹ On this and some of the most common genres of Perestroika-period and post-Soviet Russia see Ries 1997.

Further discussion and issues to address

The recent case of Russian protests abroad seems informative in several respects, as it addresses a number of key issues dealing with the way Russian society builds its relations with its expats worldwide and conceptualizes their role in new settings. The core concept of belonging to the home country is revealed in this series of protests as controversial and worth refining through diverse, almost polar argumentations. The overall dynamics of the Russian protest – both within the country and beyond it – demonstrated some fundamental contradictions which are implicit to the modern sense of being ‘transnational’, which some Russian citizens in the ‘far abroad’ tend to share. For migrants living in multinational cities like London, Berlin or Barcelona, “the idea of ‘belonging’ or at least ‘attachment’ to the culture of their country of origin seems quite natural, thus manageable and unproblematic. They feel emotional involvement toward everything that is happening in the political and social life of their homeland. But their former fellow citizens from Russia do not always understand their willingness to participate and therefore do not justify their right to take part. The common view of migration, which is shared by Russian citizens in Russia, pictures it as a definitive uprooting from the home country, a one-way transition to a completely ‘other’ space (physical as well as media, cultural and political), which either implies no possible return or an equally definitive one. These two paradigms clashed in the public sphere created by the global political protest, and they also invite other questions for further discussion.

One of them concerns the essence of transnationalism of migrants living in large cities, which are considered to be transnational spaces³⁰ that influence the way contemporary migrants experience, conceptualize and perform their newly acquired identities. With characteristics like superdiversity,³¹ multilingualism and hypermobility, these spaces seem to provide their inhabitants these features as prerequisites of their adequate existence – new multiple identities are constructed, new translocal subjects are brought to life. However, their new way to address reality may conflict with the view on their status other groups have, especially if the latter play active roles in producing meanings in the spheres significant to transnational migrants.

³⁰ As T. Faist argues, transnational social spaces (or transnational social fields) refer to ‘sustained ties of geographically mobile persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states’ (2006, p.3). This being quite a broad description, it gives the idea of forming transnational spaces ‘from below’, by the routine interactions of migrants.

³¹ The term refers to ‘the vastly increased range of resources, linguistic, religious, ethnic, cultural in the widest sense’ (Vertovec 2006, pp.1-2).

The other issue is concerned with the very idea of what ‘Russian society’ is and where its boundaries lie. Is it limited to those currently residing in the country or does this concept expand its borders to those who also have the Russian citizenship and perform their civic duties abroad - e.g., participate in presidential or parliamentary elections? If they are considered to be a part of Russian society in legislative terms, what is the extent of their participation in social or political life?

This perhaps relates to some earlier analyses of contemporary Russian migrant communities, namely H. Kopnina’s presentation of Russian migrants in Western Europe as ‘the invisible community’ (Kopnina 2005). By this term, the author means the way Russian-speaking migrants adapt to new settings, resort to mimicry and avoid any community-building activities. However, the invisibility of this community does refer not only to its inherent qualities (i.e., the reluctance of Russian migrants to form well-developed communities), or to the characteristics of its distinctive settings (i.e., the context of urban super-diversity and multiculturalism), but also to the inability or unwillingness of those outside it to recognize it (i.e., whether this neglect comes from the migrants’ home or host country). Protest activities speak especially of the invisibility of Russian migrants from the perspective of Russia itself.

The idea of autocommunication and performativity of this communicative act as its central characteristic, as an action which acknowledges the very fact of existence of the speaker (in this case, the very existence of the community as it is) agrees with the observations that A. Byford made about the Russian-speaking community of Great Britain: ‘community’ defines itself and acquires its meaning only in the performance, that is community is the performance itself (Byford 2014). In this case, the context of publicity is the only possible condition for the emergence and existence of this community, and any rare occasion for the need of performativity provides an opportunity to (re)define its relationship with other important communities or groups.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Russian anti-election campaigns carried out abroad reveals the ambiguous and undefined position Russian citizens residing in other countries share. The analysis of linguistic resources Russian migrants find, employ and conceive provides an idea of how the processes of inclusion and exclusion influence self-identification of Russians abroad. First, by carrying out their civic duties, they attempt to restore their identity of

Russian citizens. However, this act of potential inclusion turns into a sequence of statements of exclusion: they are marginalized by the way the officials treat them during the elections themselves; due to their scarce numbers, insignificant to general proportions, they are not included into the overall opposition which in some point leaves them without any formal reason to protest.

However, in their attempt to restore the unity with compatriots back in Russia (and all over the world as well) they seek to adopt the ‘protest language’ through a careful reconstruction of its features. First of all, they do so by using linguistic resources (keeping back their bilingualism or using it in a very straightforward manner, with very little space for language-games or any additional meanings their migrant experience may bring into play). Secondly, they attempt to contact the ‘mainland’ Russian protest by ‘stepping into their compatriots’ shoes’ in relation to the idea of their host community (and thus reproducing the most obvious and wide-spread stereotypes, most of which are not culturally-based or related to real-life experience, but stem from a very general idea of the ‘language’ their host communities speak).

However, this attempt fails to become even an act of solidarity. Russian-based protesters feel reluctant to consider the voice of the diaspora at all, while local host communities are not properly involved in their protest communication. Being left out, they turn onto themselves: this situation becomes one example of a community realizing its own existence through this very act of communication, which becomes a performative act of self-identification.

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