

Anglicisms in Russian in the context of the orientational function of language

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Abstract: In the post-Soviet era the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture on everyday life in Russia has been rapidly increasing, and compared to the (pre-)Soviet times, the number of borrowings from English has grown manifold. The omnipresence of Anglicisms in various types of texts is indicative of the process of language hybridization (Kravchenko 2011) whose cognitive underpinnings and possible effect on society as a living system pose a challenge to the language explorer. The paper is an attempt to identify and describe (even though cursorily) different types of hybrids in public texts and, based on the function of language as it is viewed in the biology of language and cognition, to offer an explanation of the driving force behind the occurring changes in the Russian written culture.

Keywords: *Biology of Language, Living Systems, Hybridization, Linguistic Ecology*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the function of writing is seen in representing spoken language viewed as a code used for information transfer in communication. This unsubstantiated approach, known as the language myth (Harris 1981), is institutionalized in mainstream linguistics as the study of language and forms the ideological cornerstone of linguistic education policies practiced in developed societies with a long history of literacy. The language myth is responsible for an alarming rise of functional illiteracy in modern society (Kravchenko 2009), affecting individual and social cognition as adaptive behavior in a consensual domain of coordinated interactions.

Leaning on the biology of cognition and language (Maturana 1970; 1978; Kravchenko 2011), the paper emphasizes the orientational function of languaging as co-ordinated interactional behavior and the role of texts in establishing a culture-specific relational domain of linguistic interactions which *possesses its own ecology*. The exploding use of Anglicisms, particularly in various public texts designed to have a high orientational impact on the reader, suggests on-going changes in the orientational value of English for speakers of Russian. Massive borrowing from English, when Russian linguistic elements on different levels and of various complexity are substituted — seemingly, for no obvious reason — by their English analogues, accompanied by coinage of new linguistic items in accordance with productive patterns characteristic of the English language structure, even though the resulting items (words and expressions) are totally alien to that very structure, continues both in speech and writing, claiming ever growing domains of linguistic interactions. The process itself may be viewed as the initial phase of language and culture

hybridization. An attempt is made to identify the causes of this phenomenon and outline its possible implications for the Russian language and culture (cf. Boiko 2012).

2. Biology of Cognition and the Function of Writing in Third-Order Living Systems

In traditional linguistic semiotics, which leans heavily on philosophy of external realism, linguistic signs are treated as well-defined binary structures analyzable in terms of form and content. These structures are believed to convey information by making it possible for both the speaker and the listener to analyze them into quanta of meaning using a mutually shared procedure. According to the mainstream (computational) theory of cognition and language, such analysis consists in a series of decisions made as we process 'encoded' meanings. No matter how appealing this approach may seem, it overlooks the *experiential character* of (linguistic) semiosis (Kravchenko 2012).

In the cognitive philosophy of language based on the biology of cognition (Maturana and Varela 1980; Di Paolo 2005), meaning is a cognitive function whose argument is *experience*. As such, meaning is enacted as a dynamic relationship between an organism and its environment. At every moment, it is determined by the value which environmental aspects hold for an organism (Zlatev 2003). The cognitive effort of the interpreter of linguistic signs (the observer of communicative verbal behavior) yields results which derive from how physical, biological, social, historical, cultural, etc., parameters bear on communicative experience (Kravchenko 2010). An organism's current state characterizes it as a *structure determined system* — “a system such that all that happens in it or with it arises as a consequence of its structural dynamics, and in which nothing external to it can specify what happens in it, but only triggers a change in its structure determined by its structure” (Maturana 2000: 461). Living systems are unities of *interactions* which exist in an environment in structural coupling. They depend on dynamic congruence with the medium. The organization of a cognitive system determines the domain of interactions in which it can act meaningfully to sustain itself, and cognition is an actual behavior in this domain.

In the non-objectivist, biologically oriented paradigm for the study of cognition and language (Varela, Thompson, Rosh 1991; Clark 1997; Järvillehto 1998; Lieberman 2006 *inter alia*), the 'object' of communication is not a referential state of things in an objective external reality, but the co-ordination of actions between the interacting cognitive agents; hence, other-orientation, contexts, interaction, and semiotic mediation become key concepts (Linell 2007). Speech and writing serve as *scaffolding* which we use to orient ourselves and others in the cognitive domain of interactions. As Cowley (2007) emphasizes, language activity is tightly constrained by both our sensitivity to circumstances and our skills in using many second-order cultural constructs. Among many cultural artifacts we use, writing is by far the most intriguing: its symbiotic relationship with natural linguistic activity, and the degree to which it impacts — both cognitively and evolutionarily — on humans, is yet to be appraised (Menary 2007). However, it is clear that the activities of writing and reading play a crucial role in human cognitive development (Cunningham & Stanovich 2001). While, in Maturana's terms, languaging is orientational, the primary cognitive function of writing is analogous to internal, or biological, memory. Unlike languaging, which extends the human *sensorium* (Morris 1938), writing is “a storage and retrieval system that allows humans to accumulate

experience and knowledge” (Donald 1991: 309). Once we are skilled in writing, we can ‘dump’ the cognitive load onto material artifacts and, later, use them to interact with our cognizing selves. While languaging is *embodied* and *distributed*, writing (sentences, texts) establishes cultural artifacts. Unlike speech, these impact on individuals and communities *across historical and evolutionary scales*.

Writing enhances human developmental continuity. This is possible because texts mediate relevant experience between generations and communities. Today, text-making is increasingly seen as an important part of recent human co-evolution (cf. Donald 1991). Texts determine important aspects of human life; from an evolutionary standpoint, writing helps overcome the spatio-temporal limitations of languaging. It gives us an atemporal (as contrasted with local) existential/*in*-formational environmental medium. Thus, whereas humans who lack writing systems live in a domain based on how they use experience to language together, this consensual domain is transformed by the invention of writing. In Maturana’s terms, if individual humans are second-order living-systems, then communities are third-order living systems. Since these increasingly depend on texts in their organization, the rise of writing leads to the emergence of a new ecology (cf. Bang et al. 2007). Once we view society as a unity of interactions, we see the crucial sustaining role of a linguistic ecology.

A third-order living system is sustained as a unity of interactions through the relational domain of linguistic behavior (schematized in Fig. 1). In such a system, human individuals, each in their specific physical environment (solid circle), establish their consensual domains of interactions with others (overlapping circles). Since these include linguistic interactions (overlapping dotted ovals), the events create a relational domain which surpasses the physical boundaries of any given individual’s environmental niche. Thus individuals coordinate their coordinations of behavior with respect to events beyond their immediate physical environment, extending their cognitive niche.

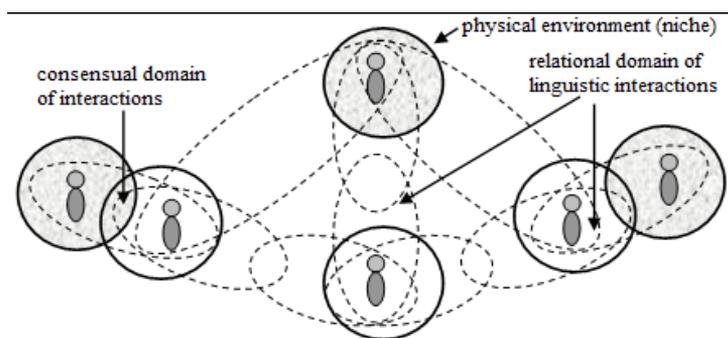


Figure 1. A community of individuals as a unity of linguistic interactions

The linguistic behavior of a third-order living system exploits a relational domain that depends on uninterrupted space-time continuity. Conversely, when links between individuals in domains of communicative interactions are severed for an extended period, the community’s unity ceases to exist. In this way one living system disintegrates into two

or more smaller systems (Fig. 2). In standard terms, this leads to the emergence of dialects which may later become new languages with associated communities/cultures/ nations.

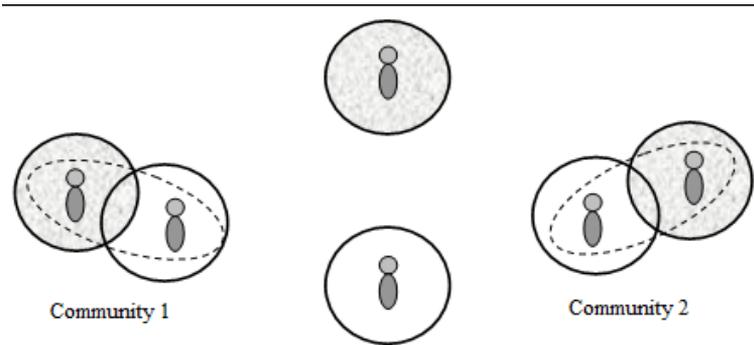


Figure 2. Disintegration of a third-order living system as a unity of interactions

Such disintegration of a languaging community as a third-order living system, however, is prevented by writing as a bonding medium for linguistic interactions across space and time. Culture, understood in a broad sense as an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning, may be viewed as a continuous evolutionary space sustained by the relational domain of interactions of a third-order system. Crucially, this depends on languaging as integrated dynamically complex interactional behavior in a consensual domain involving various artifacts and practices. In the literate era humans in their adaptive orientational activity began to depend more and more on the 'world on paper' (Olson 1994). Writing, as an artifact of human culture, began to mediate interactions in relational domains of third-order systems as unities of interactions, thus acquiring paramount importance in providing for cultural continuity and becoming an indispensable tool in enhancing human cognitive powers. Accumulated experience of interactions in the domain of written texts accounts for an individual's level of 'functional fit' in a third-order system as he orients toward values and practices characteristic of his culture.

In view of current developments, when cross-cultural interaction begins to affect the cultural ecology of linguistic interactions within a particular society, the evolutionary aspect of such changes poses questions about the continued integrity of the affected society (Russian, in this case) as a living system. While in ontogeny such integrity is sustained by the oral tradition and lore, in phylogeny — that is, on the cultural and historical time scales — it is the cultural artifact of writing that bonds generations of linguistic communities into historical societies. From the point of view of the biology of language, the observed hybridization of different cultures through hybridization of the Russian written language is a process which may have serious consequences both for individuals and society as living systems. To explore the cognitive underpinnings of the extant and emerging English-Russian hybrids, a large sample of Russian public texts (advertisements, sign-boards, billboards, posters, flyers, etc.) has been analyzed with reference to the underlying mechanisms and dominant patterns (alphabetic-graphemic, morphological, lexical-derivational, syntactical). Available data on the scale and speed of the hybridization process are discussed.

3. Hybridization of Writing Systems: Empirical Data

According to some published data, there has been a dramatic increase of the number of Anglicisms in modern Russian, which has grown from 2.57% of the entire vocabulary stock in early 20th c. to a striking 25% in 2000 (Volodarskaya 2002). While Anglicisms are widely spread in the media and trendy popular fiction and are unsparingly used in talk by the younger generation, they are really omnipresent in public texts such as sign-boards, billboards, street posters and the like. The use of English borrowings in such texts can be divided into 2 major categories (Table 1): (1) 100% English words/texts (Fig.3), and (2) various types of hybrids. Hybrids may be further categorized into (2a) hybrid texts — part-English part-Russian (Fig. 4), (2b) full transliterations represented by (2b') Russian words spelled in English letters, as, e.g., the word *сметана* 'sour-cream' in Fig. 5, and (2b'') English words spelled in Cyrillic, as the word *snack* in Fig. 6; (2c) partial transliterations — Russian words with one or several letters substituted by letters from the English alphabet, as in *ЖАРА* 'heat' (Fig. 7), and (2d) neologisms.

Some preliminary statistics about the ratio among different types of borrowings in our sample (750 public texts) are shown in Table 1. Various types of hybrids constitute an astounding 84%. Considering that the process is highly dynamic, it is reasonable to expect continued growth of hybridization – however, it would be premature to make any definitive predictions at this point in time.

Table 1. Different types of English borrowings in the analyzed sample of public texts

Percent Total	(1) 100% English words / texts	(2) Hybrids				
		(a) Hybrid texts	(b) Full transliterations		(c) Partial transliterations	(d) Neologisms
			(b') Russian words in English letters	(b'') English words in Russian letters		
100	16.0	40.7	18.2	15.0	8.6	1.5



Figure 3. Model agency

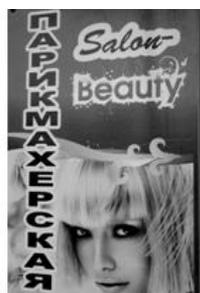


Figure 4. Hair & beauty salon



Figure 5. Café



Figure 6. Snack Bar



Figure 7. Night club Zhara

Of special interest are cases of partial transliteration — the ever growing tendency to substitute one or more Cyrillic characters in a word by their English graphemic “counterparts”. In our sample, English characters were more often found in the initial position (47%), rather than in the final (31%) or middle (22%) position. An analysis of 200 graphic hybrids randomly selected from our sample has shown the following frequency of such substitution (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of English letters in graphic hybrids

Cyrillic letter and its absolute rank ¹	English substitute	Frequency of substitute (% of all English letters in the sample)	Cyrillic letter and its absolute rank	English substitute	Frequency of substitute (% of all English letters in the sample)
А 3	A a	14.5	Р 8	R r	7.5
Б 21	B b	2.5	С 7	S s	6.7
В 9	V v	3.2	Т 6	t	6.9
Г 19	G g	2.6	У 15	U u/y /oo /ou	1.6 / 0.3 / 0.1 / 0.1
Д 13	D d	4.7	Ф 31	F f	2.9
Е 2	E e	4.3	Х 24	H h	0.1
Ё 33	--	--	Ц 28	zz / ts	0.1 / 0.1
Ж 25	G g / zh	0.1 / 0.1	Ч 22	ch	0.3
З 20	Z z	2.6	Ш 26	sh	0.3
И 4	I i / ee / y	6.2 / 0.1 / 0.2	Щ 29	--	--
Й 23	Y y	0.3	Ъ 32	--	--
К 11	K k / c / ck	4.8 / 1 / 0.1	Ы 17	I i	0.1
Л 10	L l	4.3	Ь 18	--	--
М 12	m	3.4	Э 30	E e	0.5
Н 5	N n	5	Ю 27	U u	0.1
О 1	O o	8.6	Я 16	ya / a	0.4 / 0.1
П 14	P p	2.8			

¹ Absolute rank adapted from Liashevskaya & Sharov (2009).

It might seem that introduction of English letters in the graphic structure of written Russian words is simply an eye-catching device — especially when it is one or two letters, and the graphic image of the word is still easily recognizable, as in Fig. 7. However, it is sometimes very difficult even for a linguistically sophisticated native Russian to recognize on first sight graphically disguised Russian words, such as, for example, the supposedly “speaking” names “Золотов” and “Серебров” in Fig. 8 (*золото* ‘gold’, *серебро* ‘silver’). In their disguised form these words do not “speak” to the potential customer, and the orientational value of the sign is practically lost.

There is another kind of speaking names used in sign-boards, when a Russian concrete noun is turned into a name by adding the English grapheme *-off* (which, historically, is a transliteration of the Russian surname suffix *-ов*), as in Fig. 9—10 (*бетон* ‘concrete’, *окно* ‘window’). As a consequence, such words cannot be declined, thus falling out of the Russian nominal morphological paradigm. On the other hand, some English borrowings — for example, brand names used as concrete count nouns, particularly, in the automotive sector, begin to be declined, taking regular Russian nominal case markings, e.g.: *NISSAN*’а стало больше ‘There are more NISSAN-Gen (cars)’. Thus, the process of linguistic hybridization seems to go to deeper levels, affecting not only lexicon, but grammar as well.



Figure 8. Zolotov Serebrov Jeweler’s



Figure 9. Concrete company



Figure 10. Windows installation company

Hybrid neologisms are of special interest; they are newly coined words in which cross-breeding between Russian and English is of a more intricate character, as in the name of a pub *Beerлога* (Fig. 11a, b) or a café *Barduck* (Fig. 12). On the sign shown in Fig. 11a the word *pub* is written in Cyrillic¹ and the word *beerloqa* in English characters. The intention of the sign maker was, obviously, to crossbreed the English words *beer* and *bear* and the Russian word *берлога* ‘lair’ (Fig. 11b). However, the sign maker’s poor knowledge of English in general and the English alphabet in particular (failure to tell apart the letters “g” and “q”) results in an English-looking nonce-word *beerloqa* which cannot be adequately interpreted by a native speaker of English. In a similar way, a native speaker of English will fail to see through the superficial meaning of the name “Barduck” (Fig. 12) if he is not familiar with a very specific contemporary use of the Russian word *бардак* in the meaning ‘total mess’ which, however, is derivative from the meaning ‘(mobile military) brothel’. Poor knowledge of English often results in non-authentic, pseudo-English texts (cf. the odd structure *salon-beauty* in Fig. 4); moreover, enhanced by the already established use of

¹ Interestingly, the word *наб* (Cyrillic transliteration of *pub*) is not to be found in a recent revised edition of an authoritative explanatory dictionary of Russian (Ozhegov 2010), although it is listed in the “New Comprehensive Russian-English Dictionary” (Yermolovich & Krasavina 2004).

Anglicisms, such as, for example, *second-hand (shop)* and *stock* ‘supply of goods’, it yields names of businesses that defy coherent interpretation, as in Fig. 13, which reads literally: “New arrival at the shop *STOCK HAND* market of apparel from Europe”.



Figure 11 a. Pub “Beerloga” Figure 11 b. Pub “Beerлога” Figure 12. BARDUCK



Figure 13. Advertisement in a shop



Figure 14. An Optician’s

Finally, the process of borrowing shows signs of going beyond mere graphic hybridization, beginning to exploit word-formation patterns specifically characteristic of English and alien to Russian. For example, on an analogy with *sightseeing tour* new lexical items have been coined, such as *шоп-тур* (‘shop-tour’), *шуб-тур* (‘fur coat tour’) and the like. Notice that, although the Russian words are full transliterations of corresponding English words taken separately, they are not transliterations of existing English words **shop-tour* or **fur coat tour*. While the word *шоп-тур* is easily understood by a linguistically unsophisticated Russian (*тур* being an old assimilated borrowing, and *шоп* a new but extremely frequently used one), a name such as *ЛинзаЛайн* appears enigmatic — except, probably, to the business owner himself (Fig. 14). This nonce-word has been created on a productive English word-formation pattern N+N and consists of the Russian word *линза* ‘lens’ and the Cyrillic transliteration of the English word *line* which corresponds to the Russian word *линия*. However, if the reader does not know the English word *line*, he can hardly make any sense of the word *ЛинзаЛайн*. As we will argue, linguistically coherent interpretation of such lexical coinages is not something expected from a native speaker of English or an English-speaking Russian at all. Such linguistic “creativity” is not about language as such, it is about general **value** associated with a particular language, and the orientational function of this value in modern Russian society.

4. Discussion

The majority of Anglicisms in public texts appear in sign-boards of businesses and companies operating in the entertainment sector (20%), food and drinks and public catering (13%), and beauty and clothing (9% each). This is quite understandable as, according to some evaluations, Russia today imports up to 70% of food, 80% of clothing, and most of the air time of national TV broadcasting companies is given to western licensed or cloned entertainment shows and American movies. This creates a rich soil for planting the seeds of (even though superficial) western culture — at least, in its consumer guise. Yet the question why English (in various disguises) should be used in shop or company sign-boards at all, remains, especially considering that most Russian cities are not centers of global tourism, and the number of native speakers of English we might expect to actually see and read a sign like the one in Fig. 3 is, for all practical purposes, nil. Moreover, all-English sign-boards do not advertize English or American companies or businesses — they are, with very rare exceptions, 100% local Russian businesses. Neither is the average Russian citizen bilingual, capable of reading English signs, unlike citizens of many European countries. Considering the pragmatic function of such public texts — which is to attract potential customers by telling them something about the services or goods offered — there seems to be an obvious cognitive dissonance here, as the original orientational function of texts is forfeited for something else which, according to our hypothesis, is deemed of higher orientational value.

Take, as an example, a Russian soft drinks company *Вимм Билль Данн* ‘Vimm Bill Dunn’ (Fig. 15) established in 1992. Although the name seems to be a Cyrillic transliteration of an English name, it is nothing but a jumble devoid of any meaning. Yet, although in his interview to a Russian newspaper “Vedomosti” Sergey Plastilin, the founder of the company, denied any connection between *Вимм Билль Данн* and *Wimbledon* (a district in southwest London famous for the Wimbledon Tennis Championships), the phonetic resemblance is hardly accidental. According to other media sources, an English-sounding name was chosen because, after the demise of the Soviet Union and the political-economic-cultural havoc that succeeded strict ideological control in every sphere of Soviet life, the Russian people made an about-face to embrace Western — that is, Anglo-Saxon – culture perceived as a panacea for all the problems plaguing Russian society. A product with a foreign name attached was, by default, to be accepted as of superior quality. One of the first products successfully marketed by *Вимм Билль Данн* was, and still is, orange juice *J7* — 100% Russian product with an English name that doesn’t have a meaning.



Figure 15. Vimm-Bill-Dunn company logo

This Anglo-Saxon bias persists in how people perceive “English” names of businesses as compared with Russian. One of our survey of consumer expectations in relation to company names showed that a café with an English name “*CHOCOLATE*” was expected to provide higher (or at least medium) level services, whereas service and prices in a café with a Russian name “*ШОКОЛАД*” (‘chocolate’) were expected to be just medium level. It appears that to many young Russians an English name on a sign-board brings forth only positive associations: attractive, modern, interesting, while a Russian name is often associated with boredom and simplicity. While certainly not being definitive, our little experiment has shown that superficial signs of Anglo-Saxon culture seem to be more attractive and trustworthy, acquiring **greater value**. So the driving force behind the ongoing linguistic changes appears to be *orientation to a different culture with a specific system of values*, along with rejection of traditional values, including the value of the Russian language.

On the cultural, historical, and evolutionary time scales languaging, or linguistic behavior of individuals and societies governed by certain norms and practices, *is* the manifestation of culture, the mode and form of its existence. Partaking of, and immersion in, a different culture occur in and through the languaging practices and norms of this culture, which are responsible for assimilation of the system of values which may come in conflict with, or supplant altogether, the original system of values. Such changes may not be immediately observable; however, traced through linguistic changes, they may help see their general direction and make tentative predictions about possible consequences of such change on a historical time scale — especially, when such change affects systemic features of the domain of written language.

By contrast with spoken language as embodied dialogical interactions in real time-space (the here-and-now of live communication) aimed at adaptive co-ordinations of behavior in a consensual domain, texts may be viewed as cultural artifacts designed to sustain a relational domain of coordinated interactions of humans in their cognitive niche on the cultural, historical and evolutionary time scales. This domain ensures the unity of a languaging community as a living system (Järvilehto 1998) distributed across space and time (Cowley 2011a), and serves as an ecological niche for the historically and evolutionarily sustained integrity of a given society and its culture (Steffensen 2009). This unity is supported by the shared experience of linguistically interacting individuals as a basis for understanding and comprehension. In literate societies, texts and writing practices are crucial for sustaining culture-specific life-styles and ways of life; they serve to sustain a virtual world with its unique system of values and practices created by languaging humans, and it is this world in which we happen as humans by taking a language stance (Cowley 2011b).

5. Conclusion

The kind of hybridization occurring in Russia today is fraught with dramatic changes in its culture-specific value-system, because languaging is value-realizing activity (Hodges 2009). The current situation in Russia differs from trivial linguistic changes caused by routine cross-cultural contacts. The demise of the Soviet Empire and disappearance of a clearly defined system of values in the late 1980s — early 1990s unleashed the dormant forces of destructive nihilism in the society of freedom-hungry individuals. To use a metaphor, the long-forbidden fruit of western culture, overnight becoming an easily

accessible abundance, is playing a bad joke on the starved who don't know any better than devour all of the bread given them rather than eat sparingly for health reasons. In today's Russia English is perceived less and less as a distinctly foreign language associated with a specific culture; it is actively integrating into the relational domain of native speakers and writers of Russian because of its association with "better life". Omnipresent and readily accessible hybrid public texts over-exploit the plasticity of human linguistic behavior, undermining the orientational utility of texts as an adaptational feature of the human cognitive niche, thus jeopardizing the integrity of society as a historical living system.

Unhindered cross-cultural interaction, offset by outdated external realism beliefs in ontological independence of language and cognition and enhanced by disorienting and misleading ideology of cosmopolitan language policy, poses new challenges for cognitive development of language-specific cultures outside the Anglo-Saxon world, making real the danger of losing their cultural identity. Today, Russian society with its rich language and culture is well on its way to losing its identity and becoming a non-descript socio-cultural phenomenon on the periphery of the Anglo-Saxon global cognitive domain. To foretell — if not to forestall — the possible outcome of the processes described in the paper, the continued language hybridization must be analyzed from the point of view of the biology of language and cognition, with an emphasis on the role of linguistic interactions in the relational domain of written texts as an ecological (cultural-historical) niche of Russian society as a living system. Otherwise, we might well end up in a place suggested by a Russian night club poster (Fig. 16).



Figure 16. Poster of a Russian night club

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