

Gasán Gusejnov. *DSP: Materials for a Russian Dictionary of Socio-Political Language of the 20th Century.* Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2003. ISBN 978-5-94607-025-6.



Gasán Gusejnov. *DSP: Soviet Ideologemes in Russian Discourse of the 1990s.* Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2004. ISBN 978-5-94607-024-9.



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Sammelrez: G. Gusejnov: DSP

The quick decline of party authority, ethnic conflicts that could no longer be suppressed, perestroika and the disintegration of the USSR – all the social upheavals that led to the crash of “the last empire” have triggered sweeping changes in the Russian language. Gasán Gusejnov’s pioneering work is devoted to the language of ideology that came to be known as Newspeak and has penetrated all spheres of the language reality in the Soviet epoch. The two volumes under review form a cohesive unit, yet each is a complete and self-sufficient book in its own right. The volume published in 2003 presents key words

and phraseological units that form the basis of the acting model of contemporary Russian discourse that heavily relies on the language of ideology. The 2004 edition, which is based on Gusejnov’s Habilitation (Doktor Nauk dissertation), is an analysis of the dynamics of the language of Soviet ideology and the role of its basic units in interpreting changes in the social environment. The central question the author poses in his study is how changes that have occurred on the geo-political map of the former Soviet Union affect speech habits and the mental map of the post-Soviet personality.

The titles of both books are intriguing: the abbreviation “DSP” is not transparent and does not stand for “Dictionary of Socio-Political Language”. It is deliberately chosen for its ambiguity. Passion for stump compounds and acronyms that distorted the words and made their meaning incomprehensible to the language user was a hallmark of the Newspeak. In the introduction to the dictionary, Gusejnov explains that DSP could stand for the euphemistic marking “For office use only,” which was put on classified documents and censored books, or it could be deciphered as material made of pressed sawdust and ply wood and used to make cheap furniture. In the context of material researched by Gusejnov this alludes to “wooden Russian” – one of the many pejorative characteristics of the Newspeak. Another possible interpretation offered by the author is pre-Net concepts – both volumes are based on written and oral sources, but do not take into account the language used by the Russian speakers in virtual communication. Just as the abbreviation “DSP” allows for multiple interpretations, so can Gusejnov’s books be used for multiple purposes by a variety of scholars ranging from linguists and anthropologists, to historians and sociologists. Moreover, these books will undoubtedly attract all those who are interested in the Russian language and culture.

As follows from the title of the analytical part of the study, the main object of the investigation is the ideologeme (cf. phoneme, morpheme) that is defined as “the sign or a fixed set of signs guiding participants of communication to patterns of correct thinking, faultless behavior and warning them against the forbidden” (p.14). In chapter I, Gusejnov shows how the language of Soviet ideology emerged and evolved. He emphasizes the role of subtext in dividing society into insiders and outsiders and hampering straightforward social communication. He also focuses on constant interaction of the norm imposed by the elite and its subversion by the lay public that functioned as self-defense. Of particular interest in this chapter is his analysis of the role of Soviet linguists and semioticians in both strengthening the grip of ideology on the language and emancipating it.

In chapter II, Gusejnov studies ideologemes on all levels of the text. He convincingly shows that letters, abolished from the Russian alphabet in 1918 and de-facto reinstated in the 1990s functioned as vehicles of ideology. Even such ephemeral signs as accents imitating pronunciation patterns of whole ethnicities or cult personalities carried an ideological message. The reader also learns about the ideologically charged inflexions, prepositions, ethnonyms, toponyms, names of money and of some key

words of the epoch. The final section of this chapter is devoted to Stalin’s quotations that have survived to the present day and still function as ideologemes. The abundance of quotations and allusions in contemporary Russian discourse is one of its most striking features. As if unable to stop communicating with the help of lego-parts borrowed from the “classics of Marxism-Leninism”, Russian speakers keep renegotiating the meaning of various clichés.

The third and final chapter is devoted to obscenities (mat) as a distinct layer in the language of ideology. Prudish and hypocritical, Soviet literary criticism and linguistics stubbornly ignored this layer of language, but more recent research has shown increased interest. Gusejnov, however, is the first one to investigate its role as an alternative to Soviet ideology, a popular shadow ideology providing Russian speakers with surrogate freedom under otherwise harsh social and cultural conditions. Gusejnov shows the evolution of the few basic terms into a complex and constantly expanding system of derivatives used to denote objects, actions, states, qualities and feelings. This chapter contains most useful and suggestive clues to the understanding of the pragmatic functions of obscene language in the Soviet period and in the 1990s. The author is aware that by revealing the role of mat as an opposition to the ruling ideology he challenges conventional views on this language phenomenon. But he is well-equipped with a wide range of examples for which he provides subtle analyses. In fact, the perpetuation of conventional views on mat only confirms Gusejnov’s conclusions that its important function is to disrupt the prescribed norm. But when the norms guiding various aspects of social life change, it is mat that is summoned by the Russian speakers to simplify the perception of and adaptation to the unknown and unfamiliar.

The textual material collected, documented and classified by Gusejnov in *Materials for a Russian Dictionary of Socio-Political Language of the 20th Century* is enormous and scrupulously documented. The author does not concentrate on morphological structure, syntactic functions and stylistic characteristics of the words and phraseological units, rather he places them within a context of extended quotations, enabling the reader to see their natural environment with a wide repertoire of connotations. Examples illustrating each entry range from single sentences to long excerpts from prose and full poetic and folkloric texts. They are arranged in chronological sequence and illustrate semantic changes that have occurred over time. This approach shows the logic of his-

toric evolution of ideologemes from the primary and official nucleus to the paraphrasing and reinterpretation that occur on the periphery of ideology. The book consists of two parts and divides ideologemes into those used in the 1990s and in the Soviet period. The system of cross references enables the reader to trace semantically related ideologemes used in the 1990s and in the Soviet period and indicates the direction of semantic changes. The book is supplied with three appendices: the chronological index of literature, the alphabetical list of sources and abbreviations, and the index of names. All of this makes this book reader-friendly and simplifies search for specific items.

The two volumes of "DSP" complement each other:

one by validating theoretical findings, the other by putting ideologemes into philological and semiotic context and providing clues to their interpretation. Both books are stimulating reading, dynamic and thought provoking. Gusejnov's work informs and enhances the quest for understanding how Soviet ideology captured the minds of the people. But at the same time his important contribution is in documenting and analyzing material that shows the people's opposition to "zombification". It was deliberate and intricate when expressed in dissident literature, and it was naïve and unconscious but no less effective as appearing in folklore and spontaneous speech.

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