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Ritual Speech Register, Speaking Conventions, and Social Order in the Russian North

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Abstract: This article introduces a new analytical approach to the study of a ritual speech register found in the rural Russian communities of the Vologda and Arkhangelsk districts. This register was traditionally studied as part of the local oral tradition; we argue that it is also of interest for (ethno)-pragmatics and sociolinguistics, and can be studied within a theoretical framework of community of practice (CofP). The register in question manifests itself as a combination of conventional speech genres, formulaic expressions, and clichéd forms. It helps individuals organize their life spatially and cope with, or prevent, the various critical situations mostly associated with male/female domestic and occupational roles. Adherence to speech conventions establishes social order, supports community networks, and maintains reputations in the public sphere. It is a social practice that projects social identities, obligations, and roles.

Keywords: Speech Register, Communication Strategies, Beliefs, Rituals, Linguistic Routines, Contemporary Russian Field Data

Introduction

This article provides empirical evidence to support the argument that the traditional elements of culture function as central factors in establishing and maintaining social order based on the current Russian field data from the Vologda and Arkhangelsk districts. Our study has two aims. The first one is to broaden accessibility of ethnographic and socio-linguistic field data from Russia. Such data are not easily accessible to the international academic community, but they can be valuable for potential cross-cultural research. The second aim is to provide a sociolinguistic analysis of the oral tradition and linguistic routines in the studied region in order to demonstrate that there exists a special, highly ritualized speech register. Hence, we propose to study speech varieties that were previously considered as stand-alone tokens of oral tradition in their social context, and argue that they are of interest for (ethno)-pragmatics and sociolinguistics. We maintain that switching from ordinary language to the ritual register helps individuals fulfill their social obligations and roles.

From the point of view of socio-linguistics, oral tradition functions as a "preserver of social stability and cohesion" (Agyekum 2011, 574), and a social institute for regulating an individual's behavior: communicative practices are related to the distribution and performance of social roles and identities. Oral tradition, linguistic routines, and conventional speech forms can be seen as a system of codes and practices that have particular social meaning. Oral tradition is anonymous and collective by its nature. When using collective speech patterns and folklore genres, individuals appropriate codes and adapt them to specific situations, thus voicing collective beliefs and expressing shared experiences. Through them speakers assume the collective authority and responsibility for the utterances. The oral tradition and conventional speech genres are highly stereotyped, and have distinctive prosodic and syntactic features, such as repetitions, rhythmic organization, and a limited set of metaphors, comparisons, and tropes (cf., Nekludov 2002). In traditional societies and communities, their use is often related to formalized events (burial,

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weddings, public announcements), and is characterized by specific prosodic and paralinguistic features (cf., Agyekum 2011).

Conservation of the traditional elements of culture, or "doing things" in a traditional way, is a time-consuming task, which, from an outsider's point of view, may have little practical sense. However, a community may see it as a matter of utmost importance to preserve and transmit the knowledge of such symbolic forms. According to Bourdieu (1980), tradition manifests itself in different spheres and practices, including speech practices. Citing Bourdieu (1980, 55):

> The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.

We use the terms "speech genre" and "register" with respect to those individual manifestations of oral tradition that represent the "foreign" word as opposed to the "own" word in the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin 1986). In essence, it refers to anonymous codes known to all the community members, and appropriated by individuals as needed. For a lexicographer, such speech forms would be undistinguishable from other spontaneous varieties or lexical items. However, taken in their social context, traditional speech genres can be seen as part of the collective knowledge that encapsulates the community's worldview. Unlike its purely linguistic component, i.e., words, the social context, which includes beliefs, rituals, and schemata of perception and representation, is less transparent to the linguistic methods of research. Hence, in order to address the social context of utterances and speech patterns, methods of social anthropology and ethnography are crucial.

The concept of community of practice (CofP) proved to be particularly helpful for describing the communicative strategies of a given collective or group because "non-linguistic data may carry important linguistic information and vice versa" (Bucholtz 1999, 205). We follow a definition of CofP provided by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, 464):

> A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor...practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

This definition emphasizes the notion of practice as central to an understanding of why the concept offers something different to researchers than the traditional term "community." Essentially, it follows Bourdieu in viewing an individual as a product of a social structure, and not a free agent, because practice reproduces the existing social arrangements (cf., Bucholtz 1999).

Applying the framework of CofP helps reveal the fact that, in the villages under investigation, norms and rules of appropriate behavior are transmitted from generation to generation, and are enforced as social and linguistic practices. Proper use of linguistic codes ensures normal functioning of individuals in any given society. Linguistic competence includes the knowledge of those situations in which certain speech patterns, such as the use of profanities or singing a song, may be permitted or forbidden (cf., Duranti 1992; Hymes 2001; Agyekum 2011). Therefore, language and linguistic practices cannot be separated from the general social context, and should be studied as its part. Quoting Bucholtz (1999, 205): "Language is merely one practice in which habitus is embedded, and through which the individual becomes socially

locatable to observers." As Strycharz-Banaś (2016, 666) points out, the application of CofP framework cannot be arbitrary and should include an ethnographic approach in order to understand "the extent to which the inner workings of a given community have indeed been negotiated by the community itself." She maintains further that:

> Looking at a group of people engaging together in some common activity, we cannot assume a priori the existence of a CofP. What we can do, however, is unpack their engagement with one another and understand the way in which they organize themselves as a group (if they do), thus gaining a more nuanced understanding of the internal workings of the group. (666)

Finally, the notion of a register in our study is based on Agha (cited in Agyekum 2011, 578), and refers to the:

> choice of appropriate words and expressions for specific topics and situations, to a model of communication…including words, signs, and nonverbal communication, the participants for whom the signs function as a medium of interaction, and the entire sociocultural context. It is a way of performing various social actions and distinct registers are associated with specific sociocultural practices and speech forms.

With these theoretical assumptions in mind, we hypothesize that speaking conventions and linguistic practices in the Russian North correlate with social obligations and roles. In the following sections, we discuss three varieties of ritual speech register found in the contemporary Russian North-West: lamentations, agon, and cursing and oaths. They belong to the collective repertoire, and in referring to a speech register, we adhere to Agha's (2007, 168) postulate that "every register does involve a repertoire of forms."

Data and Method

The current study is based on the field data accumulated during ethnographic expeditions organized by the Propp's Centre, a non-profit research organization affiliated with St. Petersburg State University. Propp's archive is partially available online.[2] The expeditions take place every summer in the rural communities in the vicinity of the Vologda and Arkhangelsk towns. Propp's Centre adheres to the principles of ethical use of qualitative data obtained from human subjects: informed consent is obtained from all the subjects prior to conducting interviews or videotaping them, and their participation in interviews is voluntary. Subjects understand what is being asked of them and agree to take part in the interviews. Participants' anonymity is protected, and their names and identities are not revealed. In order to receive access to Propp's Centre data, a formal letter, indicating the purpose for which data will be used, is requested in advance.

The Propp's Centre database is comprised of interviews with rural and urban residents in audio, video, and text formats, as well as photos, videos, and digitalized personal documents. It contains over 40,000 units (interviews, observations, and transcriptions recorded between 1983 and 2017), which are available through the Propp's Centre archive under the umbrella of "Russian Everyday Life." The archive and its materials facilitate a longitudinal study of the communities, portraying several generations and allowing for in-depth descriptions of all aspects of everyday life in the Russian North-West.

Initially, the goal of the expeditions was to study oral tradition, conduct interviews, and provide ethnographic observations of the everyday villagers' lives. However, with time, new forms of collective behavior, which fell beyond the scope of the traditional folklore and dialectology, became evident and started being recorded. Speech strategies, clichéd forms,

[2] Propp's archive can be partially accessed using the following link: http://daytodaydata.ru/object/3513244.

narratives, biographies, and personal stories were systematically audio-taped and transcribed. The informants were asked when and on which occasions particular texts or expressions have been used. Comments and field notes were thoroughly kept. As a result, the Propp's Centre archive and database provide investigators with rich materials for the "thick ethnographic description" of the communities in question (cf., Geertz 1973). The data represent a substantial corpus of materials pertaining to all spheres of life of many of the rural communities located in the administrative districts of Vologda and Arkhangelsk. The collected data sheds light on the mechanisms of transmission and maintenance of traditional elements of culture.

Despite the long years under the Soviet regime and the transformation of traditional farming households into collective farms—*kolkhoz*—during the Soviet era, the rural areas of the Vologda and Arkhangelsk districts, due to their remote geographic position, are still characterized by high retention of the traditional ways of life, as well as some of the traditional social institutions and roles. Even with the long period of atheism as the ruling ideology, the villagers typically have very good practical knowledge and skills for doing things in a traditional way, the way their mothers and fathers did. This is especially noticeable in the domestic and occupational spheres, where the knowledge and active use of the traditional elements of culture is seen as one of the mandatory conditions for doing things properly and necessary for survival. In the Russian countryside, there was always an apparent controversy between the official state-wide politics of cultural and religious annihilation at a state scale, and the retention and cultivation of the traditional elements of culture on a local scale. The villages under investigation are communities of practice *per se*. Villagers are engaged in daily activities, working together in the fields and doing things collectively. Many of the villagers are related, maintain social networks, and do favors for each other.

As Strycharz-Banaś (2016) reiterates, in order for the community to qualify as a CofP, all of the defining characteristics outlined by Étienne Wenger must be satisfied:

- joint enterprise,
- mutual engagement, and
- a shared repertoire of resources.

Strycharz-Banaś (2016, 669) continues: "Enterprise within this framework is both understood by the members and negotiated by them, and so understanding of this enterprise (and its negotiation) necessarily contributes to the sense of identity." Our data completely satisfies these criteria. It is important to emphasize that the villagers themselves are fully aware of both the geographical and social boundaries of their communities. The people who live in a cluster of villages are usually called by the ethnonym derived from their village name. For example, people who live in the village of Roxoma are called *roxomae*, *shubashliana* in Shubach, etc. (literally, people from the village of Roxoma, people from the village of Shubach) (Folklore Archive, Faculty of Humanities, St. Petersburg State University; hereafter, FA). Social boundaries between the villages are maintained by the young men. There are traditional fights between the different villages that coincide with certain festivals when the young men wrestle and participate in contests for the girls, and thus demarcate their villages' boundaries (cf., Shepanskaja 1998).

Findings and Discussion

In the studied communities, linguistic practices indicate attitudes and beliefs. While some of the speech forms and conventions belong to interpersonal communication, others facilitate the relationships between individuals and their environment in both the spatial and chronological sense. When and where one may or may not say certain things is highly regulated not only by society, but also by "non-human" agents and forces. The studied communities are stratified by the speech strategies corresponding to select demographics: gender and age are very important

attributes determining the informants' shared and individual repertoires and communicative strategies. During the interviews, the notion of appropriateness emerged empirically. The informants often remarked that certain words, expressions, or texts that can be suitable for mature women but not appropriate for young girls. Similarly, what can be deemed a normal way of expression for men cannot be used by young boys:

> What can be said by a young boy is ridiculous when uttered by a mature man and absolutely unthinkable for a young girl. (FA)

For example, girls and young women generally should avoid profanities or singing limericks with swearing words that are associated with male roles, whereas mature or old women are free to do so due to their old age, high societal status, and power. For them, using these limericks or swearing may seem normal and legitimate. The existence of gender- and age-appropriate forms across languages, cultures, and social contexts is well-attested in sociolinguistics and our data, but conform to the general consensus that linguistics resources take part in social indexation across gender lines, and are related to power and dominance (cf., Coates 2015).

Overall, the passive knowledge of a text or speech form and its active use in one's repertoire are two different things for the locals. We define it in terms of legitimacy and the individual's rights to appropriation of certain codes. Some texts may be well known to everyone, but only selected individuals or demographic groups may legitimately use them. On the other hand, on certain occasions, individuals are obliged to use specific ritual expressions or speech forms. As Agha (2007, 146) indicates: "An individual register's range—the variety of registers with which he or she is acquainted—equips a person with portable emblems of identity, sometimes permitting distinctive modes of access to particular zones of social life."

An example of such communicative legitimacy is the status of an outsider. We noticed that very often people apologized and said that they were not "local." It appeared that people who were not born in a particular village had a relatively low status in it. Individuals from the neighboring villages who were married to locals repeatedly said that they were "not local" (*ne mestnyj/aja*) when voicing their opinion to the members of the new community or outsiders. On numerous occasions, the informants said: "I don't know this song, I am not local." However, immediately after such a disclaimer, they might sing the songs or narrate stories they were asked for. Similar to the phenomenon observed by Labov (1972), usually such "foreigners" are willing to talk to the outsiders and share their knowledge. Nevertheless, behavioral etiquette (unpronounced rules) prescribes the use of this formulaic expression even if the person has lived in their new village for decades.

In terms of social hierarchy, such a communicative strategy signals that the given community assigns strangers a very low social status, alienating them from the symbolic resources and power and denying them rights to use certain communicative codes. One can say that there are formulaic expressions and speech etiquette associated with societal status, which signify one's discursive incompetence or right to show their competence. In order to substantiate the above claims, let us look at the speech registers found in the region under study.

Lamentations

Social expectations constitute a pragmatic context that imposes the code choice on the individual, and lamentations are one of the examples of such imposed code. During the mourning period, the female relatives should lament for three days. They use highly clichéd texts, which, however, often turn out to be improvisations with the actual details and episodes of the lives of the diseased and lamenting person. As one of the informants stated:

> I never formally learnt how to lament. You cannot learn how to lament, you do it when you are full of sorrow, and when you are grieving and pouring your heart. It's not a sin to "weep" your misery." (FA)[3]

The informants do not perform ready-made texts, but rather adapt the available code using clichéd forms and formulae in order to meet social expectations—paying tribute to the dead.

It is understood that the notion of legitimacy is not limited to the specific words or expressions, but applies to the entire behavioral etiquette: when and what one may do or say. One of the most striking occurrences of the legitimacy of use of a particular genre was refusal of mature female informants to sing songs that they claimed they knew. The motivation they provided was that "they live in a grief" (*ja v gore zhivu*) (FA). Initially we thought it was either a polite form of refusal or a real mourning after their relatives. However, after more and more informants were interviewed, and the personal circumstances of their lives were analyzed, we found out that among women there was a special social status of an "orphan," a person who has buried her closest relatives (children, husband, etc.). The age and actual time of her loss did not matter. Even if it had happened forty years ago,[4] the woman's communicative behavior was supposed to be marked as that of an "orphan." For such a woman, it was not appropriate to sing in front of others. As the informants noted, they often start singing while working, but then they regain control over themselves, looking around and making sure that "nobody heard them" (*nikto ne slyshit*) (FA). This clearly indicates that the individual repertoire and use or non-use of codes serve as a marker of their social status. During the interviews, such "orphans" were willing to talk about their sorrows. Doing this, they switched to the ritual register using metaphors, tropes, and rhythmically organizing their speech. Let us look at the following examples:

> *Oj, u men'a gor'a kak sine more.* (Ah, my sorrow is vast like a sea.)
> *Oj, kak mezh gorami da slez reka bezh*it. (Ah, the tears are running like a river amid the mountains.)
> *Oj, u men'ia gor'ushka gora stoit.* (Ah, my sorrow is high like a mountain.) (FA)

Rhyme is a very important feature found in the ritual register. In the first example, the word *gore* (sorrow) rhymes with *more* (sea). In the third example, there is alliteration—*gor'ushka gora* (gr/gr). Such tropes are epical; they allude to the metaphors found in the oral tradition. The use of the word *sirota* (orphan) in the Russian North is interesting by itself. The lexical item in the normative language denotes a person who has lost their parent/s. However, in a ritual register in the Russian North, this word may have a different connotation. A mother or wife who has lost her son or husband can call herself an orphan while lamenting.

The fact that the connotation of the word "orphan" is different in the ritual and mundane registers became evident during the interviews when the women were asked to perform lamentations. When women talked about their lives and recollected their own lamentations, they always used the word *sirota*. However, they never used this word when the interviewers asked them to demonstrate how to lament in a more general sense; for example, how a mother laments for her child. If this was not a real-life situation for a woman, she never used the words *sirota* (orphan), *lada* (love), or *dit'a* (child) as a self-designation. The ritual register of lamentation and its social context determined the lexical choice; thus, words in the ritual register have special meaning, which may be different from these found in a non-ritual context. This finding is in line with other ethno-pragmatic studies (i.e., the Akan palace language in Ghana) (cf., Agyekum 2011).

[3] Videos of women performing traditional lamentations can be found here: http://daytodaydata.ru/type/matertypes.
[4] It was not unusual several years ago to see on the streets of Toronto's Little Italy neighborhood old widows, dressed in black from head to toe.

In terms of social expectations and roles, the ritual register of lamentations creates a new meaning and context for the word *sirota*—anyone whose social status has been changed because of their loss of relatives. In turn, being an orphan means assuming certain social obligations, such as refraining from singing in public or appearing in public too often because the community disapproves of such behavior. It is expected that women who lost their relatives always attend funerals and wakes. Their speech is marked, and they often switch into the ritual register appropriate to their status.

Hence, we can say that an individual's speech repertoire is not static. It is modified during the life span. As such, it is subject to shifting social roles and statuses, as well as social expectations: the speech register is a very important indicator of social roles. One interesting parallel to such indexation through linguistic resources is found in Dyirbal (Aboriginal language spoken in Queensland), where speakers switch to specific registers known as "mother-in-law language" and "brother-in-law language" whenever so-called "taboo" kin such as the mother-in-law or brother-in-law is in earshot (Shibatani 2006, cited in Brown 2008).

Chastushka: Agon[5] Register

Chastushka is a traditional Russian genre representing four-line rhymed limericks that are recited accompanied by an accordion or alone, during social gatherings and festivals. *Chastushka* is a short message intended for a particular addressee or the community as a whole. As demonstrated in Adonyeva (2004a), *chastushka* is not merely a folklore genre but a special speech register enabling participants to make public announcements that otherwise are not possible. According to Adonyeva (2004a), there are three main functions of *chastushka*:

- medium of news/public announcements,
- agon: contest or conflict resolution, and
- humorous/entertainment.

Let us look at some examples of the *chastushka* used as a medium of public announcements. News can be announced to the whole community via *chastushka*, as in a following text. Note the real names (young men, Vlasov and Khrolov, from the neighboring villages) and the village name, Anosovo. As our materials show, popular and well-known texts are often adapted to the particular circumstances, where specific names and events are being mentioned:

Van'u Vlasova ubili,
Da i Hrolova hotiat,
A ne ostanetsia v Anosove,
Horoshen'kih rebiat. (Adonyeva 2004a, 164–65)

(Vanya Vlasov he got knifed,
And Khrolov got a threat,
In the village of Anosovo
There'll soon be no lads left.)[6]

[5] Agon is from the Greek *agōn*, meaning contest, conflict; especially: the dramatic conflict between the chief characters in a literary work.
[6] Translated to English by Catriona Kelly.

Chastushka can be also recited to a rival in order to set the stage to resolve a conflict, as in the following example. A community member may reproach another member for a wrongdoing:

Tridzat' let pesen ne pela,
Pet' ne sobiralas'.
Menia v pesniah pozadeli,
Ja porasschitalas'. (Adonyeva 2004a, 166)

(For thirty years I haven't sung,
And wasn't planning to.
You poked fun at me in your songs,
Now I'll get revenge on you.)[7]

Similarly, the following text may serve as a public announcement, but in a more humorous register: a girl may mock her former lover or rival in public. Note the new reality reflected in this text (the bride now could be summoned from America):

Milyj hodit ne podhodit,
Govorit: "Ne po umu."
Iz Ameriki by vypisat'
Sudarushku emu.' (FA)

(My beloved doesn't approach me,
Says, I'm not good enough for him.
He wants a bride from America
To be sent to him.)[8]

In this article, we will limit our discussion to the agon register only (for more detailed discussion and extended bibliography, see Adonyeva 2004a). The agon register is mostly found in the demographic group of unmarried youth or young couples. Its topics embrace love affairs and prenuptial and matrimonial relationships. It serves as a means of conflict resolution in cases of pre-marital/marital infidelity. There is a very rigid ritual that cannot be omitted: if a girl recites *chastushka* addressed to her *supostatka* (the rival with whom she contests for her lover), the opponent cannot interrupt her, but has to answer back (*otpet'*[9]—sing her out) in a similar fashion: using *chastushka* and in public. The skill in answering back (*otpet'sia*) is highly valued. The informant calls this: "*Dve supostatki peli naotpev*" (Two female rivals contested "singing out" each other) (FA).

The act of "singing out" is perceived as a speech act: *ona ego vypoet*, *on ee otpoet* (she will sing him out, and he'll answer back to her). Note the lexemes *vy-pet*, *ot-pet*: these verbs are not found in the standard language, and are derivatives of the verb *pet'* (to sing). They can be translated as "act of reciting *chastushka* with a certain purpose." These lexemes are found in the *chastushka* domain only. Note also that there are both reflexive and non-reflexive forms: *on ee otpel/ on otpelsia* (he sang her out/he sang out himself).

However, this does not hold true for the normative Russian language, where there is no active reflexive form *pets'a'*: *ja pojus' (*I myself sing out), but only passive ones: *mne poets'a* (I-DAT to-sing-SELF) or *pesnia poets'a* (the song is sung). Therefore, not only is the agon register functionally distinct from the everyday language, but there are also specific lexemes and grammatical forms used only under this register. This is in line with the current ethno-pragmatic

[7] Translated to English by Catriona Kelly.
[8] Translated to English by Laura Olsen.
[9] Compare with a non-reflexive verb "otpevat'," which in Standard Russian has a strictly liturgical meaning pertaining to a burial ceremony in a church.

research; for example, comparing the use of honorifics, appellations, and address forms in Akan palace language (Agyekum 2011). Another interesting parallel is found in Japanese and Korean, where specific use of honorifics may index "a more private or personal mode of self-presentation…or a public and an interpersonal identity" (Brown 2008, 375).

Similar to the ancient Greek drama, the *chastushka* agon has a predefined set of roles, protagonists, and characters. Let us take a quick glance at the *chastushka* vocabulary. The lexeme *supostat*-M*/ ka*-F could be found only in the *chastushka* register: although it exists in literary Russian, it is archaic and means "enemy." However, in *chastushka*, this word means "rival in a love affair (M/F)." For example, *supostat* is a lad who cheated on his girlfriend, and a competitor for another lad. Along the same lines, other lexemes that can be only found in *chastushka* define its protagonists and characters: *milenok*-M*/milka*-F (sweetheart-M/F), *jagodin-ka/-ochka* (honey-lit. berry-Diminutive-M/F), *droli-a-M/-echka-M* (sweetheart-Diminutive-M), and *sudarushka*-F (darling-Diminutive-F). The above lexemes are almost nonexistent in spontaneous speech. However, when there is a need to describe this type of relationships (i.e., love, affection, friendship between a male and female), the villagers borrow the lexemes from the *chastushka* vocabulary, as in the following example:

> *Drol'a - s kotorym druzhish, ne to chto nravits'a, a tak, uzhe druzhish, poetomu mogut skazat': Prihodil drol'a vchera-to. A jagodinochka—chashe v chastushkah tol'ko. A pro devushku—sudarushka.* (FA)
>
> (Drolia is someone who is you friend, not that you are in love with him, but just like a friend. So, it can be said: did drolia come to visit you yesterday? But *jagodinochka*—it's mostly in *chastushka*. And a girl—would be called *sudarushka.*)[10]

These observations are supported by the Dictionary of Russian Dialects. Connotations of the aforementioned words can be described only through the roles and relationships that are explicated in *chastushka* (i.e., *drolia—eto tot, s kem ty gul'aesh'*: *drolia*—it is someone you spend time with). Statistics offer further evidence that *chastushka* is a register different from casual speech. For example, in the Repository of Russian dialects, out of thirty-four examples of the use of the word *drol'a*, twenty-six are in *chastushkas*, and only eight in spontaneous speech (*Kartoteka slovarnogo cabinet*—The Non-Digitized Repository of Russian Dialects located at the Faculty of Humanities, St. Petersburg State University).

It should be noted that, although there is a very high degree of improvisation needed for adapting *chastushka* text to specific events, names, places, etc., all the informants point out that everyone in the communities know the most popular texts. Thus, *chastushkas* are stored in the collective memory, from which the members draw texts suitable for a particular occasion. According to the villagers, only *hodovye* (those people who are capable of inventing new *chastushkas*) compose new texts, whereas the average person uses the existing texts, modifying them for the particular circumstances. Moreover, *chastushkas* always refer to concrete events and people, and are well thought of in advance, prepared and memorized before the occasion:

> *Nu kotorye khodovye, te srazu otvet'at.* (FA)
> (Those who can, they'll answer on the spot.)
>
> *Net, ne s khodu…chastushki znali i razuchivali, eshe tozhe drug drugu pojut.* (FA)
> (No, the words do not come on the spot—*chastushkas* are prepared in advance, passed from mouth to mouth.)

[10] Translated to English by Olga Levitski.

Therefore, a *chastushka* performance is an exchange of messages in the public domain. One of the *chastushka* types that make possible a translation of the intimate feelings into public announcement is called *primernye* (exemplary). In an exemplary *chastushka*, the performer reveals feelings in public that normally would be concealed; for example:

> *To li ty igraesh-taesh,*
> *To li poju-taju.*
> *To li ty lubit' konchaesh,*
> *To li ja perestaju.* (FA)
>
> (Maybe you are playing, faking,
> Or maybe I'm the one to bluff,
> Maybe you're falling out of love,
> Or it could be I've had enough.)[11]

It is important to note that reciting a *chastushka* in front of an audience is a mandatory condition for switching into *chastushka* register. Such news as someone's unfaithfulness should be announced, presented to the public, and discussed afterwards by the community members. Hence, one can say that the *chastushka* register is a powerful tool for ensuring social order: it can help establish reputations among youth, but it also can serve as a method of adult control in the matrimonial sphere. Since all reputations receive publicity, the adult community members have a chance to discuss and supervise the relationships and developments leading to prospective marriages. In other words, *chastushka* is a way of informing the public about one's sexual availability, mutual relationships and engagements, rivalry, etc. This information is not considered a private business of individuals. On the contrary, the community makes it mandatory to reveal it, and expects all its members to do it through *chastushkas*. That is why the villagers comment on *chastushka*: "*vse chto-to k chemu-to skazano*" (everything that is said has a meaning and relates to something). Switching to a *chastushka* register is not the free will of an individual, but a ritual that individuals cannot omit. This is fully corroborated by other highly ritualized contexts, such as, for example, the Akan palace language in Ghana.

Analogous to the agon explicating the emotional sphere, the *chastushka* register may serve the purpose of regulating ritual fights between different villages: groups of young men (called *shatija* or *vataga*) meet at the border of their villages in order to recite ritual offences, *chastushkas*, mocking another village and containing profanities, which eventually lead to fights. Thus, young men's verbal aggression and exchange of offensive *chastushka* texts is a prelude to a physical clash that represents a traditional element of the Russian male festive behavior (cf., Shepanskaja 1998; Ludevig 2003). In fact, such a physical clash is a culmination of any festival in the villages under investigation. Both male verbal aggression, directed to the rival group, and female *chastushka*-squabbles with their rivals, are a normative way of regulating conflicts: they may be resolved under *chastushka* register and with a compulsory participation of an audience.

Although it was found that all the informants have passive knowledge of *chastushkas*, when it comes to actual performance, there is a strict division by age and gender:

> *Parni, konechno, parni svoja, u devchonok svoi chastushki...Rebiata hodili gruppami,...i vot oni peli pesni, maternye, konechno, a devchonki, konechno, normalnye.* (FA)
>
> (Lads have their chastushkas, with profanities [*maternye*], and the girls—their own normal).[12]

[11] Translated to English by Laura Olsen.
[12] Translated to English by Olga Levitski.

Thus, for example, according to our informants, only men can use erotic *chastushkas* and texts that contain profanities because it is shameful for young women and girls to sing them. However, as our materials show, almost everyone, including children, know such texts, which demonstrates a boundary between knowledge of a code and legitimacy of its use, determined by a speaker's status and domain of use.

In this respect, the use of profanities and erotic *chastushkas* by elder women is remarkable: there is a correlation between obscene lexicon and position of power and domination in Russia. As Kirilina (1998) points out, the function of obscene vocabulary is to spell out power and domination—only those in a certain position can swear in public. This observation is fully supported by our field data, as well as numerous other ethnographic studies (cf., Nikiforov 1996). For example, in our data, erotic and obscene texts were often recorded by elder women, who demonstrate their high status and power freely switching to the male speech register. This topic can be also explored further in its connection to the competence vs legitimacy/appropriacy in other social and linguistic contexts (for example, the notion of competence vs communicative appropriacy in English as *lingua franca*, cf., Seidlhofer and Widdowson 2017).

Cursing and Blasphemy

One of the examples of a linguistic practice linked to the worldview and popular beliefs found in the communities under investigation is the use of blasphemy or cursing. It is believed that swearing or blaspheming at certain times or by certain individuals may lead to catastrophic consequences. In the Russian language, there is a word denoting the spirit of forest, *leshij*.[13] *Leshij* is believed to be an anthropomorphic supernatural agent who often appears disguised as an old man, and who has the power to help or punish (i.e., disorient) people in his territory, the forest.

Cursing in *leshij'*s name (saying *idi k leshemu, zaberi tebia leshij*, literally "go to *leshij*" or "may *leshij* take you") is a clichéd form and a widespread mundane practice in the studied communities. In an everyday context, the above cliché may be uttered several times a day. However, these utterances may prove disastrous when they occur in the woods (the *leshij*'s territory), during a certain hour, or when uttered by mothers towards their children.

It is believed that there is a time of day (a bad hour, minute) when a curse may turn into reality. Thus, the pragmatic context and temporal and spatial characteristics of an utterance can switch an expression from the mundane register to the ritual one. As a result, the illocutionary force of this expression varies in the different contexts (Austin 1962). While it is usually uttered in the spur of the moment, unintentionally, as a sign of frustration or irritation, it may exist in two registers. This fact is very important because in the Russian North, there is a popular belief that there are two ways of casting the evil eye: intentional and unintentional (cf., Potebnia 1989). In the studied data, most of the narratives describe unintentional curses. There is a clash between the perlocutionary and illocutionary effect of the accidental curse because the speakers do not intend to change the reality, they merely express their emotions (cf., Kushkova 2006). Mothers who curse their children in *leshij*'s name may unintentionally cause their disappearance. The expression becomes a performative act when uttered by a mother because, in general, little children are thought to be very vulnerable. When a curse is uttered by a mother whose social and gender role is to protect a child, it becomes very hazardous.

Likewise, the illocutionary force and register of an expression changes if it is uttered during a "dangerous" hour or in the "wrong" territory. There are numerous "real-life" stories about people who have lost their way in the forest because of the way they spoke. The informants provide their personal interpretations of the events, which are essentially based on the common referential knowledge of the speaking conventions and the penalty for their violation.

[13] The word *lešij* is derived from the word *les* (forest).

The following text is a variant of a very popular narrative frequently told by the villagers:

> *Byl takoj sluchaj v nashej derevne. Byl takoj bolshoj dom i bylo u nih troe detej. Devchonka malen'kaja, Lusia, ona byla ochen' neposlushnaja. Mat' poprosila ee chto-to sdelat', a ta—net. I pobezhala k derevjam. A mat' voz'mi da i skazhi: Zaberi tebia leshij. Vot ona i propala, zeluju nedelu iskali ee.* (FA)
>
> (There was such a case in our village. There was this big house and they had three children. A little girl, Lucy, she was very mischievous. Her mom told her to do something. And she said, "No." And she went towards the trees. So the mother said, "May *leshij* take you, and not bring back." And she disappeared; they've spent a week searching for her.)[14]

In this narrative, the mother, irritated by her daughter, has uttered the forbidden words. In general, the community disapproves of such verbal transgressions. As may be seen in the following text, the interlocutors who are the agents of social control and who monitor the social order criticize the woman who did not obey the interactional etiquette:

- *Babushka, vot ja s synom so svoim, syn traktorist...Ja ego proklianula, Ja tak s im rugalasia. Ja ego...proklianula, tak on poehal s traktorom, traktor oprokinulsia v reku i on utopilsia.*
- *Vot, ...materinskaja molitva so dna-to vynimaet, a materinskoe prokliatie vo dno opuskaet.*
- *Zachem ty ego? ...*
- *Nu kak eto ty ego? ...* (Kushkova 2005; Kushkova 2006, 62)

- That's what...I cursed my son, the tractor driver...I was…I was so angry…I...So he drove his tractor and he fell into the river....
- Well, you see, the mother's prayer may save, but the curse—it can kill!
- Why have you done this to him?
- How could you?[15]

Tolstaja (1994, 176) points out that there is an underlying belief that the curse is not addressed to the real person, interlocutor, but to "some supernatural force."

The ritual speech register is observed in other linguistic practices, such as expressions of gratitude, or asking for permissions of spirits that may control certain activities. The knowledge and distribution of formulaic expressions is based on gender and occupations. Women, who are typically involved in domestic activities, utter their formulae of gratitude in a house, or in a sauna. Men may know different "words," which are used during fishing, hunting, or in a pasture. There are numerous examples of people thanking places (or "spirits-masters") for their benevolence. For example, it is customary to thank the forest. After October 17th, women may go to the forest and say "goodbye and thank you," because after that date there is no picking mushrooms or berries until the next year (FA).

The above examples demonstrate that the ritual speech register helps individuals organize their lives spatially and cope with, or prevent, various critical situations, mostly in specialized domains associated with male/female domestic and occupational roles. Speech conventions represent an intricate system that links linguistic practices with the worldview, beliefs, social relationships, social statuses and roles of community members]. Any violation of the shared discourse norms and rules may lead to conflicts, or even to ostracizing the CofP members. Since

[14] Translated to English by Olga Levitski.
[15] Translated to English by Olga Levitski.

speaking conventions and discursive norms constitute a social practice that mirrors collective beliefs, speakers' intentions, shared experiences, and protect social identities and roles, they are of interest to (ethno)-pragmatics, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics.

Conclusions

The theoretical framework of CofP offers valuable insights into the data collected in the Russian North. Because this framework is ethnographically oriented and focused on practice, it reveals the facts of social life from the speaker's perspective, and helps researchers take the local meanings into consideration. The emphasis of this concept lays on practice—the recurrent behavioral patterns that govern the way people do things, including doing them linguistically. Members of the CofP share views on what constitutes the normal course of events. In traditional societies, individuals are not free agents expressing their opinions or will. Rather, they constantly draw on the tradition that provides them with interactional resources that embody a social order.

In this article, we introduced a considerable corpus of the archival and current Russian field data. We argued that interactions observed in the CofPs of the Russian North retained elements of traditional culture. Using conventional speech varieties, clichéd speech forms, linguistic routines, and oral tradition and traditional genres, interlocutors navigate between the mundane and ritual speech registers, and by doing this, they negotiate their social identities and roles. The above ritual speech register and genres are not merely part of the collective repertoire stored in the collective memory. They are used by individuals actively and creatively.

Since any interaction is structured and constrained by inferential frames, contextualization cues, and social expectations of the participants, switching to the ritual speech register is one of the ways of ensuring social order and regulating interpersonal relationships in the communities in question. It is also a way of assuming collective responsibility or validate personal opinions through the collective authority. The marked speech register is one of the conduits for a complex system of knowledge of the world and index of meanings. Similarly to what is found in other CofPs, whereby participants switch between dialects and normative language or between formal and informal register, knowledge of what is appropriate and of how to use linguistic resources is also a way to mark in/out boundaries. Our findings conform to other CofP research, such as, for example, Osaka-style negation or *uchi* and *soto* situation marking in/out boundaries in Japanese culture (Strycharz-Banaś 2016), or Akan palace language of Ghana (Agyekum 2011).

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: A Woman Performing a Lamentation, 2012
Source: The Propp Centre Archive, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmd_GQ-Ddhc

Figure 2: A Village Woman, Borok Village
Source: The Propp Centre Archive, http://daytodaydata.ru/object/3499294

Figure 3: A Village Woman Tending to Her Cow, Moyseevo village
Source: The Propp Centre Archive, http://daytodaydata.ru/object/3499886

Figure 4: A Village Woman Explaining How to Use a Spinning Wheel, Kimzha village
Source: The Propp Centre Archive, http://daytodaydata.ru/object/3484748

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