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## American and English Borrowings in Russian: Blurring Ethnosocial Boundaries

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*The paper presents the results of experimental method further compared with the information depicted in the dictionaries to account for the linguistic and socio-linguistic profile of English borrowings in Russian.*

*The case of four borrowed words suggests that natural ethnical, social and cultural differences incorporated in their semantics are leveling due to the changing societal attitudes towards the elements of the western culture.*

*Keywords: borrowing, target and source language, assimilation, adoption of cultural values.*

### Point

The global spread of English has been the most successful case of language spread in history, its triumph in the modern world results not only in a number of lexical borrowings as the outcome of language adaptation to changing environments but in the adoption of the values of the source language culture as well. With continuously growing prestige of American and European economy and culture, borrowed words acquire positive connotations merely because they are borrowings: using *нон-стоп* instead of *без перерыва*, *грант* instead of *стипендия* or *прайс-лист* instead of *печетр цен*, etc. These examples illustrate the conceptions (which are widely exploited by advertising) that foreign technology is more progressive, foreign economy is more successful, foreign banks are more reliable, foreign goods are of better

quality than their Russian equivalents (Breiter, 1997). With increasing number of Anglicisms and Americanisms and their spreading and even ubiquitousness in the common use, the language profile of the Russian society is changing leading to societal and cultural changes, reorientation and reconstruction of national mentality.

During its long history, the Russian language more than once has been influenced by other semantic systems, the results of which can be differently estimated and disputed. But we have to admit that the influx of borrowings from English in the current use is unprecedentedly high and incomparable with previous invasions due to the vigorous pressure on the speech assumptions and as a result on speech norms via mass media and advertising.

This investigation attempts to account for the functions of Anglicisms and Americanisms

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in the common use with the help of experimental method. The study includes a questionnaire given to 331 people (221 women (66%) and 114 men (34%) of different age groups (up to the age of 21– 62 people (19%), age 21-35 – 177 people (53%), age 36-50 – 72 people (22%), from the age of 50 – 20 people (6%) and of different occupations.

The research questions of the questionnaire were the following:

- *How often do you come across the word?*
- *How often do you use the word a) in writing, b) in speaking?*
- *Define the word or give the synonym.*

The borrowed words under study can be categorized as ideological and non-ideological borrowings for the time they were first accepted into the language. Ideological borrowings in the target language differed from their counterparts in the source language in stylistic connotations as argued by L. Krysin: "... such words as *комикс* (*comics*), *конгрессмен* (*congressman*) acquired peculiar and distinctively emotional fringe – basically negative – as they signaled the subject of America or Britain, American or British way of life, bourgeois society in general with its 'amenities'" (Krysin, 1968: 145). With the quite opposite attitude of the contemporary society towards the "foreignness", the connotations ("emotional fringe") have changed to more positive or even preferred or neutral.

The lexical set of such borrowings is quite numerous including loanwords naming political circles, their representatives, public groupings, subcultures, military and political lexical sets, words from mass media culture. The borrowings *босс* (*boss*) and *бум* (*boom*) are referred to this group. The word *ланч* (*лэнч*) (*lunch*) is referred to the non-ideological borrowing as its semantics did not incur neither shifts in the core meaning nor connotational additions. The loanword *брэнд* is referred to the group of the recent borrowings

as it was firstly recorded in the dictionary in 2001 (DRL, 2001).

The results of the experimental method are further compared with the information depicted in the dictionaries (from the first dictionary recording to the current norms) with the aim to account for 1) whether the word is perceived by the user as an alien word; 2) whether the semantics of the words has changed due to the societal and communicative practices, though the changes have not been recorded by the dictionaries.

### Example

**‘Босс’.** The borrowing *босс* (*boss*) was first recorded by the dictionary in 1951 (DFW, 1951) with the following meanings: 1) the person in charge of organization, institution; 2) party leader, kingpin (*заправила*) of any organization of Republican or Democratic Party of the USA. The second meaning implicitly illustrates the recommendation to use the word only as a certain ‘exotism’ as it depicts the phenomenon not existing in the Russian culture, alien to the target language and culture. Hardly is it a coincidence that the authors use the informal defining word *kingpin* (*заправила*), unambiguously expressed negative attitude towards the phenomenon is demonstrated and transmitted to the audience. Further in the dictionary entry the extra-linguistic information about the newly borrowed word is exposed: "Bosses have great influence on the economic and political life of the states, they act in the interests of the financial capital by intimidation, blackmailing, bribery (particularly in elections). The main objective of the bosses' activity is organizing a struggle with the progressive movement. Bosses usually have strong connections with the criminal world, they use gangsters for gunmen attacks on democratic organizations and progressive public figures and for terrorizing the electorate". Thereby *bosses* are bracketed with *criminals*, *gangsters*, *gunmen* who

*attack, terrorize, intimidate, blackmail, bribe* and are opposed to progressive, socialist world. The potential dictionary user did not doubt political ortherness, or even alienation and negative emotional connotation of the borrowed word.

In the dictionary of 1989 (DFW, 1989) the first meaning of the word *boss* is preserved: 1) the person in charge of organization, institution, undertaker. The monolingual dictionary of the same year defines the word *undertaker* as 1) the capitalist, the owner of organization; 2) enterprising and practical person. As the words *capitalist, owner, undertaker* refer to the private property and ownership, which did not exist in the USSR in 1989, the word *boss* is still alien to the target (here – adopting) language and culture. The second meaning explicitly signals about the reference of the word *boss* to the bourgeois (alien) society: 2) widely spread naming of people who are in charge of bourgeois political party in the USA cities and states, and trade union leaders.

We can observe slight semantic change in the dictionary of 1998 (DFW, 1998), where the phenomenon does not signal about the alien culture but still retains the negative estimation component: 1) master, owner and dealer (*делец*) in general. According to the same dictionary the word *делец* is defined with the negative connotation: the person who successfully (sometimes not fastidiously in the methods and ways) carries on business. The dictionary entry then provides the examples of word combinations: *биржевые дельцы* (*speculators*), *темные дельцы* (*shysters*). The word *делец* in the dictionary of 1935 (DRL, 1934-1940) is defined quite neutrally as may be supposed, but in the Soviet system of values it had unequivocally negative ideological coloring: ‘an enterprising person, pursuing only practical aims (primarily commercial)’.

The component ‘in the USA’ or ‘in capitalist countries’ disappears in the dictionary of 1998 (DFW, 1998), though preserving the

second meaning: 1) the person in charge of an organization; 2) widespread unofficial naming of political and trade union leaders. Surprisingly enough, the word still preserves the status of an exotism in the dictionary of 2000 (DFW, 2000): 1) master, owner; 2) in the USA – naming of people in charge of Republican and Democratic Parties and trade unions.

The latest dictionary shows only one meaning of the borrowed word *босс*: the person in charge of organization, the head (with stylistic mark ‘*informal*’). The results show that the word has lost its status of an exotism, as it is no longer depicts only the phenomenon of the other culture.

The research questions of the questionnaire showed that 82% of the respondents come across the word regularly; 20% – sometimes, 8% – rarely. 25% regularly use the word in speech, 40% – sometimes, 25% – rarely and 10% – never. In the written discourse 46% regularly come across the word, 44% – sometimes, 26% – rarely and 4% – never. Only 8% of respondents use the word in writing, 25% – sometimes, 28% – rarely and 39% – never.

By 93% of respondents the word *босс* is defined as *шеф* (*chief*), *начальник* (*executive*), *большой начальник* (*chief executive*), *руководитель* (*manager*), *хозяин* (*master*), *глава* (*head*), *директор* (*director*), *главный* (*principle*), *управляющий* (*managing director*). 2% define the word as *патрон* (*patron*), *богатый* (*rich*), *бугор* (*tycoon*), *командир* (*commander*), *главарь* (*ringleader*).

It is evident from the examples that the central component of the word meaning is unanimously understood by the users, while the peripheral aspects vary from neutral to having clear emotional coloring like in *главарь* (*ringleader*), *бугор* (*tycoon*), *патрон* (*patron*).

‘**Бум**’. The borrowed word *бум* is first recorded in the dictionary of 1951 (DFW,

1951) and defined as ‘ballyhoo’ (*шумиха*), sensation (*сенсация*); speculative boost encouraged by business tycoons for getting profit (‘спекулятивный подъем, вызываемый крупными капиталистами для получения барышей’). The definition has a distinctly articulated negative connotation which results in the choice of defining words with ideological coloring: *profit* (in the Russian variant *барыш* – an informal word with the negative connotation), *speculative* (*спекулятивный*) – the speculative activity is described as illegal in the dictionaries of the same year; *capitalists* (*капиталисты*) – ‘the representatives of the dominating class in a bourgeois society, owning capital and exploiting people for getting profit. Capitalist class is a class of oppressors’. All the dictionaries to follow (DFW, 1989; DFW, 1998) illustrate two meanings of the word *бум* (a case of split polysemy): 1) in the capitalist world – accelerated increase in production, prices and other economic features in the capitalist cycle development: *бум инвестиций* (*investment boom*) is a cyclic increase of invested capital, *бум биржевой* (*market boom*) is a rise of stock; 2) enlivening of some event, person, etc., ballyhoo, sensation.

In current dictionaries the word *бум* is not considered as the phenomenon only of the capitalist countries. Thus, the dictionary of 1998 (DRL, 1998) defines *бум* as 1) short-term, sharp revival of industry, trade and other spheres: *нефтяной бум* (*oil boom*), *книжный бум* (*book boom*), *биржевой бум* (*market boom*); 2) (figuratively) ballyhoo, artificial enlivening of some event.

The answers to the research questions of the questionnaire showed that 39% of respondents regularly come across the word in the spoken discourse, 37% – sometimes, 24% – rarely; 18% of the respondents often use the word in speaking, 32% – sometimes, 38% – rarely, 12% – never. In the written discourse 21% of

the respondents regularly come across the word, 36% – sometimes, 35% – rarely and 8% – never. Only 3% of the respondents use *бум* in writing, 11% – sometimes, 28% rarely and 58% – never.

52% of the respondents gave the following definitions of the word illustrating unanimous understanding of the meaning: 1) *успех* (*success*), *всплеск* (*surge*), *резкий подъем* (*sharp increase*), *верхняя точка в развитии чего-либо* (*the highest peak in the development of something*), *пик подъема* (*increase peak*), *рост* (*growth*), *увеличение* (*increase*), *грандиозный переворот* (*grandiose upheaval*), *пик* (*peak*); 2) *ажютаж* (*agiotage*), *шум* (*noise*), *повышенный интерес* (*heightened interest*), *событие* (*event*), *пик массовой приверженности чему-либо* (*the peak of massive adherence to something*), *популярность чего-либо* (*popularity*), *новальное увлечение* (*everybody's fad*), *переполох* (*flurry*), *новинка* (*new product*), *новшество* (*novelty*), *новое течение* (*new stream*), *аврал* (*hectic rush*), *мода* (*fashion*), *яркое, громкое событие* (*bright famous event*), *фурор* (*furor*), *шумный анонс* (*sensational announcement*), *разгар чего-либо* (*high point of something*), *когда народ ломится куда-то* (*when people rave for something*), *всеобщее кратковременное помешательство на кумире* (*massive short-term bandwagon*), *массовый психоз* (*massive psychosis*), *эйфория* (*euphoria*), *чего-то много и сразу* (*something in large amount and at once*). The last responses demonstrate only lexical associations therefore, the word *бум* can be considered as partly assimilated by some respondents.

16% of the respondents considered *бум* as interjection: *что-то унало* (*something has fallen*), *гром* (*thunder*), *шум* (*noise*), *грохот* (*crash*), *бах* (*bang*), *удар* (*a strike*), *ударить* (*to strike*), *стук* (*knock*), *ба-бах* (*bang-bang*), *имитация звука падения* (*imitation of the sound of falling*), *хлопок* (*slap*). In this case the homonymic interpretation is likely to have taken place, i.e.

the substitution of the meaning of a foreign word with the meaning of the Russian homonym *бум*: onomatopoeic interjection ‘about a muffled and strong sound like strike of the bell or a gunshot’. The same finding is about defining the word *бум* as ‘коктейль’ (*cocktail*) and ‘будем’ (*we will be*). In the first case the respondent probably meant ‘текила-бум’ (the calques from English ‘*tequila slam*’); in the second case – contracted form of the word ‘будем’ (future form of the verb ‘быть’ (*be*)), expressively imitating inarticulate speech while pronouncing the toast (e.g. drinking to smb’s health).

10% of the respondents understand *бум* as *наплыв* (*zooming*), *нашествие* (*invasion*), *восстание* (*riot*), *суета* (*fuss*), *беспорядок* (*disorder*), *обвал* (*downfall*), *крах* (*collapse*), *конец* (*end*), *катастрофа* (*catastrophe*), *прорыв* (*breakthrough*), *возбуждение* (*agitation*), *волнение* (*excitement*), *толпа* (*crowd*), *бунт* (*rebellion*), *переворот* (*upheaval*), *мятеж* (*mutiny*), *паника* (*panic*), *праздник* (*feast*), *веселье* (*fun*), *тусовка* (*hangout*). It has to be pointed out, that almost in each of these responses the following components of the lexical meaning can be singled out:

- something outstanding, something extra whether positive or negative;
- large-scale involvement, influence on the society;
- short-term;
- phonetic associations with interjections (richness of sound, resonance).

**‘Ланч’.** The borrowed word *ланч* or *ленч* is very well known to the large majority of respondents as only 3% experienced some difficulty in defining the word. At the same time lexicographical definitions and responses to the questionnaire proved to be contradictory to some extent. In the 1980s the dictionary entries (e.g. DFW, 1989) described the word *ленч* as ‘the second breakfast after midday or a light snack at

any time of the day (in Britain and the USA)’ or ‘in Great Britain and some other countries the second breakfast’. The fact that the word is perceived as the sign of the other culture is obvious, therefore why was the meaning of the source language not adopted? (cf., for example, the entry in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of 1989: *lunch* 1) meal taken in the middle of the day; 2) (US) light meal taken at any time; or in Longman Dictionary of English Language & Culture: *lunch* also *luncheon* – ‘a usually light meal eaten in the middle of the day’).

The only dictionary of the Russian language which deprives the word *ланч* of the status of exotism is The Dictionary of the Russian Language of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (DRL, 1998): ‘dinner (*обед*), the time for formal or informal meetings’. Here the word also acquired a new component in its meaning – first business then friendly meeting. It became fashionable to discuss business at lunch and then to have an informal talk. The tradition has obviously been borrowed from the western culture, in this case we can speak about cultural borrowing.

The other dictionaries, even though they appeared some time later, still describe the word as the phenomenon of the other culture: ‘the second breakfast in the USA and Great Britain’ (DFW, 1998); ‘the second breakfast, dinner (mainly in English-speaking countries)’ (DFW, 2000).

According to the findings in the questionnaire, 52% of the respondents come across the word *ланч* in the spoken discourse regularly, 36% – sometimes, 12% – rarely; 28% of the respondents use the word in speaking on a regular bases, 28% – sometimes, 37% – rarely, 8% – never. In the written discourse 32% of the respondents regularly come across the word *ланч*, 40% – sometimes, 28 – rarely. Only 2% of the respondents regularly use the word in writing, 69% – sometimes, 24% – seldom, 5% – never.

Only 3% of the respondents connect the word *ланч* with the other culture defining the word as *‘второй завтрак в США, на западе’* (the second breakfast in the USA, in the west), *‘второй завтрак, наш обед’* (the second breakfast, our dinner). Four respondents illustrated vague understanding of the word: *пикник* (picnic), *перекур* (smoke break), *фуршет* (stand-up meal), although these words, apart from *перекур*, are associated with eating and some break in the everyday routine work.

All the other respondents single out the nuclear component ‘eating’: *второй завтрак* (second breakfast), *перекус* (bite), *обед* (dinner), *полдник* (afternoon snack), *между завтраком и обедом* (between breakfast and dinner), *прием пищи перед ужином* (having a meal before dinner), *завтрак-обед* (breakfast-dinner), *деловой завтрак* (formal breakfast), *легкий обед* (light dinner), *небольшой обед* (small dinner), *званный обед* (banquet), *еда вне расписания* (meal out of schedule), *прием пищи с 12 до 13 часов* (having a meal from 12 to 1 pm), *званный обед в кафе* (reception in a cafe), *перерыв с едой* (break with a meal), *жвачка* (chow).

All the responses can be classified according to such components in the meaning of the word *ланч* as ‘the time of the meal’, or vice versa ‘the time of the meal is not important’, light or hearty meal like in *званный обед* (reception).

Two definitions should be pointed out: 1) *жвачка* – pejorative connotation; 2) *‘званный обед’*, *‘званный обед в кафе’*, in which the word *ланч* acquires the positive connotation of a prestigious borrowing, the ordinary event it describes is perceived like an exclusive one. Due to this, as we may suggest, café and restaurant owners use a foreign word *ланч* in advertising to attract clients. Furthermore, the widespread cliché *бизнес-ланч* (business lunch) facilitates to full assimilation of the phenomenon and the word it denotes in the language of the target culture.

**‘Brand’.** The borrowed noun *брэнд* was first recorded by the dictionary (DRL, 2001) with the stylistic note ‘prof.’ – ‘professional vocabulary’ and with the meaning ‘trademark’ (‘торговая марка’). Therefore, according to the lexicographical information, the word *брэнд* was not perceived as an ‘exotism’, a phenomenon of the other culture.

The analysis of the responses to the questionnaire revealed that 23% of the respondents regularly come across the word *брэнд* in the spoken discourse, 37% – sometimes, 39% – rarely and 1% – never. In speaking 9% of the respondents use it regularly, 31% – sometimes, 49% – rarely, 11% – never use it in the spoken discourse. While in the written discourse 16% of the respondents regularly come across the word, 37% – sometimes, 33% – rarely and 14% – never. Only 2% regularly use the word *брэнд* in writing, 7% – sometimes, 13% – rarely and 79% – never use it in the written texts.

24% of the respondents showed difficulty in defining the word, 2% described it as ‘an alcoholic drink’ or just ‘a drink’ confusing the word *брэнд* with *бренди* (brandy).

20% of the respondents demonstrated clear understanding of the meaning of the word: *торговая марка* (trade mark), *марка* (mark), *имя* (name), *название торговой марки* (trade mark name), *известная марка* (famous mark), *фирменная марка* (shopmark), *раскрученная марка* (hyped-up trade mark), *широко известная торговая марка* (widely known trade mark), *название иностранной компании* (the name of a foreign company) – the only response referring the word *брэнд* to another culture – *название фирмы* (name of the company), *фамилия* (surname), *марка продукции* (production mark), *узнаваемая марка продукта в рекламе* (recognized trade mark in the ad), *устоявшаяся торговая марка* (well-established trade mark), *фирма*

(*company*), *название* (*naming*), *марка товара определенной фирмы* (*product mark of the definite company*). It has to be noted that many respondents pointed out the semantic component ‘famous’, ‘widely known’, ‘recognized’, ‘well-established’, ‘promoted’ as a peripheral one.

In many responses we can find the substitution of the notion *логотип* (*logo*) by the notion *бренд: маркировка* (*marking*), *клеймо* (*identification mark*), *логотип* (*logo*), *символика фирмы* (*company style*), *этикетка* (*label*), *фирменный знак* (*company label*), *отличительный знак фирмы* (*distinctive logo of the company*), *эмблема фирмы* (*company emblem*), *идея* (*idea*), *фирменный стиль* (*corporate style*), *определенная идея, продвигающая фирму* (*definite idea promoting the company*), *лейбл* (*label*). We may account for this concepts substitution that each company has its logo, and the respondents, imagining any *бренд*, saw its ‘embodiment’ in a logo.

4% of the respondents consider *бренд* as a *крупный рекламный заказ* (*big advertisement order*), *реклама* (*advertisement*), *рекламная линия* (*advertisement series*), *рекламный элемент* (*advertisement element*), *рекламный бренд* (*advertising brand*), *рекламный проект* (*advertisement project*), *рекламная кампания* (*advertisement campaign*), *проект* (*project*), as well as *эксклюзив* (*exclusive*), *официальный знак качества* (*official quality mark*), *конкурс* (*contest*), *новшество* (*innovation*), *новинка* (*novelty*), *сорт* (*sort*), *богатый и известный человек* (*rich and famous person*). In these responses the lexical component ‘referring to advertising’ is singled out by the respondents

which accounts for the association of the notions *бренд* and *реклама* (*advertisement*). These examples suggest that the borrowed word *бренд* is not fully assimilated in the language by its users in spite of the frequency of the usage of the word by different mass media.

### Resume

The findings from the lexicographical sources and responses to the questionnaire reported here suggest that though separate but thematically diverse examples indisputably indicate already existing consequences of American-English language and cultural expansion, the intensity of which is constantly growing. Both in lexicography and in the mentality of our contemporaries the conception about blurring ethnosocial boundaries (manifested in globalization claims and postulates) prevails, though not very distinctly in each case. The binary opposition ‘self – other’, ‘we – they’, ‘of my culture – of the other culture’ is being substituted (or has already been in some cases) by the relations ‘both of my culture and of the other culture’ that in future might result either in absorption or in substitution of ‘of the other culture’ by ‘of my culture’. To conclude this overview, we may suggest that natural ethnical, social and cultural differences incorporated in the semantics of the borrowed words are leveling due to changing societal attitudes towards the elements of the western culture as it is one of the multifarious ways for the nations to fashion representations of one another and “to borrow and revamp different traditions in order to articulate their identities in a broader community of peoples” (Gruen, 2005).

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## **Англо-американские заимствования в русском языке: стирание этносоциокультурных границ**

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*В статье представлены результаты лингвистического эксперимента, направленного на описание трансформации обыденного языкового сознания носителей русского языка в связи с вхождением большого количества заимствований из английского языка на примере таких англицизмов-американизмов, как 'босс', 'бум', 'ланч' и 'брэнд'.*

*Рассмотренные примеры позволяют сделать вывод о том, что, как в научном, так и в обыденном языковом сознании, происходит стирание границ этносоциокультурного характера, что приводит к поглощению либо к замене прежнего «своего» бывшим «чужим».*

*Ключевые слова: заимствование, ассимиляция, экспансия инокультурных ценностей.*

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