

*Russkie pidzhiny*. By Elena Vs. Perekhval'skaya. St. Petersburg: Aletheia 2008. Pp. 363. Paper RUB 200.00 (approx. \$7.00) [To order, contact [office@aletheia.spb.ru](mailto:office@aletheia.spb.ru)].

Reviewed by Dieter Stern, *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, Germany*

To this day Russian pidgins have not yet been summarily treated at book-length. Elena Perekhval'skaya's book seems to fill this gap and it is certainly to be welcomed as an advancement in the study of Russian pidgins. However, the book is not so much a comprehensive survey of Russian pidgins, – as might be concluded from the title of the book (“Russian pidgins”) –, but rather a specialized study focussing on possible genetic relationships between the attested Russian pidgins.

The book consists of two parts. Part 1 consists of three chapters. The first chapter (pp. 11-76) offers a lengthy introduction to the field of pidgin and creole studies in general. The second chapter (pp. 77-137) acquaints the reader with the sources and the literature on Russian pidgins in the traditional mode of a research report, and then enters into a discussion of the origin of the Russian pidgins. The third chapter (pp. 139-204) provides an analysis of the grammatical and lexical features of the Russian pidgins. The analysis is aimed at further exploring and substantiating the genetic links between the Russian pidgins, which accounts for the partial selectivity of the linguistic phenomena that are examined. Part 2 reproduces all currently available testimonies of Russian pidgins and contact languages. The list of the varieties included in this section comprises besides CPR: a contemporary Finnish-Russian Jargon in use at Helsinki, Russenorsk, TPR, the mixed language Mednyj or Copper Island Aleut, and a prepidgin called Boksit Language, presently in use for communication between Russian specialists and the local population of Guinea. The Russenorsk and TPR materials are taken from sources already available in print. The materials on the Finnish-Russian jargon and the Boksit Language as well as the larger part of the CPR materials are published for the first time in this book. This certainly enhances the value of the endeavor, though the modern prepidgins do not play a role in the argument advanced in the book. Section 2 is rounded off by a dictionary of what the author calls “Siberian pidgin”. This term is meant to designate a more encompassing, hypothetical entity, of which CPR is said to form only the Far Eastern Branch (p. 9). Since CPR represents the only attested branch of this presumed Siberian pidgin, the material of the dictionary consists exclusively of CPR items.

The introductory chapter (pp. 11-76) reviews the extant literature on pidgins in general and sums up the basic findings of theoretical relevance. The account is roughly in line with the present state of knowledge, although seminal papers of more recent years (e.g. Bakker 2003) are not taken into account. Most phenomena are illustrated by Russian examples. Though one might expect the use of Russian examples to put things at least time and again into a different perspective, they are exclusively employed to corroborate received ideas about pidgins. Thus instead of elaborating on the basis of available data on TPR verbal morphology (cp. Stern 2005) the point made by Bakker (2003) that pidgins contrary to traditional notions indeed do adopt inflexional morphology from their lexifier, the author repeats Sebba's (1997:54) dictum that pidgins lack inflection (pp. 32-33).

The second chapter (pp. 77-137) starts off with a review of Smith (1995) and Wurm, Mühlhäusler & Tryon (1996, I, map 110). The author rightly observes that the Russian pidgins listed in these sources for the most part are only known by name, among these non-specific, vague or elusive designations like "Pidgin Russian Trade Language". From my own knowledge of TPR I am able to clarify at least for one of these ominous labels what stands behind it, namely *Transtundra Christian-Russian* (No. 480 in Smith's list). Stern (2002:7) identified this alleged mixed language as the result of a misreading of Ubryatova (1985:66-67) by Wurm (1996:79). The language described by Ubryatova is most probably the lexifier of TPR, viz. the partially restructured native Russian as spoken by the so-called Transtundra Peasants (not Christians!).

Though not stated explicitly, the survey of the available sources probably aims at completeness, which is not achieved. One important early source on the Kyakhta variant of the Siberian pidgin is only mentioned in passing (V.P. 1849:13-15) on page 103, while one of the first descriptive surveys of the various ethnolectal varieties of this pidgin (Georgievskii 1927:66-87, and 1929:113-114) is not mentioned. The source material is classified throughout as either basilectal or mesolectal. I intuitively agree with most of the classifications, but neither the criteria nor their application to single cases are elucidated in the book under review.

The author then proceeds to discuss one of the more tenuous aspects in the study of Russian pidgins, viz. the question of their origin. Her argument is built around three features allegedly common to all attested Russian pidgins. These are (1) SOV order, (2) the generalization of the Nom. sg. fem. of the possessive pronoun *moya* and *tvoya* for the first and second person, respectively, and (3) the use of an invariable verb form ending on *-i*, which resembles the Russian imperative. The author clearly favors a monogenetic explanation for

these features. Her position is thus basically in line with the monogenetic hypothesis Kozinskii (1974) proposed for Russian pidgins. What exactly is to be posited at the beginning of this monogenetic development remains, however, something of a riddle. The author seems to have in mind some kind of specific and at the same time abstract knowledge of how to build a language rather than knowledge of a particular vehicular language.

Though SOV order can be accounted for by the immediate substrates for all pidgins in question, —which the author openly admits—, she opts unhesitatingly for a monogenetic explanation in the hazy past of the first sable hunting Cossacks that entered Siberia. SOV word order in CPR derives from a Mongolian substrate, which also shows up in other features of the pidgin. In TPR, SOV order derives from all relevant substrate languages (Nganasan, Dolgan, Evenk), while Russenorsk, for which a Saami substrate could be claimed, does not really fit in with the alleged uniformity showing a split pattern: SVO is the norm, but sentences containing an adverbial uniformly exhibit the SOV order (Broch & Jahr 1984:41-42). The strongest point in favor of monogenesis is the generalization of the 1 sg. fem. possessive pronoun *moya*, used in Russenorsk as well as CPR. (The analogous 2. sg. *tvoya* is attested only occasionally in CPR, which prefers the form *tebe/tibi*). Lunden (1978) suggested that this particular feature was introduced into Russenorsk from Kyakhta Pidgin via long distance trade contacts. Perekhval'skaya objects to the particular direction of transfer on chronological grounds. She observes that the Pomor trade started earlier than trade at Kyakhta. However, the assumption of a link between both pidgins remains in general uncontested. But, TPR does not fit the overall pattern, having generalized the forms of the genitive-accusative of the personal pronoun *menya, tebya*. Though, TPR *tebya* may indeed be formally related to CPR *tebe/tibi*, as the author is eager to point out (p. 126), this misses the point. The argument for monogenesis hinges exclusively on the common distribution of the forms *moya* and *tvoya*, which are, however, absent from TPR. The generalization of the possessive pronouns *moya* and *tvoya* strikes me as a highly idiosyncratic choice, while the genitive-accusative of the personal pronoun qualifies as the most likely candidate for generalization given its high token frequency in colloquial Russian (Stern 2005:303-307). Support for the third point draws basically on CPR/Siberian pidgin, which shows a generalized form of the verb resembling the Russian imperative. While TPR adopted the complete set of Russian verbal endings, Russenorsk has a different ending *-om* as generalized verb marker. This being so, the author simply dismisses TPR from further consideration because of its mesolectal character, implying that it must have had the required generalized form in former times. However, this assumption cannot be substantiated, and may prove

wrong in the end. The reviewer has identified historical records for TPR reaching as far back as the year 1880, i.e. long before depidginization set in, and none of these records show anything like the form required by the author. For Russenorsk she adduces the forms *grebi* ‘row’, *plati* ‘pay’, *prodai* ‘sell’ and *skasi* ‘tell, say’, —to which *snaj* ‘know’ may be added—, in favor of her argument, declaring that they represent the specific Russian contribution to Russenorsk. These lexemes appear indeed invariably in the form of the Russian imperative; moreover, some of them are even attested in contexts other than imperative. So the Kyakhta-Russenorsk connection seems once again to be corroborated. As for TPR, there are indeed occasional instances of imperatives used instead of indicative forms, but their small number in relation to the sum total of relevant tokens in the available audiodata as well as historical considerations on the emergence of the TPR verbal system thwart the possibility of interpreting them as historical relics of a Russian protopidgin (Stern 2009). In the end, one has to admit that there are indeed occasional intriguing parallels between Russenorsk and CPR/Siberian pidgin, especially in its Kyakhta variant. But on the whole a solid case for monogenesis and the existence of a Siberian protopidgin cannot be made.

Only the third and last chapter (pp. 138-205) embarks upon an in-depth analysis of concrete linguistic data. It deals with the morphology, syntax and lexicon of Russian lexifier pidgins. As regards morphology, special attention is directed at the question whether Russian pidgins differentiate formally between parts of speech. This analysis yields interesting observations: the differentiation between verbs and adjectives seems indeed weakened in CPR. Adjectives as well as verbs exhibit a similar formal element *-i* (*taska-i* ‘bring’ – *molodo-i* ‘young’), and there is one attested case of a Russian adjective being reinterpreted as a verb, viz. Russian *fal’šivyi* ‘wrong’ in *za moya fal’šiva-i-la netu* ‘I have not been cheating’ with the Chinese marker of perfectivity *le* (*-la*), usually attached to verbs (p. 149). Surprisingly, the author does not discuss the emergent noun marker *-a* in Russenorsk (Broch & Jahr 1984:33-34), which would lend additional support to the monogenetic hypothesis, since CPR nouns overwhelmingly end in *-a*. Though the author never states it in an open manner, her book makes clear that she tries to establish a closer link between TPR and CPR as well as the presupposed protopidgin. She does so by pointing to the fact that both pidgins have developed post-nominal grammatical markers. As if to immunize her argument, she withholds the fact that CPR has a generalized preposition *za*, which is only mentioned in passing in a footnote on page 178. Cherepanov (1853:374), however, unambiguously states that prepositions are replaced by *za* or adverbial expressions, the latter appearing indeed post-nominally. But post-nominal modifiers play a numerically und structurally rather marginal

role in CPR. None of them qualifies as a genuine case marker, as is the case with *mesto* in TPR.

Although I disagree with Perekhval'skaya's overall conclusion, her book is a welcome and important contribution to the study of Russian pidgins. Perekhval'skaya undoubtedly succeeds in bringing out all facts which are suggestive of a monogenetic origin, but in the end she spoils the argument by her being bent too much on proving her particular point, not allowing for more skeptical alternative readings of the facts presented. On the positive side, the author's exquisite first-hand knowledge of much of the material has to be appreciated, which makes the book a competently written account teeming with interesting detail and observations.

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