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**Global Languages and Cultures in Contact:**

**Perceiving Russia and China Englishes**

The transition of the world center of economic development into the Asia-Pacific region contributes to the increasing expansion of contacts between the world's two major powers, Russia and China. The most intensive interaction takes place in the border areas of the two countries, which results in the formation of a specific multi-linguocultural space, part and parcel of which are English-mediated contacts. The choice of English as a lingua franca in the Asia-Pacific region is primarily determined by the economic, political and cultural expansion of the United States. A concomitant factor in establishing the status and functional areas of the English language in the Far East for international communication may, in our view, be considered the genetic and typological distance among most languages of East Asia. The linguistic situation in China deserves a more detailed comment: many Chinese dialects (about ten dialectal groups), which are recognized by linguists as separate, though related, languages, make it difficult to communicate in the Chinese language, not only for foreigners but also for their native speakers.

The spread of English in China dates back to the early 18th century and is associated with the establishment of open ports and the receipt of extraterritorial and concessions rights, as well as preferential treatment by England and then the United States in the 1740 's. Later on, the functioning of English in China was territorially and socially limited. English was spoken, mostly, on the southern coast of China, where it was used in the coastal cities of Guangzhou (Canton), Fuzhou, and Shanghai and Tianjin. The English language was spoken mostly by educated merchants and clerics. In 1862, in China, the first school of foreign languages was established. The main focus in English teaching was put on understanding the Scriptures [Proshina 2001: 73-77].

From 1949 to 1976, China saw a period of deterrence in the English language teaching, which at that time was taught only in eight classic universities and institutes of foreign languages for interpreters and translators, the need for which was international relations, politics, and trade. The situation worsened since 1966, with the beginning of the so-called “cultural revolution”, during which the functioning of schools was reduced to a minimum, including the teaching of the English language.

However, since 1977, with the start of a new period of reforms the attitude towards the study of a foreign language has changed [Zhuanglin 2005: 4]. If the English language was originally intended “to disseminate the ideas of the Chinese revolution”, it gradually became a means of access to the achievements of Western science and technology, information and entertainment channels. A contributing factor was the increasing flow of Russian and foreign tourists and businessmen to China [Cheng 1992: 162]. According to L.Todd and Y.Hancock, the number of people in China who spoke standard English, in 1986, was approximately 1% of the total population, which amounted to more than 1 billion [Todd & Hancock 1986: 107]. At the beginning of the twenty-first century English was studied by more than 200 million people living in mainland China [Proshina 2001]. Today, according to different sources the number of people who speak English is acknowledged to range from 250 to 300 million and is a quarter of the total 1.3 billion people population [Yang 2006: 3; see also Cui 2006; Li 2007].

Currently learning English in China is no longer a fad, but a pressing need. Knowledge of English has become a distinctive characteristic of a kind of elite: clerics, diplomats, political scientists, journalists, secret service officers [Kabakchi 2002]. English language distribution in China today has become such a massive scale that this process has often been compared to the epidemic. Almost every third person in the country is studying English in schools and universities. Ministry of education has recognized English to be a mandatory language for learning in elementary school, at college, where some courses are taught exclusively in English. Knowledge of English is required for admission to any higher education institution in China. A strong argument in favor of the English language is a supplement to the salary of up

to 72.5% [Frances 2010]. Numerous television and radio channels broadcast English-language learning programs. And it is not surprising, because English in China, as well as in the world as a whole, gives you the opportunity to participate in the activities of international organizations, provides access to international business, finance, tourism, education, information (science, sport, Internet, etc.) and entertainment (cinema, music, theatre, etc.). Integration of China into the world economy is enormous: in 2001, the country joined the WTO, each year increasing the number of joint ventures. Occupying the leading position on the world stage, China participates in the work of major international organizations as a full member or partner and observer. It is noteworthy that in one of the most influential organizations in Asia, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), English is the only official language (see more in [Kirkpatrick2010]). For comparison: in the UN Organization English, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish are recognized as official languages.

It should be noted that, despite the fact that the historical contacts of English and Chinese languages have occurred for more than 350 years, China English (as opposed to the so-called pidgin English) has been regarded as an emerging regional variety of English only since the early 1980 's. Therefore, little work has been done so far on the description of this specific interlanguage system. In linguistics, the study of lexical and grammatical features of China English has been performed by Z.Proshina [2001] and T.Ivankova [2007], and of phonetic features – by V.Zavyalova [2001] and M.Polyanskaya [2010].

The Chinese variety of English is a dynamic language system used by citizens of the PRC for intra-and international communication. China English is not a homogeneous entity: there are several variations depending on the region, particularly China, Hong Kong S.A.R., Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Chinese districts – Chinatowns in the US cities, etc. However, it can be said generalized that China English, while in the process of formation, is under the direct influence of the Chinese language and Chinese culture. This linguistic and cultural impact is

manifested at all levels of the China English language system, which makes it a unique variety and, therefore, requires a comprehensive study and description.

For Russia the importance of studying the peculiarities of China English is determined by the continued expansion of contacts of the two countries, which in turn is due to objective geopolitical and socio-economic factors [Minakir 1999]. China and Russia are close neighbors and important strategic partners. The Russian Far East is of special importance in the partner contacts, as, on the one hand, it is a transit area that connects China (and other Asian countries) with the European part of Russia and the European market as a whole, while on the other hand, it continues to function as the “Eastern Gate” in the Pacific Ocean, for both Russia and Europe. At the fourth Russia-China forum in Beijing (2009) a number of agreements was signed indicating a significant increase in economic cooperation between the two countries (the total amount of contracts for about 3.5 billion dollars). The main areas of cooperation include the provision of large inter-bank loans, the development of the transport system, construction projects, development of mineral deposits and others.

The rapid development of regionalism and special relationship of Russia and China’s border territories call for effective cooperation between the two countries. Surprisingly, our country's contacts with the dwellers of “the Celestial Empire” are increasingly carried out in English as a lingua franca of the globalization era. English is the working language of the international conferences and forums, international organizations and transnational corporations. As V.Kabakchi commented, “the world has entered the era of the communicative, the essence of which is the objective need for the national language plus English bilingualism” [Kabakchi 2000: 84].

As a result, the key to successful cooperation of Russia and China, for the most part, is reaching understanding in the context of lingua franca communication situations. Numerous polls of Russian citizens who largely practice English-mediated contacts with the Chinese people in a particular context (business meetings, international conferences, academic process, everyday talk, etc.), indicate that the incidents and mutual misunderstandings occur rather often. In most cases, the cause of the difficulties in communication is the specific “Chinese” sounding of English

speech: even commonly used words and phrases are often altered beyond recognition. For example, the English word *but* [bʌt], [b(ə)t], pronounced by the Chinese English speaker, sounds like *butter* ['bʌtə]; *speak* [spi:k] > as *speaker* ['spi:kə]; *of* [əv] > as *offer* ['ɒfə] or *over*['əʊvə]; *coffee* ['kɒfi] > as *copy* ['kɒfi], etc. Resegmentation caused by the differences in syllabic structure along with the phonotactic rules in the languages in contact is abundantly detected in the English speech samples produced by Chinese speakers. Resegmentation in China English exists in two forms: 1) minus-segmentation, i.e. simplification of complex English syllable structures by omitting consonant clusters or consonants that rarely occur or are totally excluded in a syllable final position in Chinese (e.g. *twelve* [.tel], *strange* [.sten]), and 2) plus-segmentation, i.e. inserting vowels between consonants (e.g. *slept* [sə .lepətə], *place* [pə.leisə]) or adding vowels after consonants (e.g. *love* [.lʌvə], *mine* [.maɪnə]). Moreover, Chinese speakers of English tend to accompany each syllable within a sentence with one of the four (or more) tones that are inherent features of this syllabic language. This phenomenon is sometimes called the “reincarnation” of Chinese tones and can be also explained by the lack of word stress in Chinese. Thus, China English prominence seems to be very similar to tone modifications. In a similar phonetic fuzziness of the right and left contexts on the background of general ethnocultural specificity of the vocabulary usage, grammatical structures and other features in the English speech of the Chinese speaker, it often becomes hard, and sometimes even impossible for the English natives as well as for the Russian English speakers to restore the correct meaning implied in the message.

On the other hand, Russian speakers of English are also likely to modify the English speech patterns at both segmental and suprasegmental levels, which is caused by the interaction of English with the sound system of the Russian language. It is quite natural for Russian speakers to replace the sounds of English that do not occur in the Russian speech community with the Russian sounds that are more or less similar in terms of their articulatory and acoustic features to the corresponding English ones. Sometimes, more than one sound of the native language can be used to substitute the English ones. Consequently, a group of three or more words may sound

alike in Russian English and perceived alike by the Russian speakers of English, for example: voiceless *th* can be replaced either by *s* or *f*, leading to such words as *thought – fought – sought / thin – fin – sin / thaw – four – saw*, etc. not contrasted productively and receptively. Russian speaker of English tends to change the word-final voiced consonants into their voiceless counterparts, thus, producing and perceiving no contrasts between such English words as *cub – cup, bad – bat, league – leak, knees – niece, buzz – bus*, etc. It is notable that given the likelihood of non-distinction between English open and close vowels (e.g. *e/æ*), short and long vowels (e.g. *i/i:*, *u/u:*), monophthongs and diphthongs (e.g. *e-æ/eə*, *ɒ-ɔ:/əʊ*), and other vocalic contrasts in the production and perception of English speech by Russian speakers, word-final consonant devoicing may add up to the formation of such homophonic chains of words as: *dead – dad – dared – debt, lick – leak – lig – league, fit – feet – fid – feed, got – goat – God, etc.* English consonant clusters are not troublesome for the Russian speakers of English (as they are for most Asians) with the exception of a few coda sequences which contain consonants that do not occur in Russian: e.g., *ninth(s) /nθ(s)/, twelfth(s) /lfθ(s)/, clothes /ðz/, springs/ŋz/*, etc. In this case Russians can resort to a number of articulatory simplification methods, including substitution of uncommon sounds into most similar analogues available in their native language (*/θ/ > /s/, /ð/ > /z/, /ŋ/ > /n/*), addition of an extra vowel sound between the consonants *clothes /ðiz/*, or omission of one or more consonants *ninth(s) /ns/, twelfth(s) /l(f)s/, clothes /ðz/*, etc. Prosodic transformations seem to be more saliently observable than substitutions of separate sounds in the Russian English speech. Russian learners often give excessive prominence to English words (for the most part – auxiliary, or function words) that English native speakers are likely to reduce considerably, for example *his, her, have, will, should, as, is, can, etc.* The findings of the research also demonstrate that the predominant acoustic feature employed by the Russian speakers of English to achieve the effect of greater prominence is longer duration of the vowel sound, which can be attributed to the quantitative stress type of the Russian phonetic system. Russian speakers of English are very likely to follow the broken (not gradually descending) scale and to ask yes/no questions with falling instead of rising

intonation, which may sound impolite to English native speakers. This tendency to change a rising contour into a falling one is generally characteristic for Russian English as a whole which makes Russian English speakers sound rude to the English-native speaker's ear.

Given the above-described accent peculiarities of Russia and China Englishes, it is obvious that there is a need to conduct further studies of English-mediated Russia-China contacts. The results can be applicable in the course of training professional interpreters, competent not only in the matters related to the culture of the Eastern Asia, but also in the high degree of variability of the English language in the Asia-Pacific region. High level of professional English training will contribute to the strengthening of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large, as well as to the maximal inclusion of the Russian Far East in regional integration processes. Moreover, the study of the characteristics of the sound system of World Englishes offers the prospect of contributing to the solution of the task of achieving mutual understanding between Russia and the peoples of East Asia, as well as to interpenetration of national cultures, in particular, Russian and Chinese.