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Engineering the Alien, or Let's Learn English

An examination of an elementary-school textbook for studying English reveals a distinctly 1960s Soviet approach to the outside world, offering students an opportunity to familiarize themselves with a foreign language while shielding them from exposure to different, consumer-oriented cultures.

A hallmark of the Thaw was the expansion of contacts with foreign countries.¹ Exchanges of scientific and cultural delegations, of publications and movies, bilateral exhibitions, mutual visits by touring companies, a variety of joint international undertakings that culminated in the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in 1957, and international tourism, which gradually took off beginning in the late 1950s—all these things indicated that a new openness had triumphed over domestic problems and that the country was now willing to display its achievements to the world and to acknowledge, in turn, the achievements of others.²

Overcoming so many years of isolation required, in particular, an increase in the number of people whose knowledge of foreign languages rendered them capable of more than just translating simple texts and answering by rote a dozen or so predictable questions. On 27 May 1961 the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution “On Improving

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Foreign Language Study” [Ob uluchshenii izucheniia inostrannykh iazykov], which called for the “opening, between 1961 and 1965, of no less than seven hundred additional public schools with instruction in foreign languages” and the “improvement of foreign language syllabuses for schools and the publication, in the course of three to four years, of new textbooks linked to those syllabuses.”³

In the eyes of parents, these types of educational institutions offered appreciable advantages, offering them an opportunity to have their children taught a foreign language free of charge. Command of a foreign language now became one of the mandatory hallmarks of a “genuinely” educated person.⁴ In certain social circles, foreign language study, along with the study of music and some form of athletics, traditionally ranked high among the leisure activities deemed beneficial for a child. But the number of foreign language instructors schooled prior to the revolution who had been giving private lessons was, for obvious reasons, shrinking, whereas parents did not trust most of the teachers educated in Soviet universities, especially since the people who taught foreign languages in schools often had no specialist training at all.

Word got out that the new type of school would place strict limits on the number of pupils in foreign language groups (a maximum of ten in elementary schools and eight in secondary schools). The idea was to raise the quality of teaching overall, restricting the total number of children per class to thirty in elementary schools and twenty-four in secondary schools. Furthermore, the administrators of the specialized language schools could expel pupils at any time for poor academic performance without violating the law on compulsory education, because the expelled child would be transferred to an educational institution close to home. Therefore in the “language schools,” where a foreign language was to be taught in all ten grades and the number of curriculum hours allotted to it would be several times greater than in an “ordinary” public school, enrollment for the first grade was implicitly competitive. The children who won were the best prepared, those with more significant cultural capital; in most cases, their parents had attended a university. The schools, which drew primarily on children from one social group, thus became a unique type of social selection that replenished the ranks of the elite, since in the USSR the relatively fluent command of a foreign language was an elite form of knowledge.

The higher quality of foreign language competence in the specialized schools (English and German mostly, more rarely French, and Spanish

hardly ever)⁵ was primarily achieved by beginning language instruction earlier, increasing the number of curriculum hours, and including a number of subjects taught in the foreign language into the syllabus for the upper grades.⁶ The teaching staffs viewed foreign language learning as their priority task—and constantly told pupils and their parents so—although in most such schools, instruction in general subjects was also reasonably solid. As a result, a high-performing pupil could attain a command of the language that foreign language teaching methodology normally termed advanced, whereas a graduate from an “ordinary” school would, depending on academic performance, end at a beginning or an intermediate level.

The higher level of foreign language mastery was, of course, achieved through the application of other means and resources. Instructors at such schools were usually good or excellent graduates of the language departments of teachers’ colleges or even native speakers.⁷ There was also a well-developed system of extracurricular work to create the linguistic environment that was lacking in Soviet life. The schools regularly held academic Olympiads and panel games on various aspects of foreign language knowledge (grammar, reading, translation, listening comprehension, writing), arranged reading and singing contests, staged plays “in the language,” had active international friendship clubs, and hosted delegations of foreign schoolchildren. Most of the visual aids in the classrooms and recreational spaces, especially those associated with the countries in which the relevant language was spoken, was in the foreign language, which gave its “indigenes” a sense of belonging inaccessible to others and created a natural barrier against the “outsiders” who wandered onto school property.

Even though few books, magazines, and newspapers originally written in English, French, or German (the foreign languages most widely studied in the USSR) ever made their way into the country, the school libraries were well stocked not only with the requisite selection of textbooks and readers but also with books for what was called “home reading”—adapted texts meant to be read independently at home with subsequent selective follow-up—and original texts of classical works to be used in history of literature studies in the upper grades.⁸ The schools also had audio materials for language lab work, which were usually methodically aligned acoustic supplements to the textbooks and whose primary intent was to ensure correct pronunciation.

This brief description of the practices adopted in schools to familiarize pupils with the language and culture of the countries where the relevant

language was spoken is strong evidence of their fragmentary nature, which resulted from an insuperable absence of a linguistic environment and a grassroots urging to interact with non-Russian speakers in a variety of everyday situations.⁹ The schools had to provide that encouragement themselves and to find artificial ways to overcome the lack of native speakers. This hindered the achievement of the language competency initially targeted in the 1961 Council of Ministers resolution, which noted that “it is essential for the new syllabuses and textbooks to overcome existing shortcomings in the command of foreign languages.” “The overwhelming majority of graduates from general secondary schools and secondary and higher educational establishments have an inadequate command of foreign languages. A negligible stock of words and a formal knowledge of grammar do not permit a person to translate a foreign text without a dictionary. Verbal foreign language skills are especially poor.”¹⁰

The decree ignored the fact that the development of “verbal foreign language skills” required the public at large to engage in international contacts at various levels that barely existed.

Another factor contributing to the fragmentary exposure to foreign cultures was the frame of reference handed down “from above.” Those who studied a foreign language in the Soviet Union were at the same time supposed to isolate themselves from “pernicious bourgeois influences” so they would not develop a tendency to “grovel before the West.” In this way, the foreign language was detached from the reality of the world in which it was spoken to keep that reality from becoming a source of temptation for Soviet people. Although—like many other frames of reference in Soviet times—this one was seldom explicitly mentioned, and rank-and-file teachers probably did not even suspect its existence, we can distinguish its traces in both the prescriptive documents of the time and, above all, in the textbooks.¹¹

Any textbook mandated for use in state schools is obviously the product of ideological engineering and has the job of developing not only subject-specific skills but also certain civic values.¹² In textbooks the state—as the monopoly exerciser of legitimized symbolic coercion—implements its policies for viewing and evaluating the world, defines the questions to be asked and the answers to be given, and determines what merits attention in the world and in oneself and what does not.¹³ Textbooks are powerful tools of socialization, if only because children do not expect them to exert any ideological pressure, even as they resist ideological pressure from elsewhere.¹⁴

Schools offering in-depth foreign language study, having been set up as a new and timely solution aimed at replenishing the ranks of white-collar workers, naturally had to equip themselves with teaching materials that would permit them to discharge the duties laid on them, including their duties to the state. Equally naturally, the already emphatically semiotic Soviet culture rendered textbooks hypersemiotic: all the elements of text and layout facilitated the achievement of several tasks, only one of which—important as it may have been—was mastery of the rules of English. In creating an image of the foreign, the textbook authors to a certain extent projected an attitude toward it, thus defining the proper image of one's own kind and the alien.¹⁵ The textbook we discuss below was the first of its kind and therefore carried an especially important load, both methodologically and ideologically.¹⁶

In methodological terms, the textbook focused on the educational challenge of providing pupils with a solid command of English at the high-intermediate level. In accordance with general trends in non-native language instruction in the 1960s, attention went to the gradual assimilation of grammar and the unhurried expansion of vocabulary.¹⁷ Over the course of a year, pupils would absorb certain basic affirmative and interrogative grammatical forms that were repeatedly combined and modified, to reinforce them in the student's mind. This approach in turn fostered a view of language as a system of grammatical constructions informed by a variety of lexical content that, together with elementary verbal skills in the foreign language, had the job of simplifying the ongoing assimilation of colloquial speech.

The textbook, pursuant to the Council of Ministers' resolution, made much of the need to build communication skills, as shown in the concluding section, "For the Teacher" [*Dlia uchitelia*]: "lexico-grammatical material has been selected for the simplest speech situations, which arise in an environment of items and phenomena that are closest to the pupil (the classroom setting, the lessons, the home setting, games, etc.)."¹⁸

At bottom, the instructions called for the reiteration of speech situations in every lesson to engage all pupils in the repetition of identical speech patterns. The particular importance of speech here is indicated by the types of assignments—"Say and do," "Ask and answer," "Sound the letters," "Read, do, and answer," and so forth. In addition, many exercises concentrated on developing reading technique aided by transcriptions and separate syntagmas showing word stress and rising and falling intonation.

Writing was taught only from the third quarter and relied primarily on the English instruction “Copy” (the mechanical reproduction of letters and words). In Soviet school practice, listening skills were allocated even less time, on the evident assumption that most of the pupils, rather than talking to native speakers of the relevant language, would only be reading and doing sight translations, which matched, overall, the actual introversion of Soviet society. Many foreign language students had little exercise in listening other than listening to answers given by fellow students in class or, in the upper grades, to songs sung by the original performers in the appropriate language, which usually occurred outside school.

The default focus on teaching speech in prestructured dialogue determined the ordering of the grammatical material. The first constructions taught were not the affirmative “It is” or “There is” but the imperative/prohibitive.¹⁹ In the first lesson, which takes up half a page, two new words—“take” and “pen”—are combined into the first sentence, “Take a pen.” The pupil is told to “Read and do.” The word is reinforced with the action, then is repeated numerous times until it is fully acquired. The last lesson (no. 60), which consists of the fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood,” ends in an energetic succession of questions: “What is the little girl’s name? Where does she go one day? What does the wolf say? Where does the wolf run? What does the wolf do in the grandmother’s house? Who comes in and kills the wolf?”²⁰ The book focuses on teaching speech predominantly about actions, which explains why it is dominated by the question-and-answer form in both dialogues and descriptions.

The language student is characterized as a person of action, devoid of passive introspection and disinclined to differential evaluation.²¹ But, while constantly speaking about and performing actions, the pupil is by design simultaneously doomed to subordinate his or her every step to an unseen overseer. The student must be prepared to reply endlessly to unexpected questions that either follow inevitably on the description of a courtyard, a classroom, or a room or are incorporated into the text itself. The questioner is only verbally designated: he or she is someone who crosschecks every word of a story, who intrudes unceremoniously into the narrative, and whose questions must be answered.

The textbook’s focus on organizing the text in dialogue form and reproducing speech situations leaves one with the impression that the teaching must emphasize communication skills. But communication here is specifically a quasi-interaction, in which partners with an equal command of the language either exchange preset phrases or take turns

explaining themselves to their opposite number, who is authorized to ask a question but never to answer. Such an approach is, as a matter of principle, characteristic of various language teaching methods, since it helps remove the psychological barrier to communication and render speech as automatic as it needs to be. It belongs, furthermore, to the kind of adaptation that is conditioned on the student's insufficient command of the foreign language. In this case, though, the adaptation was not only linguistic but also cultural, especially given the significance that a first textbook should have in shaping a child's image of a native speaker of that language.

The nature of that adaptation was, without a doubt, determined by the frames of reference imposed by the Soviet system on formal education. While experiencing a sense of familiarity with foreigners during his classes, the schoolchild was simultaneously deprived of the opportunity to observe life in the foreign country, if only through photographs or movies or by hearing the living speech of native speakers. It was important to curtail the distance between the Soviet daily routine in which the schoolchild existed and the lifestyle in, say, Great Britain, but it was at the same time necessary to allude somehow to the difference between them, thus supporting an interest in and empathy for foreigners and the foreign. It was, that is, necessary to establish in the student an accurate attitude toward the outside world, to teach him through the assimilation of a second language to toe the line between "groveling" and disdain.

Any school textbook is a well-ordered and creolized text in which the verbal and the visual are inseparable, especially in the perceptions of a younger schoolchild. The former pupils whom we queried who had learned English from the textbook in question remembered none of the actual texts, except perhaps for a few individual lines of verse. That is natural, since it was the repeatedly spoken, read, and written English words that underpinned their knowledge of the language. But they briskly conveyed their general perceptions of the book: "It had brown pictures," "The children in it weren't dressed like us," and "It was a textbook with pictures where children sat one to a desk." That is, they primarily remembered the textbook as a record of a different life.

From today's vantage point, viewed at a significant chronological remove, the textbook leaves an integrated impression. It was primarily a foreign language textbook, as evidenced by the cover notation *English: Book 1*. At the same time, the introductory information in the first few pages is written entirely in Russian and contains many references

to Soviet real life²² and technical peculiarities.²³ The academic texts, including the assignments, are written exclusively in English from the beginning. Russian reappears at the end, in the supplementary notes and in the explanations “For the Teacher.” The book culminates in a table of contents, all in English except for “The Sounds of the English Alphabet” and “For the Teacher,” which are in Russian.

The Russian text is evidently intended less for the teacher (whose knowledge of the language would be sufficient to understand an uncomplicated methodological text) than for the parents, to provide them in a roundabout way with an explanation of the instructional methods. The seemingly slow study tempo, based on numerous repetitions of the material, and the small number of written assignments, neither of which was typical of foreign language learning in an ordinary school, required some prior justification. The assumption was that the parents would be involved in the teaching process—as indicated, for example, by the concluding proposition in “For the Teacher”: “All the verses and dialogues to be memorized should be tape-recorded, to give pupils an opportunity to use those recordings in preparing the lessons.”²⁴ Considering that this was in the mid-1960s, when tape recorders were expensive, a fairly uncommon sight in Soviet homes, and objects hardly ever placed at the disposal of eight-year-old children, they would clearly be able to “use those recordings” only if their parents were involved. Finally, the composition of the textbook—which produced the initial impression of a hermetically sealed package, lacking explanations and requiring an overseer to explain the meaning behind the assignments and check that they had been performed correctly—also assumed the involvement of an adult capable of locating the lesson notes and reading them, so as then to be able to help. A child is unlikely to have been able to understand the traditions of self-study adopted in the notes, where grammatical rules are displayed as gnomes and parachutists, without clarification. Nevertheless they follow the main lesson text as supplements to be worked through more by the parents than by the children, who were taught not through the memorization and articulation of rules but through the memorization and recitation of set constructions (in an approximation of the “natural” assimilation of a language).

While the parents existed in a bilingual world based on their native language, pupils had from the outset to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the alien language. Not coincidentally, even new words and expressions were introduced without translation, immediately after

the “reading” passages, just like words and expressions to be mastered by rote that filled the bushel basket, as it were, and served as gauges of teacher “performance” by providing an opportunity to track how well the class was keeping up with the syllabus schedule. Pupils, though, had to contend only with a growing textual corpus that they were able to read, from which they gained a proper sense of pride. Thus both pupil and parents could not only monitor the assimilation of the syllabus but also see for themselves the anticipated net results of that assimilation.

The Latin alphabet for children framed by the Cyrillic alphabet for adults reflected the specific way in which an image of the foreign (state structure, lifestyle) was created in Soviet society of the 1960s. Quintessential in the image of the alien as modeled in the textbook was that it was different but still comprehensible to the Soviet schoolchild. The Sovietized (meaning, in the context of the 1960s, the domesticated) *alien* thus lost the attraction of mystery, inexplicability, and obvious cultural distinction.²⁵

Domestication was achieved through a significative lack of “documentary” attestations to the other culture (except, of course, for the language).²⁶ First and foremost, there were no images of characters that could, in one way or another, be perceived as English and no photographs of life in the alien world. In the mid-1960s Winnie the Pooh and Mary Poppins were still nonexistent [in Russia—Ed.], Alice and Little Lord Fauntleroy were as yet unknown to a wider readership, and the characters of *The Mother Goose Rhymes*, famous from the translations of Kornei Chukovskii and Samuil Marshak, were not recognized as English but were instead perceived as belonging to Russian children’s literature.

Especially in the age before television and after many years of Soviet isolationism, there were also no stable visual signatures of English culture, such as Big Ben or the Tower of London. The absence of photographs or drawings of English/American/Australian reality in the textbook probably had less to do with typographical limitations than with an effort to create a specific visual image of the English-speaking world.²⁷ In principle, it was easy to rescue a child from the “pernicious influence of consumer society” if illustrations were well selected. But in our view, the reluctance to draw children’s attention to real life in a foreign land was more basic: certain elements of that life might seem attractive in their deviation from the familiar. This reluctance explains why the textbook contains no exotica such as double-decker buses, the uniquely shaped

red telephone kiosks or post boxes, guardsmen in bearskins, skyscrapers, koalas, or similar items.

The textbook focuses on recreating the everyday life of people of an undetermined nationality. The characters populating it live in a world of routine with neither past nor future—in part because those grammatical tenses were not studied in the second grade, although they were, on occasion and without explanation, introduced in the speech constructions of poems and songs. The textbook's characters study in school, go to the cinema, play outside, read books, and eat. Their humdrum life, we reiterate, eliminates the exotic and accommodates neither porridge nor ham and eggs nor fish and chips. The textbook's two central themes—family and daily routine—appear here only to underscore similarities in the way of life. The simplest speech situations (a request to give, a request to take, an inquiry made as to the owner of an item, a general question asked) are also, by and large, universal for people living in various countries of a similar culture. This gave the pupil a sense of affinity to those whose language he was studying, a sense that it was possible to fully interact with them.

In addition to the texts, the pictures make it possible to compare Soviet life with that lived abroad. There is visual reinforcement of the idea of a similar lifestyle, a similar way of life with a light veneer of otherness [*inakovost'*]. People who speak an entirely different language are the same, although not completely the same, as Soviet children studying that language. But how are they different?

First, in their names. The characters are called Tom, Nick, Kate, Ann, and Jane—unfamiliar words all, which have to be memorized. There is also Willie, especially difficult to pronounce, the leading light of a poem that the textbook wants the student to “learn by heart” and then recite while pronouncing the “w” correctly. Second, the textbook's child characters differ a bit in their appearance. The schoolchildren wear uniforms that would have looked odd to Soviet pupils: the boys in short pants, knee socks, and a pullover; the girls in a Soviet-style school pinafore over a blouse and skirt. The little children wear rompers and play with strange, thin-legged dolls. The house windows lock differently, with a lever instead of a sliding bolt. That is the full extent of the specific visual and verbal peculiarities.

But we find nothing specifically Soviet in this textbook either, with the sole exception of the mandatory worker in the dialogue “An English Worker Speaks to Mike Belov.” The protagonist with the Anglo-Russian

name of Mike Belov, whose father's name is Pavel Ivanovich Belov, talks with Henry Brown, an unhurried and orderly English worker who—on learning that Mike speaks English, is nine years old, goes to school, and lives on Lenin Street in Moscow, that his mother is a housewife, that he has a sister and is a worker's son (which prompts the gratified exclamation, "Oh, I am a worker, too")—invites the boy to come and see him in London.

In this case, London is a metonym for Great Britain, while the reference to Moscow, Lenin Street, and the worker is metonymous for the USSR. The dialogue presented in the textbook was absolutely impossible in real life, but it was symbolic of the second grader's success in learning English while simultaneously defining (once and for all) the prospect of being able to speak fluently with foreigners and tell them about himself and his country.

The overwhelming majority of texts and illustrations are a blend of the unusual and the familiar. The pupils in the pictures sit at one-person desks. But on a neighboring page is a normal, black, two-person Soviet desk with its hinged lid and opening for a non-spill inkwell. A breakfast table with neatly conventional table settings is set alongside a cut-glass beaker, there to demonstrate the meaning of the word "glass." Along a street where large signs reading "café," "circus," and "school" emphasize that the scene is set abroad walk characters whose appearance symbolically reinforces their social role. There is a father, an engineer, wearing a jacket and carrying a roll of drawing paper; a mother dressed like a middle-class fashion plate; a child in a romper; schoolchildren in non-Soviet uniforms; and a trio of workers, one in overalls, one in work shirt and pants, and one in a trade-school uniform.

There was no other way of representing Western reality. The alien world is denoted emblematically (signs in the Latin alphabet, the non-Soviet school uniform). It is populated by decidedly courteous people who speak in complete if short sentences. The deliberately simplified speech, the homogeneity of the words and grammatical constructions (natural for the early stage in the study of a foreign language) conveyed to Soviet schoolchildren the image of foreigners as people who conduct themselves in life as they would in the classroom and whose conversation always deals, interminably and in great detail, with the same things: "Where is my pen?" "On the desk." "Where is my briefcase?" "On the chair," and so on. The exercises also teem with faceless characters who endlessly wash their hands, brush their teeth, do their lessons, help their friends, and

want to know if everyone is learning English, speaks it or reads it—who are, that is, the kind of odd birds found only in textbooks.

The book's main characters are the large-headed, big-eyed, and poufy-haired children of Soviet fashion magazines from the early 1960s. Schoolchildren were undoubtedly acquainted with that image, as they were with that of the ideally pretty teacher in a white blouse or the composite intellectual grandpa with spectacles, a bushy beard, and a cane. The way they are posed expresses their emphatic readiness to follow the commands given to them in English—to take and give books in general; my, his, her, or their books; pens, pencils, balls, and boxes. These imaginary children with no nationality live, in the textbook's world, in rooms that are theirs and only theirs but whose décor is entirely Soviet and whose bookshelves hold both English and Russian books. These children are served breakfast on napkins at special little tables. The textbook's characters, in general, live in an imagined world that yields no proof of its reality, for all that its details are so thoroughly described.

Other visual means are also brought to bear in creating a sense of diversity (but not of multiculturality). The textbook title on the cover is in English (*English: Book 1*), just like the sign on the building depicted in the cover art (*School*).²⁸ The color illustrations are atypical of Soviet textbooks—not gaily colored, as in certain elementary-school textbooks, and not black-and-white either, but brown-black-and-white, green-black-and-white, orange-black-and-white, and blue-black-and-white. The meticulous draftsmanship of the drawings, with their clean contour lines and the color fill of individual details (in black, orange, brown, and green), created the sense of a particularly clean, tidy world, while the unusual splashes of color imparted to that world the requisite dissimilarity with the Soviet humdrum. Finally, the script, too, contributed to the sense of otherness: in Russian penmanship classes, the schoolchildren of the time learned to write with a rightward slant whereas this English language textbook gives a handwriting example with no slant.

All this, taken together created a unique image—one, naturally, unexamined by the pupils but even more stable for that very reason—of Abroad as a place where people with different names, whose daily life differs slightly from our own, live a life very similar to ours: they get up at eight in the morning, wash their hands and face, brush their teeth, breakfast on buttered bread and milk, go to school, and so forth. Their life is as routine as that of their Soviet age mates and has little specific about it. This lessens the distance between the imagined English-speaking

country and the USSR and strips it, in the pupil's eyes, of the attraction of unfamiliar and unattainable alienness. The alien world differs only in language, which the pupil is successfully assimilating, and in certain negligible details. It is, of course, singularly orderly, but the orderliness is that of a world composed from pictures in fashionable (pattern-setting, that is) Soviet magazines, whose conspicuous conformity—which is recognized because of the obvious reductionism of the depicted world—anticipates, as a matter of principle, no imitation.

The specific selection and structuring of the Western world, as presented by this textbook and prescriptive of the attitude toward it, are for the most part characteristic of the Thaw. The potential for rapprochement and interaction with the Western world was limited, first, by the small number of schoolchildren selected to undergo this special foreign language study and, second, by the need to find a balance between extending opportunities to those who had “permission” to get to know that world and simultaneously administering an antidote to counter the allure of “consumer society.” A language may be studied for its own sake, for the opportunity to understand unknown letters and the unknown words formed from them. A language may be studied to understand an alien culture, to strike up an acquaintance with a little-known people. Or a language may be studied in order to use that language in the future. The textbook we have been analyzing here set the third—pragmatic—goal through the parameters of quasi-interaction but mostly left it to be explored outside the classroom and even partially outside the school, while the two other goals—those of deciphering and self-interjecting into the alien world—were achieved directly in the text. Even as Soviet schoolchildren were ushered, in a skillful and methodologically well-calibrated manner, into the world of the alien language, they were also shielded from the reality of the alien culture by an emphasis on its similarity to Soviet daily life and the specific visual means used to convey its diversity.

This textbook became for its readers a unique window onto an alien world, but like the famous fireplace in the cubbyhole under the stairs where Papa Carlo lived,* that window was only a painting. The world of Abroad as filtered by the textbook's creators was invoked to engineer the image of the alien. But these were aliens seen through Soviet eyes, comprehensible on the whole and, despite their peculiarities (the most

*Papa Carlo is the Geppetto-equivalent character in Aleksei Tolstoi's Pinocchio-like *Burattino*.—Trans.

obvious of which was that those line-drawn people for some reason spoke in an unintelligible language), similar to the people the student knew best. Foreignness thereby lost its enticing mystique, while knowledge of a language automatically transformed one into a foreigner even as the foreigners themselves drew ever closer to the image of the ideal Soviet person seen in book illustrations, whose life no one could imagine living.

On the one hand, that other world—tidy and clean, imaginary and without any specific national affiliation—expressed a dream of unification with those Abroad. On the other hand, the study of language under such circumstances no longer aimed at comprehension of the alien culture. It became instead a kind of grammatical brain teaser with no practical results other than a scarcely plausible interaction with an English worker from an amorphous London that was as imaginary as the fairy-tale Emerald City or City of the Sun. This adaptation of the alien ultimately stripped other nations of their specificity. We would argue that the Thaw-era Soviet school's ideological task was precisely this: to supply a tool for knowing the West while eliciting no interest in the West as a cultural phenomenon.

No one at the time could have supposed that the Iron Curtain, here lifted just a crack, would later rise to the point where pupils realized that the painting merely concealed the entrance to another reality, and the foreign language, learned under parental pressure or from a desire to stand out among peers or to solve a series of grammatical brain teasers, would become a real means of experiencing the gradual revelation that was the mysterious and therefore alluringly alien Western world. Yesterday's *special-school* pupils will tell you, with every justification, that once upon a time, those educational institutions *taught them to love ... the forbidden fruits of the Western world.*²⁹

Notes

1. This project was based on an English language textbook for the second grade [equivalent to the third grade in a U.S. elementary school—Trans.] of schools offering in-depth subject instruction in a foreign language (Iu.B. Borisov, S.A. Berlin, and T.F. Semerova, *Uchebnik angliiskogo iazyka dlia II klassa shkol s prepodavaniiem riada predmetov na inostrannom iazyke. Pervyi god obucheniia*, 3d ed. (Moscow, 1966).

2. For this, see L. Anninskii, *Shestidesiatniki i my* (Moscow, 1991); P. Vail' and A. Genis, *Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow, 1996); and S. Chuprinin, "Ottepel': Vremia bol'shikh ozhidani," in *Ottepel', 1953–1956: Stranitsy russkoi sovetskoi literatury* (Moscow, 1989).

3. "Postanovlenie Soveta ministrov ot 25 maia 1961 goda 'Ob uluchshenii izucheniia inostrannykh iazykov,'" *Sobranie postanovlenii pravitel'stva Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, 1961, no 9, pp. 73–74 [henceforth "PSM 5/25/61"].

4. Descriptions of a person with a *genuine* (often prerevolutionary) education invariably included the number of foreign languages he or she spoke. We find echoes of the status that attached to knowledge of a foreign language in works of fiction (see, for example, Viktor Dragunskii's *Pavlia the Englishman* [Anglichanin Pavlia] or Vasilii Aksenov's *Star Ticket* [Zvezdnyi bilet]).

5. A USSR Council of Ministers resolution dated 3 October 1947 "On Improving Foreign Language Study" [Ob uluchshenii izucheniia inostrannykh iazykov] defined the desirable balance of languages to be studied as English 45 percent, German 25 percent, French 20 percent, and Spanish 10 percent.

6. Most often the course was "Technical Translation" [Tekhnicheskii perevod] or a brief history of literature in the appropriate language. Less often it taught the history and geography of the country whose official language was being studied.

7. So, for instance, many English and French instructors in the 1960s and the 1970s were *shankhaity*, émigrés returning from China who had learned English and French in English and French schools and had graduated from universities where they had been taught in the corresponding languages. After returning to the USSR in the late 1940s, the repatriates, given the general shortage of competent language teachers, found teaching jobs wherever they could and gave private language lessons as well. In the 1960s they were extensively recruited into the newly constituted language schools. The presence of *shankhaity* and other native or near-native speakers on the teaching staff substantially boosted a school's prestige in the eyes of parents.

8. Students of German had an easier time of it, since the German Democratic Republic was in the socialist camp and original German-language books, newspapers, and magazines were regularly available for purchase in the specialized Druzhba stores. Students of French and English had, at best, to be satisfied with *The Morning Star* or *L'Humanité*, the newspapers published by the respective national communist parties, or the appropriate foreign-language edition of the newspaper *Moskovskie novosti*, published in the USSR.

9. People who studied foreign languages in a specialized school usually recall, with a modicum of irony, that one of the principal motivations offered by their teachers was "You will be able to read Shakespeare (Goethe, Corneille, etc.) in the original."

10. "PSM 5/25/61," pp. 198–202.

11. A textbook is particularly amenable to analysis "since its linguistic field is limited and the construction stripped bare, which results in a thoroughly avant garde 'baring of the device'" (E. Dobrenko, *Politekonomiia sotsrealizma* [Moscow, 2007], p. 446).

12. On this, see, for example, M.Iu. Timofeev, "Kanaly natsionalizatsii," in Timofeev, *Natsiosfera* (Ivanovo, 2005); and M. [Marc] Ferro, *Kak rasskazyvaiut istoriiu detiam v raznykh stranakh mira* (Moscow, 1992).

13. On this, see P. Burd'e [Pierre Bourdieu], "Sotsial'noe prostranstvo i genezis klassov," in his *Sotsiologiia politiki* (Moscow, 1993).

14. While recognizing the ideological agenda pursued by the textbooks, we must also acknowledge that we ourselves have been mediated by textbooks, so that our

analysis inevitably suffers from subjectivity, from the promotion of one thing and the suppression of another, and from limited interpretive methods.

15. As “authors” we categorize not only those who were directly involved in developing the exercise texts but also the graphic artists, editors, and censors, each of whom contributed in his or her own way to the creation of the book as a whole.

16. In this case, the system of legitimized doublethink that typified how Soviet institutions worked revealed itself in the textbook’s designation as an educational aid “for the second grade of schools offering in-depth subject instruction in foreign languages,” whereas in reality English language classes began in the first grade but were there conducted by teachers working directly with their pupils without benefit of a textbook.

17. On the development of foreign language teaching methodology in the USSR, see A.A. Mirolubov, *Istoriia otechestvennoi metodiki obucheniia inostrannomu iazyku* (Moscow, 2002).

18. Borisov, Berlin, and Semerova, *Uchebnik angliiskogo iazyka*, p. 193.

19. Yet the imperative mood—although characteristic of the Soviet school and, when softened by formulas of courtesy, for everyday interaction in Russian—is not typical of “courteous” colloquial English. This, again, obliquely indicates a focus on the “domestic consumption” of the foreign language being studied.

20. We resist the temptation to muse on the opening and closing of this academic text, which begins with “Take the pen” and ends with “Who came and killed the wolf?” This textbook, by and large, does not ask to be perceived as a model of interrogative discourse.

21. In one year’s time, pupils should absorb forty-nine words and expressions in the first quarter, fifty-five in the second, ninety-five in the third, and seventy-two in the fourth. Of the 271 lexical units recommended for spelling quizzes (meaning that they were to be learned with special care), 15 are adjectives—black, brown, English, good, big, large, red, Russian, small, little, toy, white, green, and funny. Adjectives in the form of possessive pronouns supplement these. There are forty-four verbs—to come, to take, to go, to put, to show, to sit (in the imperative), to touch, to clean, to count, to do, to teach (lessons), to dress, to stroll, to lie down (in bed), to get up, to jump, to play, to read, to run, to sleep, to speak, to write, to buy, to be able to, to help, to play hide and seek, to kill, to please, to live, to talk, to see, to study, to wash, to observe (to follow), and to work. [Note that all the terms above have been retranslated from Russian and thus may not correspond exactly to the textbook. The lists here include fourteen adjectives and thirty-five verbs, not the full count given by Litovskaia.—Trans.]

22. Such as the crediting of the RSFSR Council of Ministers Committee on the Press and its A.A. Zhdanov first model publishing facility on Leninskii Prospekt in Kalinin.

23. The textbook’s price was presented as a kind of arithmetic puzzle: “Price without cover, 16 kopecks. Cover, 8 kopecks” (even though only the publishing-house employees, it seems, ever saw the textbook without a cover).

24. Borisov, Berlin, and Semerova, *Uchebnik angliiskogo iazyka*, p. 194.

25. The validity of this assertion is confirmed by the typological similarity among various Soviet foreign language textbooks.

26. The textbook’s only minixamples of unfiltered, so to speak, documentary English culture were the poems that accompanied almost every lesson. They were

designed to be memorized and are examples of living speech, with its irregularities and complexities (inversions, speech segmentation, idiomatic expressions). The illustrations to the poems also contain a few tokens of “dear old England” (depictions of bridges, half-timbered facades, and the like).

27. The choice of the country where the relevant language was spoken was largely arbitrary. English-language schools usually picked Great Britain, which must have had little to do with the distinct nature of American English but rather bespoke a reluctance to fix the pupil’s attention on the “bulwark of imperialism,” perceived as in competition with the USSR. There was a similar separation in German-language schools, where the German Democratic Republic had a manifest advantage over the Federal Republic of Germany.

28. Below the sign, though, are two children dressed warmly in the Russian style, the boy wearing a hat with earflaps and the girl in a winter coat with a fur collar.

29. From “Goodbye America” [“Gud bai, Amerika,” also known as “The Last Letter” (Poslednee pis’mo)—Trans.], a poem written by Il’ia Kormil’tsev, a graduate of a school in which several subjects were taught in English.

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