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# THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN SOCIETY : AN OVERVIEW

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**ABSTRACT:** "The French language is like a woman, beautiful, proud, modest and unassuming, daring, voluptuous, chaste, noble and so dear, whom you love with all your soul, whom you will never leave.  
- Anatole France, *Nobel Prize laureates*.

It is difficult not to agree with the author of this statement. The French language is really beautiful. It is filled with colors, feelings, and beauty. It is not for nothing that Russian poets and writers used it in their masterpieces. If you divide into the depth of all these lines, it becomes clear that the French language has always been an integral part of Russian society.

**KEYWORDS-** French, Eighteenth, Russian, Influence, Society, Language

## I.INTRODUCTION

From the first third of the eighteenth century in the highest circles of Russia began a widespread fascination with France. Everything French, art, literature, fashion, and etiquette, was considered the standard of refinement and elegance. All noble children began to be taught a fragrant foreign language, and so zealously that many of them, having grown up, spoke and wrote French better than Russian.[1]

It all began in the golden age of the Russian nobility, which coincided with the blossoming of France, which then played a huge role in the life of Europe, and therefore the whole world. The political and cultural influence of France became so great that the elites of all countries had to learn to understand the language of Voltaire and Moliere. Of course, The Russian nobility could not stay aside. By the beginning of the 19th century, most of the books in the libraries of the Russian nobility were French.

Of course, at that time French began to actively enter not only the everyday life of people but also their language. If we look closely at the Russian language now, you can see that a lot of words related to clothing came from French, and for luxury goods, the share of French words is even more than three-quarters. These are the consequences of the Russian aristocracy's fascination with the French language.

The whole Russian culture of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bore a pronounced imitation of the French, thanks to which, from the second half of the eighteenth century, the French influence was manifested in virtually all spheres of life of high society, including its life, thoughts and tastes. France in this period was the center of enlightenment, cultural, literary life, a trendsetter and ruler of thoughts of all Europe.

As we can see, the choice of the French language is not accidental, because in this period it was not only the most lexically rich and stylistically developed language of Europe. Flexible, elegant, and diverse, French became the language of interethnic and secular communication in the noble societies of Europe. In Russia, the French language not only acquired the status of the language of noble salons but also used for intra-family, everyday communication in aristocratic circles.

The predominance of the French language meant in turn the predominance of French culture. French fashions and French wines were imported, French cooks were hired and French ways and manners were adopted.[2]

Russia may have been the last country in the eighteenth century to yield to French culture and language. The direct influence of the French language began during the reign of Peter the Great. The influence grew in importance during the reign of Elizabeth, when French language and culture were introduced at court.

When the Dutchman Huyssens was put in charge of the Tsar-evich's education in 1702, it was based on French. In turn, the teaching of French to the children of the aristocracy was introduced. Young daughters of the aristocracy, such as the little princess Kourakine, were taught French. Russian students were sent to Amsterdam to study French.

When Elizabeth acceded to the Russian throne in 1741, the German influence at court was suspended by a French influence. The culture of the court became French. French social manners and ways began to infiltrate the life of the court.

## II. DISCUSSION

In schools, emphasis was laid upon the learning of French. At the officer cadet school, which had been founded during the reign of Anna in 1731, military exercises were performed once a week, the rest of the time was spent learning music, dancing and languages. The programme in the elementary classes consisted of twice as many hours teaching French as teaching Russians or dance.

By the time Catherine the Great had become empress the prestige and attraction of French was so strongly felt that most aspects of French culture were perceived as desirable and necessary. For example, French cooks had introduced French cuisine in Saint Petersburg and Moscow.

This infatuation with French cuisine was recorded by English Travellers. In his journey to Russia in the 1780s the British Traveller William Coxe noted that the Russians, while still enjoying their cooking, had "adopted the delicacies of French cookeries". [3]

French fashion was also adopted by both men and women at court and in good society. In 1769 the journal *трюмень* (Trumen) mentioned the arrival of two ships carrying fashionable goods of all kinds from France.

For many Russian aristocrats French was their first language. It is surprising, therefore, that this dominant language infiltrated the native tongue. When they spoke Russians, French words crept into their language. According to Poroshin, "many Russian weave so many French words into their language that they sound like French people talking, using some Russian words." Moreover, the French language exerted its influence upon the Russian literary language in enduring and profound ways. The reasons for this influence lay in the state of the Russian literary language, the cultural situation at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Russia and the dominance of the French language and culture throughout Europe.

The French language exerted a powerful influence upon literary Russian in the eighteenth century. As it came to dominate the courts of Elizabeth and Catherine II, French became the language of the Russian aristocracy and the educated Russian classes, as was the case also in many other European countries. In the reign of Elizabeth and the reign of Catherine II ties with France were strong right up until the events leading to the French Revolution. These ties fostered the cultural Europeanisation of Russia and more specifically the development of the Russian literary language. Moreover, as Anthony Cross rightly stated: "The French language and French culture dominated upper class society well into the nineteenth century, surviving with ease periods when Russo-French political relations were at a low ebb, especially during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic invasion".

### Results

This influence could make itself felt at early stage in the lives of individuals. The children of the aristocracy were educated by French or francophone Swiss tutors, and in the 1760s the study of the French language was made compulsory in the state educational establishments. Thus, at an early age educated Russians spoke and read French, learnt the French classics by heart and acquired the ability to write in French fluently. [4]

The habit of speaking, reading and thinking in French inevitably had its effects on the aristocratic idiolect. Gallicisms of all kinds - new meaning added to Russian words, turns of phrases, expressions, metaphors, syntactic calques - penetrated the spoken and written Russian of the aristocracy and educated society, while the pronunciation of the original French word was faithfully reproduced in the loan-words. As Ogienko asserted "французское произношение слов стало обычным. Употребляли не только одни слова, но и их русские буквальные переводы". "



In the seventeenth century in France the aspiring bourgeois gentilhomme (intellect bourgeois) of Molière's comedy takes lessons in diction because of his desire to enter the world of the aristocracy. Similarly, in the eighteenth century in Russia a knowledge of French was the touchstone of a good education and was obligatory for anyone with social ambitions. For instance, having been cut socially by a young aristocrat for being unable to speak French, Fonvizin received a painful lesson in the necessity of acquiring a good knowledge of French at the earliest opportunity, if one aspired to rise in Russian society.

From the 1740s onwards French language and culture were taken over wholesale by the Russian aristocracy. Many of the hyperboles, periphrases and metaphors found in the language of French poetry and literary prose of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were introduced into the colloquial and literary Russian of the aristocracy and educated classes through the reading and learning of French classics, a task which was imposed upon young Russians by their tutors. Moreover, the enormous number of the translations from the French had powerful cultural and linguistic influence on Russian. These translations were eagerly read and the ideas they purveyed absorbed. In this way they served as a major vehicle for the introduction of a rich variety of linguistic and stylistic borrowings.

The imitation of French cultural habits led young Russian aristocracy to ape the manners, dress, language and even the pronunciation of the French fops and coquettes slavishly. This gallomania was successfully satirised by writers such as Sumarokov, Lukin and Fonvizin. Nevertheless, the language of the fop and the coquette, which was one of the hyperboles, periphrases and metaphors, exerted a strong and continuous influence on the Russian literary language. Moreover, the desire to create a new literary language to rival the West European languages led to even more borrowings from French, despite persistent protest from such devotees of the Church Slavonic tradition as Shishkov.

The overwhelming influence of the French language upon Russian in the eighteenth century can be easily demonstrated in the works of Russian authors, whose writing abounded in borrowing from the French. Words previously used in a concrete sense only were endowed with an abstract sense, a development which enriched the lexis with new meanings. Expressions and metaphors depicting feelings or psychological states: physical traits portraying emotions, qualities or defects: phrases describing the inner life of man, others referring to social or worldly habits and customs: polite forms of address, hyperboles, lyrical periphrases, fixed phrases and expressions, as well as conversational phrases and loan-words, all began to appear in their writings in their appropriate contexts.

### III. CONCLUSION

The French language affected not merely the fashionable but ephemeral language of the Russian educated classes in the eighteenth century. A new, more sophisticated and diverse Russian literary language was being formed, which was largely a result of the influence of French. [5]

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