

Research Article

Multilingual Strategies in Sorokin's *Manaraga* and Pelevin's *Watchman*

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received Mar 30, 2026 Revised May 04, 2026 Accepted May 06, 2026	This article examines multilingualism in the prose of Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Pelevin through an integrated translanguaging and sociolinguistic framework. Despite extensive scholarship on both authors' postmodern and neomodernist aesthetics, the role of multilingual practices in their narrative structures remained underexplored. The study addresses this gap by analyzing how code-switching, borrowing, neologism, and resemanticization function across their texts as systematic rather than ornamental devices. Drawing on close reading and corpus-based selection of multilingual elements, the analysis identifies three main dimensions of literary multilingualism: discursive power, identity negotiation, and cultural translation. These dimensions reveal how linguistic hierarchies encode ideological asymmetries, how characters and narrative voices construct shifting subjectivities in contexts of globalization and post-Soviet transformation, and how meaning is transformed through cross-linguistic circulation. The comparative analysis shows that Sorokin's multilingualism foregrounds cultural commodification and the marketization of language, while Pelevin's linguistic hybridity emphasizes ontological instability and the simulation of meaning systems. In both cases, multilingual practices destabilize monolingual norms and function as structural principles shaping dystopian imaginaries, cultural critique, and representations of the world. The article argues that multilingualism in these works is not a stylistic feature but a central mechanism through which power, ideology, and meaning are produced and contested in contemporary Russian literature.
Keywords	
Translingualism	
Code-Switching	
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Hybridity	



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1. Introduction

The study of multilingualism in literature occupies a productive intersection between linguistics and literary studies, constituting a distinctly interdisciplinary field that engages with both formal textual analysis and sociolinguistic theory. Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on multilingualism and code-switching as integral rather than peripheral features of literary discourse, examining their functions in fiction alongside their relationship to spoken code-switching and other forms of written multilingualism.

Within this framework, literary multilingualism is understood not merely as a stylistic device but as a semiotic resource through which relationships between languages at the levels of individual perception, social structure, and textual mediation are constructed and negotiated. It thus enables the analysis of cultural representation, character construction, stylistic language choice, modes of multilingual presentation, and the sociolinguistic dynamics of language contact (Delabastita & Grutman, 2005; Kellman & Lvovich, 2022; Buschfeld et al., 2023).

At the same time, contemporary developments in poetry and prose challenge essentialist notions of culture and identity, foregrounding both material and symbolic hybridity and advancing transcultural frameworks for understanding identity formation (Nordin et al., 2013; Taylor-Batty, 2013; Wiegandt, 2020). Research on translingual literature has demonstrated its wide distribution across genres and narrative modes, highlighting its capacity to destabilize linguistic boundaries and reconfigure literary expression (Lvovich, 1997; Preece & Rees, 2021; Williams, 2020). Building on these insights, the present study examines how Russian authors mobilize code-switching, borrowing, and other forms of linguistic insertion as structured literary strategies rather than incidental features. These practices perform multiple functions: they index and negotiate characters' identities, generate stylistic differentiation, and produce polyphonic narrative textures (cf. Hansen, 2018; Kellman, 2019). Particular attention is given to the role of foreign-language elements in constructing fictional worlds and representing non-ordinary or destabilized realities. In this context, borrowings frequently interact with neologisms and invented forms, creating a dynamic tension between referential realism and imaginative projection. Such layering allows authors to parody, critique, and extend the sociocultural and linguistic conditions they depict (cf. Ljunggren, 2018; Maguire & McAteer, 2024).

The novels selected for analysis exemplify distinct yet complementary configurations of translingual practice in twenty-first-century Russian prose. In the speculative dystopias of Sorokin and Pelevin, translingualism operates not as decorative multilingualism but as a constitutive narrative principle. By embedding multilingual elements into the structural fabric of their texts, these authors transform translingualism into a dystopian method: readers encounter semiotic environments in which linguistic codes circulate more rapidly than stable meanings, and authority manifests as performative display. Intra-linguistic variation within Russian functions to calibrate social evaluation, while cross-linguistic insertions map global asymmetries; together, these processes generate a semiotic economy in which cultural memory

is commodified (in Sorokin) and spiritual discourse assumes the logic of liquidity (in Pelevin). This poetics of managed unintelligibility renders the politics of language materially perceptible and offers an analytic framework applicable to post-Soviet literature more broadly. In this sense, translingual devices not only index identity and language contact but also model the ways in which power, markets, and myth reconfigure cultural value, positioning these texts simultaneously as objects of literary analysis and as pedagogical resources for developing critical multiliteracies attuned to contemporary multilingual communication.

2. Literature review

The prose of Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Pelevin has been the subject of sustained comparative analysis, with scholars situating their works within a liminal zone between postmodernism and neomodernism. Rather than treating these categories as fixed, recent scholarship conceptualizes them as overlapping interpretive frameworks that foreground instability, reflexivity, and epistemological uncertainty. Within this paradigm, critics consistently highlight shared features such as intertextual play, dense philosophical and political allusions, the critique of grand narratives, and the construction of ethically and philosophically charged fictional worlds, alongside a distinctive post-Soviet language play that both reflects and destabilizes cultural memory (Lipovetsky, 2016; Radchenko, 2024; Tatarinov & Bezrukavaya, 2019; Trotman, 2017; Vinoukour, 2017). More specialized studies refine this perspective by examining Sorokin's intertextual strategies as mechanisms of cultural deconstruction (Garipova, 2021; Khatkova & Beshukova, 2022) and Pelevin's deployment of philosophical and intertextual frameworks as tools for ontological destabilization (Mar'iushkina, 2021). Lunde (2018) further conceptualizes Sorokin's prose as a site of linguistic innovation that exemplifies the transformation of post-Soviet Russian, while Vinoukour (2023) identifies analogous processes of linguistic experimentation in Pelevin's work, suggesting that both authors contribute to a broader reconfiguration of literary language in the post-Soviet space (Pelevin, 2015; Sorokin, 2017).

From a geopolitical and ideological perspective, Uffelmann (2020) interprets Sorokin's engagement with Eurasianism as a dynamic and evolving dialogue rather than a static thematic concern, arguing that his later works increasingly spatialize Russian cultural discourse within European and global contexts. This shift has prompted critics to characterize Sorokin as a "European writer," whose texts stage tensions between modernity and regressive ideological formations such as nationalism, isolationism, and anti-

globalism. In *Manaraga*, set in a dystopian Europe of 2037, these tensions are articulated through the intersection of reactionary discourses and global cultural flows. The novel foregrounds conflicts between nostalgic attachments to national literary traditions and the realities of a transcultural world, thereby exposing the internal contradictions and self-destructive tendencies of anti-globalist sentiment while simultaneously interrogating the conditions of cultural interaction, globalization, and resistance to transcultural influences.

A significant body of scholarship has focused on *Manaraga*'s central motif of book burning, approaching it as a complex semiotic and cultural phenomenon. Turysheva (2018) identifies typologies of literary destruction rooted in fear, disillusionment, and tragic necessity, interpreting Sorokin's vision as reflective of contemporary sociological anxieties surrounding the transformation of book culture rather than as a direct engagement with specific theoretical models. This aligns with broader understandings of dystopian writing as a mode that amplifies cultural tensions through symbolic exaggeration. Stryjakowska (2019), by contrast, emphasizes the novel's metafictional dimension, reading it as a post-ironic commentary on the literary canon that simultaneously critiques and reaffirms the value of high culture. Her analysis focuses on the emergence of an elitist system that commodifies literature through the practice of "book'n'grill," where texts are hierarchized as canonical or non-canonical ("canonical firewood," "proper books," "to read properly"), thus transforming cultural capital into consumable spectacle. This line of interpretation is extended by Juraveţ (2018) and Kazarina (2018, p. 137), who elaborate on the metaphorical dimensions of grilling books as a process that collapses symbolic and material economies. Zywert (2019) localizes these dynamics within a broader narrative of the decline of print culture, emphasizing the replacement of originals by copies and digital forms and the resulting erosion of authenticity and cultural continuity. Lizoň (2021, p. 12) further argues that Sorokin redefines the semantics of book burning by literalizing the metaphor of the book as nourishment for the mind and soul, thereby foregrounding the materiality of the text as a determinant of its "consumption." Pešková (2020), in turn, puts Sorokin's language within a fragmented contemporary narrative mode that captures the commodification of experience and the superficiality of late-modern culture.

Scholarship on Pelevin similarly underscores the interplay between linguistic experimentation, philosophical inquiry, and ideological critique. Khagi (2021, 2022) characterizes Pelevin's prose as intellectually dense and structurally hybrid, combining absurdity, dark humor, and metaphysical

speculation while engaging both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. This synthesis functions to destabilize the boundaries between reality and illusion, positioning the text as a site of epistemological uncertainty. Gomel (2013) posits Pelevin within a postmodern sensibility shaped by the Soviet historical experience, highlighting his ironic yet critical engagement with ideology and fragmented identity. Magun (2017) develops this perspective by interpreting Pelevin's recurring apocalyptic imagery as emblematic of worlds constructed by demiurgic "spin doctors," drawing on Gnostic and Buddhist motifs within postmodern and cyberpunk frameworks to articulate an "antiworld" that resists the coercive power of language even in the absence of overt authority.

In *The Caretaker*, these concerns are further elaborated through complex narrative and spatial structures. Lubarsky (2022) reads the novel as an artistic reinterpretation of Carlos Castaneda's concepts, such as the plurality of worlds, the notion of a "place of power," intention, and awareness, arguing that these ideas underpin the construction of a multi-layered fictional reality and a distinctive secondary artistic convention. Tsygankova (2022) complements this analysis by examining the novel's spatial organization, demonstrating how Pelevin's narrative techniques produce multiple overlapping topoi that blur the distinction between reality and illusion and shape the trajectories of characters within a fluid ontological framework.

The present study adopts a translingual and sociolinguistic approach within the broader interpretive space between postmodernism and neomodernism. The study employs close reading as its primary analytical method, complemented by a comprehensive corpus-based selection of examples featuring foreign-language elements. These instances are subsequently translated and interpreted, and systematically classified according to types of code-switching and their semiotic dimensions, allowing for a structured analysis of their functional and ideological roles within the texts. Building on comparative scholarship on Sorokin and Pelevin, their prose is approached not through fixed literary categories but through overlapping paradigms that foreground instability, reflexivity, and epistemological uncertainty.

3. Theoretical Framework

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, the role of multilingualism in the works of Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Pelevin remains comparatively underexplored, creating a significant gap in the field. This is particularly striking given that both authors construct narrative worlds deeply embedded in processes

of globalization, cultural hybridization, and shifting linguistic hierarchies (cf. Deganutti, 2024). In these texts, multilingualism is not merely ornamental but functions as a marker of power relations, identity negotiation, and cultural translation. In Sorokin's prose, transcultural settings presuppose linguistic plurality, intersecting with questions of canon, authority, and cultural memory. In Pelevin's fiction, linguistic hybridity often accompanies ontological instability, reinforcing the blurring of boundaries between realities and discursive systems.

In *Utopia*, Thomas More portrays an ideal society in which constant population movement and uniform institutions ensure a single shared language across all regions, effectively eliminating linguistic variation (Zhou, 2011, pp. 15–44). Against this backdrop, the need to examine multilingualism in the present corpus arises from both theoretical and contextual considerations. Theoretically, such an approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how language operates as a medium of ideological control, resistance, and transformation within postmodern and neomodernist frameworks (Bar-Itzhak, 2021). Contextually, it reflects broader sociolinguistic shifts in the post-Soviet and globalized world, where multilingual competence and linguistic mixing increasingly shape cultural production (Fedorova & Protassova, 2024). By foregrounding multilingualism, the present study moves beyond predominantly monolingual readings of Sorokin and Pelevin, demonstrating how linguistic diversity contributes to the construction of dystopian and philosophical imaginaries, as well as to ongoing debates about culture, identity, and power in contemporary Russian prose.

The study adopts an integrative theoretical framework that combines insights from translanguaging, literary multilingualism, and postmodern–neomodernist theory (Ala-Risku, 2024; Sommer, 2004). Within this framework, multilingualism is conceptualized not simply as the coexistence of multiple languages in a text, but as a dynamic semiotic and ideological practice through which meaning, identity, and power are negotiated. Drawing on approaches to literary multilingualism that foreground the interaction of languages as a site of cultural translation, hierarchy, and resistance, the analysis treats linguistic hybridity as a constitutive feature of narrative structure rather than a peripheral stylistic device. At the same time, the study engages with postmodern and neomodernist perspectives that emphasize epistemological instability, reflexivity, and discursive fragmentation, allowing multilingualism to be interpreted as a mechanism that both reflects and intensifies these conditions.

More specifically, the analysis is guided by three key concepts. First, multilingualism is understood

as a marker of discursive power, revealing asymmetries between languages and the ideological hierarchies embedded within them. Second, it is approached as a form of identity negotiation, through which characters and narrative voices position themselves within shifting cultural and geopolitical contexts. Third, multilingualism is analyzed as a mode of cultural translation, enabling the circulation, transformation, and contestation of meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. These concepts structure the comparative analysis of Sorokin's *Manaraga* and Pelevin's *The Caretaker*, allowing for a systematic examination of how linguistic diversity operates within their respective fictional worlds.

By adopting this theoretical lens, the study reframes multilingualism as a central structuring principle of Sorokin's and Pelevin's prose. It thus positions linguistic diversity as integral to the construction of dystopian and philosophical imaginaries, as well as to broader debates on globalization, cultural hybridity, and the reconfiguration of identity and power in contemporary Russian literature.

4. Vladimir Sorokin's *Manaraga*

Vladimir Sorokin, born in the Moscow region and now residing in Berlin, presents in his novel a futuristic world in which languages and cultures are densely entangled. The title itself, said to mean "bear paw" in Nenets, sets the tone for a narrative steeped in linguistic experimentation and cultural hybridity. For Sorokin, indigenous peoples mix codes and coexist on their own level of modernity.

Sorokin constructs a deliberately unstable semiotic system in which language functions less as a medium of reference than as a field of constant reclassification. The professional jargon of book-burning transforms reading into culinary practice, collapsing distinctions between cultural consumption and material digestion. The writer introduces the 'English' terms *book'n'griller* / *book'n'grill chef* without translation into Russian, thereby underscoring the globalized character of the imagined profession. The author develops an elaborate professional argot, metaphorically employing terms such as *читать* ("to read," used for "to grill"), *бабочка* ("butterfly"), *полено* ("log"), *дрова* ("firewood"), *брикет* ("briquette"), *головешка* ("charred log"), *букинист* ("antiquarian"), *почтальон* ("postman"), and *графоман* ("graphomaniac"), all resemanticized within the practice of preparing food through book burning. Sorokin also coins neologisms or assigns novel meanings to familiar lexemes, often italicized for emphasis, such as *шеф-застролёр* ("touring chef"), *пoxopoшo* (a blend of "got better" and "felt good"), and hybrid formations like *мягкая пуля / праща / радость / умница / мягкий кокон* ("soft bullet / sling /

joy / clever one / soft cocoon”) for futuristic objects. Set in a future where names, peoples, animals, states, religions, and even food and dance circulate across boundaries, the narrative features distinctive interjections (ўе-ўе, вax, наk, эва). Characters are classified as “Russian” when grilling with Russian books, “German” when using German authors, and so forth—an ironic taxonomy that foregrounds the instability of cultural identity. Self-referential moments include references to Sorokin’s opera *The Children of Rosenthal*, while enigmatic lexemes such as *mormolon*, *sientat*, and *yokha-vokha*, alongside other invented entities, further destabilize linguistic categories. Relexicalization and neologism proliferate across all levels of discourse, producing a world in which linguistic categories (nationality, profession, objecthood) are fluid and performative rather than essential. This systematic instability extends to cultural identity itself, which is shown to be contingent on arbitrary semiotic markers (e.g., the language of the books burned). The resulting effect is a satirical yet structurally coherent model of globalization as total linguistic circulation, where meaning is continuously produced through displacement, irony, and recontextualization.

The protagonist’s linguistic biography is equally hybrid. His father, Géza, lectured in English; the family conversed in Polish at home, cursed in Russian and Belarusian, and retained fragments of Hungarian (*nem tudom* — “I don’t know”). After education in Hungary, they fled to Bavaria. The protagonist, son of a Belarusian Jewish father and a Polish Tatar mother, proudly states: “Actually, besides the world’s main language, I speak French, German, and Bavarian decently, I have a good command of Hungarian and Polish, and thanks to the flea [an automatic translation device] I can read fluently in twelve more languages. But I have trouble with spoken Russian. That’s natural—it’s now hard to meet a Russian speaker. I remember Russians only from my childhood, when they came to Budapest looking for work.” This personal narrative underscores the novel’s broader engagement with post-Soviet diasporic dispersion and the global assimilation of Russian speakers. The passage constructs multilingualism as a lived condition of displacement rather than a stable repertoire of competences. Languages are distributed across domains of intimacy (home speech, insults), education, and mediated access (translation technology), producing a fragmented linguistic identity shaped by migration and historical rupture. The ironic privileging of “the world’s main language” alongside technologically mediated multilingual fluency further destabilizes hierarchies of linguistic value, while the weakening of spoken Russian signals a reversal of traditional cultural centrality. The protagonist’s biography exemplifies the novel’s broader depiction of post-Soviet subjectivity as diasporic, hybrid, and increasingly decoupled from monolingual or territorially anchored

models of identity.

An inserted story, “Tolstoy,” alluding to the famous Russian writer and partially echoing his stylistic manner, depicts a Russian village transformed into a multicultural community, with imitations of folk speech using lexemes such as *манерича* (“nowadays”) and *подоспело* (“came just in time”). Accented utterances enhance authenticity, e.g. *Прииёл, батюшко, не забыл нас* (“You came, dear father, did not kill/forget us”), and *Откущай, батюшка, на здоровье!* (“Help yourself, dear father, enjoy!”), as well as an escalating sequence *Будем делать! Будэм дэлат! Бьютэм тэладь!* (“We’ll do!”). Native-language greetings *Даудэра!* (?) and *Гамарджоба, дорогой!* (“Hello, dear!” in Georgian) add further texture. The text constructs multilingualism as a stylistic strategy of “thickened realism,” where phonetic variation, dialectal markers, and transliteration effects are used to simulate oral heteroglossia. However, this heterogeneity is not purely mimetic: it is carefully staged to expose the instability of “folk speech” as a literary construct. The progression of distorted utterances demonstrates how linguistic difference becomes progressively stylized and performative, while the inclusion of greetings extends the village space into a broader post-imperial multilingual imaginary. The effect is not only representational but also metalinguistic, foregrounding how literary tradition itself manufactures authenticity through controlled forms of linguistic othering.

The novel abounds in multilingual insertions: Latin plant names and phrases (*O tempora, o mores!*; *Homo sapiens*; *Mea Culpa*; *Memento mori*); French (*Bon appétit!*, *C’est la vie!*; *amour à trois*; *le public éclairé*; *Sacré Geza, toujours en forme?*; *Merci bien*; *Le Château de Mauve-Brise*; *à la naturelle*; *voilà*; *Grand Opéra*; *Bonjour*; *Oh-là-là!*; *mon cher* etc.); English (*Fuck!*, *What would you prefer, sir?*; *watch your back, Mister*; *Certainly, sir*; *As you wish, sir!*; *At your service, sir!*; *yes-s-s-s*; *fusion*; *trip* etc.); Greek (*anathema maranatha*); Hungarian (*Sziget*); German (*Himbeergeist*; *Ordnung muss sein*; *Haben Sie Feuer?*; *Übertreibung*; *Ewige Wiederkunft!*; *Ewige Wiederkehr!*; *prosit*; *ade*; *mein schönes Vaterland* etc.); Italian (*finite*; *Vittoria finale!* *Fortissimo*; *Grazie mille*; *al diavolo*; *dolce vita* etc.); Norwegian (*lutefisk*) and Yiddish (*Azokhen vey*). Culinary terms (*pirozhki*, *solyanka*, *kulebyaki*) appear in Roman script, while *водка* (vodka) and *укра* (caviar) remain in Cyrillic. Brand and institutional names like *Vulcanus*, *Hermès*; the ship *Proxima-B*; the club *BLEIBTREU*; the cigar *Arturo Fuente Opus X*; and the publishing house *McGraw-Hill* reinforce the novel’s global orientation. Humor extends to invented game titles such as *Düdył* (an impossible mix of letters) and *NOVA RODZINA 4* (suggesting a Slavic “new

motherland”). When a female singer’s surname is rendered in Roman script as *Viazemskoy*, which due to its morphological ending would normally be interpreted as masculine, the text introduces deliberate onomastic ambiguity.¹ The accumulation of multilingual fragments operates as a systematic poetics of globalized heteroglossia, where linguistic variety functions less as background realism than as a structuring principle of meaning production. Code-switching across classical, modern, and invented languages produces a flattened semiotic field in which cultural registers coexist without hierarchy but with constant ironic friction. The alternation between Cyrillic and Roman scripts further foregrounds the material visibility of language as a marker of cultural positioning. At the same time, naming practices become sites of interpretive instability, where even grammatical gender and lineage are rendered uncertain. Overall, multilingualism here does not simply represent global diversity but actively stages the breakdown of stable linguistic, cultural, and ontological classifications.

Sorokin interweaves cultural allusions, citing an English song (“Love me tender...”), a French poem by Arthur Rimbaud (“La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes...”), and Vietnamese girls singing in broken English. The protagonist self-addresses in English (“Relax, relax, book’n’grill chef”), while dialogues occur in German with prostitutes and in French with antiquarians.

Through this rich combination of languages, cultural references, and neologisms, *Manaraga* constructs a speculative semiotics of global communication in which linguistic code-switching becomes both representational device and thematic core. Rather than functioning as ornamental multilingualism, these shifts foreground the instability of communicative norms and the commodification of cultural difference within a globalized literary economy. Sorokin’s prose thus stages language as a site where identity is continuously produced, displaced, and reconfigured, compelling readers to confront hybridity not as exception but as structural condition of contemporary meaning-making.

5. Viktor Pelevin’s *The Watchman Duology*

Viktor Pelevin, a Moscow-born writer whose current residence remains unknown, uses multilingual and resemanticized language not merely for ornament, but to construct a world in which political authority,

¹ This may allude to cases of gendered surname variation in transliteration, including instances where French writers adopted modified forms of maternal surnames (e.g. Ostrovskaya). Alternatively, it may suggest aristocratic diasporic naming practices in which surnames are reshaped in exile, or it may function as a deliberate destabilization of gendered and genealogical assumptions embedded in name morphology.

spiritual truth, and cultural memory are all shown to be unstable, performative, and linguistically manufactured. In his duology *Order of the Yellow Banner* and *The Iron Abyss*, he constructs a rich mythology that interweaves elements from multiple eras and cultures. The protagonist, Alexis de Kije, derives from an anecdote recorded by Vladimir Dal', in which a non-existent soldier makes a career due to an error committed by a copyist. The surname of a fictional character appears as Kizh, purportedly of purely Russian origin. Well-known is the book *Podporuchik Kizhe* by Yuri Tynianov where this story is interpreted in a different way. This playful intertextual gesture exemplifies Pelevin's approach to cultural and historical reference-making.

Within the author's multicultural imaginary, Alexis inherits the legacy of Niccolò the Third, potentially adopting the name Aleksei Nikolaevich. His double inhabits the "Old Earth," a realm populated by figures from diverse nations and generations, both historical and fictional, including Maltese knights, Illuminati, and Freemasons. Viktor Pelevin presents Pavel as the inventor of an alternative world, assembling a heterogeneous mixture of religions, scientific discourses, and cultural allusions into a shifting mirage saturated with neologisms, clichés, superstitions, and myths. Quotations from books, anecdotes, and films are woven into this eclectic construction. "Idyllium" designates an upper realm (a boutique-loca) on the Old Earth, where Pelevin humorously portrays a foolish beauty who speaks a southern dialect comprehensible only to golems and maidservants. This configuration can be read as a paradigmatic instance of Pelevin's translingual and interdiscursive poetics, in which multilingual and multi-register elements function not merely as stylistic ornamentation but as mechanisms for destabilizing ontological boundaries and exposing the constructedness of cultural and ideological systems.

Pavel I the Alchemist (who already appeared in the previous works of Pelevin), also referred to as Paulus Primo, keeps a diary in Latin, with entries titled *De Docta Ignorantia* and *Aurora Borealis*. The dystopian city's name, *Idyllium*, appears in both Latin and Russian, alongside alternative appellations such as *Pauloville*, *Arkhatopavlovsk*, and *Sviatopavlovsk* ("Saint-Pavlovsk"). His collected works, *Corpus Anonymous*, include calligraphic mottoes such as *SCIO ME NIHIL SCIRE* and *SCIRE OMNIA EST NIHIL SCIRE*. The narrative concludes with the paradoxical dictum: *Omnia est nihil. Nihil est omnia*. These forms generate ideological instability, parody imperial and spiritual discourses, undermine historical authenticity, and expose the constructedness of identity and authority in Pelevin's dystopian world. The systematic use of Latin and pseudo-Latin forms functions as a translingual strategy that both invokes and subverts the

authority of classical, scholarly, and ecclesiastical traditions. By embedding these markers within a fragmented and ironic narrative framework, Pelevin transforms them into semiotic devices that destabilize meaning and foreground the performative nature of knowledge, power, and cultural legitimacy.

French culture features prominently: the American envoy Benjamin Franklin, styled “the Singer,” becomes *Le Duc des Antipodes*, while Pavel, traveling incognito, is designated *Le Comte du Nord*, their connection underscored by the conjunction *et*. French expressions include “Chute, monsieurs, chute” (with the erroneous *monsieurs* instead of *messieurs*), *point d'honneur*, *Saint Rapport*, and others. The Italian *ciarlatano* is used in place of the expected French form, while inscriptions such as *Museo di ordine militare di Malta* appear. *Anicca di Chapao*, an Italianized transformation of the machine-gunner Anka, is recast as the niece of *Basilio di Chapao*, author of *To Nibbāna in a Single Breath*, thereby recalling Pelevin’s novel *Chapayev and Void*, based on the mythologized figure of a Soviet hero. The Pali concept of *anicca* (“impermanence”) is explicitly invoked. This dense layering of French, Italian, and Pali elements exemplifies Pelevin’s translingual poetics, where linguistic hybridity operates through deliberate misquotation, cross-linguistic substitution, and parody. The resulting semiotic dissonance destabilizes cultural hierarchies and exposes the arbitrariness of linguistic authority, while simultaneously foregrounding the commodification and performativity of cultural capital within a globalized, post-Soviet imaginary.

Through these layered linguistic strategies, the text constructs a semiotic economy in which meaning is continuously displaced across languages, registers, and cultural codes. English idioms, global media references, and hybrid neologisms are stripped of stable referentiality and reconfigured as elements of an internally coherent yet fundamentally unstable system of signs. So, English-language parodies include expressions such as *coming in*², *glass-organ colour revolution*, *pipe dream*, and *speciality of the house*. Within the emerging narrative construct, these expressions acquire resemanticized meanings that detach them from their conventional idiomatic usage and reinsert them into a hybrid ideological system. Film culture is invoked through allusions to *Interstellar*, *Moon*, *Star Trek*, and *Planet of the Apes*, embedding the narrative within a recognizable yet distorted global media landscape. The Facebook is satirized as a *каббалистический гроссбух* (“kabbalistic ledger”), while authors are figured as *спириты-лицекнижники*

² Used to denote the creation of a world with Fluid, a substance signifying unfathomable power and authority.

(“spirit-facebookers”), blending mystical, technological, and colloquial registers.

Specialized terminology further reinforces this hybridization: the neologism *солик* (“solic,” from *solus* + *stoic*) suggests an individualized philosophical stance, while the currency *глюки* (“glitches”) is administered by *глюкассаторы* (“glitch-cashiers”)³, a noun of neuter gender in German and masculine gender in Russian. Happiness itself is described as dependent on *gliukogen*⁴, a metaphorical construct that echoes biochemical and drug-related terminology, thereby framing affect as both commodified and artificially regulated. This translingual and interdiscursive play functions not merely as parody but as a critique of late-modern symbolic regimes, exposing how language, media, and ideology converge to produce realities governed by simulation, commodification, and epistemic uncertainty.

Pelevin further expands his lexical experimentation through neologisms such as *Khad* (prayer wheel) and *Tsof* (spells), derived from the English compounds “hardware” and “software.” Alongside coinages, existing terms undergo systematic resemanticization: *inner territories* come to denote spaces for the cultivation of freedom, will, and imagination, while *phalanstery* is reinterpreted as a monastic school, even as it preserves its original meaning of a self-sufficient utopian community. These strategies illustrate Pelevin’s characteristic blending of technological, philosophical, and utopian discourses. By reworking both invented and inherited vocabulary, he destabilizes fixed semantic boundaries and exposes language as a site where ideological, spiritual, and technical registers continuously intersect and compete.

The term *невозвращенец*⁵ designates a stage of spiritual perfection preceding that of the *apxam* (arhat). The text integrates concepts from multiple religious traditions and esoteric doctrines. Several ideas are associated with Franz Anton Mesmer, particularly those of *mesmerisme* (Fr.) and *magnétisme*. This lexical layering demonstrates Pelevin’s characteristic strategy of hybrid conceptualization, in which Buddhist soteriology, European occultism, and invented terminology are fused into a single interpretive field. The effect is not merely intertextual accumulation but the destabilization of doctrinal coherence:

³ a formation that playfully draws on German language *Glück* “happiness/luck”; in modern Russian, “bag, hallucination, confusion.”

⁴ Maybe this is an allusion to the pro-Putin novel *Gospodin Geksogen* by Aleksandr Prokhanov, or to a remedy.

⁵ “non-returner,” also referred to as *зауряд-архат* (*zaurjad-arhat*; the first component alludes to mediocrity, whereas *arhat* in Buddhism denotes an individual who has attained nirvana and insight into the nature of existence). A comparable concept is *anāgāmin*, likewise drawn from Buddhist tradition. Only Anāgāmins (“Non-returners”), the third stage of enlightenment, attain Arhat-hood from the Śuddhāvāsa worlds without further rebirth in lower realms. However, the compound *fligel-anāgāmin* constitutes a neologism coined by the author.

spiritual categories become modular linguistic units that can be reassembled, downgraded, or hybridized, thereby foregrounding the constructedness of all metaphysical systems within the narrative world.

This dense multilingual and semiotic layering produces a systematic destabilization of referential stability. Objects oscillate between the archaic and the futuristic, such as *вычислитель* (“counter”), *умофон* (“brainphone”), *шлем-резонатор* (“helmet-resonator”), and *благодать* (“grace”), which acquires a new meaning, as well as *жёсткие лучи Абсолюта* (“the harsh rays of the Absolute”), etc., coexisting with deliberate anachronisms such as *montgolfier* and *pamad*⁶. Invented expressions such as *Единый культ* (“United Cult”), *совершить простирание* (“to perform a prostration”), and *Небоптога* (“Sky-toucher”) coexist with terms like *Трансмиграция* (“transmigration”) and *таблицы модусов* (“tables of moduses”). The word *зелёнка* is resemanticized⁷. Titles addressed to the Watcher include *Ваше Переменчество* (“Your Changeability”), *Ваше Безличество* (“Your Facelessness”), *Ваше Страдальчество* (“Your Sufferance”), and the colloquial *ваша экселенция* (“your excellency,” with lower-case orthography). The *Ангел Воды* (“Angel of Water”) is addressed as *Ваша Текучесть* (“Your Fluidity”). Archaic, technological, religious, and bureaucratic registers are deliberately fused, while neologisms and resemanticizations undermine the fixity of lexical meaning. At the same time, honorifics are transformed into abstract ontological attributes (changeability, facelessness, fluidity), suggesting that identity itself becomes fluid and performative within the fictional world. The result is a linguistic regime in which meaning is continuously deferred, and social or metaphysical hierarchies are encoded through shifting stylistic and lexical play.

At the end of the manuscript, when certain secrets and symbols are revealed, it is noted: “Numerous verbal borrowings from contemporary Russian (often with a complete replacement of the original meaning).” As an example, the word *однопалочница* is cited in *Idillium*, used in its archaic (*ветхий* instead of usual *устаревший*) sense: “a debauched beauty who visits for at least two hours but allows only a single embrace, thereby doubling the price of her company” (pejorative, very widespread). Its first meaning is “a woman who plays a large drum with a single mallet” (neutral, rare); the second meaning is “a woman who reveres only Pavel among the Three Exalted” (neutral, very rare). The passage foregrounds a systematic

⁶ intended as *pomade*, though historically attested variant spellings existed in the 18th century.

⁷ referring not only to the antiseptic brilliant green dye used for minor wounds, nor to vegetation or any green matter, but also as an allusive designation for the lady-in-waiting “Green Sleeves,” likely mediated through the musical motif *Greensleeves*.

mechanism of semantic destabilization in which lexical items are deliberately overloaded with competing meanings across registers (pejorative, neutral, archaic, religious). Rather than maintaining stable reference, the text constructs a stratified semantic field where meaning is context-dependent and hierarchically indexed by usage frequency and ideological framing. This technique reinforces the broader narrative strategy of linguistic relativization, in which words function less as fixed designators than as mutable carriers of cultural, erotic, and theological coding.

In sum, Pelevin employs lexical borrowings in ways that often erase their original semantic value, generating new meanings. In doing so, he invites readers into a deliberately unstable dystopian world of linguistic and cultural experimentation.

6. Discussion

While early utopian visions such as More's equated social harmony with linguistic uniformity, contemporary utopian thinking increasingly frames multilingualism as a resource, treating linguistic diversity as integral to identity, inclusion, and global interconnectedness rather than as a problem to be eliminated. In this shift, "utopia" is no longer defined solely by ideal social order but also by struggles over meaning, representation, and discursive authority; multilingualism becomes politically charged as dominant discourses may suppress linguistic plurality, while more inclusive imaginaries position it as essential to representing complex social realities.

Suslov and Bodin (2020) trace how utopian and dystopian imaginaries have shaped Russian culture and politics from the 18th century to the present, particularly in non-canonical literature. They argue that utopias simultaneously liberate and constrain: they expand imaginative horizons beyond inherited traditions, yet also produce new hegemonies and normative frameworks. In the Soviet period, utopian writing—largely in the form of science fiction—combined technological optimism with communist modernization and functioned as a medium of intellectual self-reflection. In contemporary contexts, utopian and dystopian narratives return to 19th-century identity debates (including auto-orientalization and Russia's positioning between East and West) while also engaging with 21st-century crises such as climate change, digitalization, and virtual networks. As a result, such texts often combine archaic, pseudo-historical registers with technologically and environmentally oriented discourse. Both Sorokin and Pelevin explicitly implement this hybrid temporal and stylistic logic: Sorokin's dystopian globalization merges archaic

cultural forms with commodified global media flows, while Pelevin's fictional universes fuse mythological, religious, and cybernetic idioms to produce unstable ideological chronotopes. Within this vision, multilingualism functions as part of a broader utopian/dystopian aesthetics of transformation and crisis, where linguistic plurality signals both openness and systemic fragmentation.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, multilingualism in utopian imaginaries is not merely abstract but emerges as a practice embedded in communicative constraints and agentive choice. Gardner-Chloros and Weston (2015) distinguish spoken code-switching, which reveals how bilingual speakers mobilize linguistic resources in interaction, from literary code-switching, which foregrounds structural and authorial design. Applied to Sorokin, this distinction clarifies how his multilingual practices exceed representation of spoken hybridity and instead construct a semiotic economy in which languages function as exchangeable cultural capital. In *Manaraga*, for instance, English, French, and other codes circulate alongside commodified cultural practices (book burning as gastronomy), so that multilingualism directly mirrors globalized cultural markets: languages themselves become part of the novel's logic of consumption, branding, and cultural stratification. In Pelevin, by contrast, literary code-switching exposes not only social hybridity but also epistemological uncertainty: multilingual instability aligns with simulated realities in which language no longer guarantees referential anchoring but instead generates shifting layers of interpretation, parody, and ideological masking.

The distinction between intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic mixing further refines this analysis. Intra-linguistic variation—such as shifts between colloquial, archaic, bureaucratic, or slang registers—operates within a single language system and primarily signals social positioning, irony, or ideological stance. Following Bakhtin (1981), such heteroglossia reflects the coexistence of multiple social voices and worldviews within one language. In Sorokin's texts, this principle is radicalized: stylistic stratification becomes commodified, as high and low registers are redistributed within systems of cultural consumption (e.g., “canonical” versus “non-canonical” books as material fuel). In Pelevin, intra-linguistic variation often destabilizes epistemic authority, producing polyphonic narration in which competing ideological voices cannot be resolved into a stable interpretive frame.

Cross-linguistic mixing (e.g., Alexiadou & Lohndal, 2018), by contrast, involves the insertion of elements from distinct languages (e.g., Russian with French, English, or Asian languages), thereby foregrounding not only stylistic contrast but also cultural difference, power asymmetries, and partial

intelligibility. In Sorokin, such insertions frequently index global circulation and cultural commodification, as multilingual fragments signal participation in a transnational symbolic economy where cultural difference is both aestheticized and commercialized. In Pelevin, cross-linguistic hybridity contributes to what can be read as a poetics of simulation: foreign languages and esoteric vocabularies (religious, philosophical, technological) function as interchangeable sign systems that undermine stable ontological reference and reinforce ideological fluidity.

Thus, while intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic mixing operate differently, both function as strategies of destabilization. The former exposes multiplicity within linguistic systems, while the latter foregrounds permeability between them. In Sorokin, this dual mechanism produces a dystopian model of global culture as commodified circulation of signs; in Pelevin, it produces a model of reality as semiotically unstable simulation where language itself becomes an unreliable epistemic medium. In both cases, multilingualism is not ornamental but structurally constitutive: it encodes the tensions between identity, power, and meaning under conditions of globalization and post-Soviet transformation.

Analyzing such texts offers clear benefits for linguistics students. Placing them at the center of language curricula means treating authentic written, oral, visual, and digital texts not merely as illustrations of grammar or vocabulary, but as the primary vehicles through which learners encounter language, meaning, and the body of knowledge accumulated over generations (Paesani & Menke, 2023). Doing so diversifies the classroom by introducing multiple languages, registers, voices, genres, and perspectives, including those of marginalized or underrepresented communities, thereby moving beyond a single “standard” or textbook-bound view of language. This language-centered approach fosters students’ agency and empowerment by positioning them as active interpreters and meaning-makers who analyze, question, and respond to texts, thereby developing critical literacies and a stronger sense of ownership over their language learning through engagement with real-world communicative practices. In both Sorokin and Pelevin, multilingualism functions as more than stylistic ornament; it becomes a structural principle through which dystopian worlds expose fractured identities, unstable authority, and the erosion of monolingual cultural certainty.

7. Conclusions

Multilingualism as a marker of discursive power was identified through the distribution of languages and registers within the texts, distinguishing between dominant global languages and marginal, archaic, or

localized forms. This analysis shows how such hierarchies reflect cultural authority, commodification processes, and ideological dominance. Multilingualism as identity negotiation was examined through close reading of character speech and narrative voice, focusing on how linguistic choices construct, fragment, or reposition subjectivity in contexts shaped by migration, globalization, and post-Soviet transformation. Multilingualism as cultural translation was analyzed through code-switching, borrowing, and resemanticization, highlighting how meaning changes across linguistic boundaries and how these shifts actively shape fictional worlds rather than neutrally transferring content. These three aspects structured the comparative reading of the corpus, showing multilingualism not as stylistic variation but as a systemic mechanism shaping power relations, identity formation, and meaning production.

Across Sorokin and Pelevin, linguistic experimentation combines invented lexicons, neologisms, and cultural references drawn from multiple traditions. Sorokin's futuristic narratives connect linguistic play with reflections on technology, social organization, and cultural commodification. Pelevin integrates mythology, philosophy, and satire, using multilingual references to explore identity, spirituality, and the instability of meaning. Both authors juxtapose historical and imagined worlds, using linguistic hybridity to reflect tensions between cognition, politics, and cultural change.

Several shared features emerge across their work. Linguistic diversity functions as a central device, with English, French, Latin, and other languages embedded to represent culturally mixed environments. Cultural critique is developed through irony, satire, and philosophical reflection, while formal experimentation, especially neologisms and code-switching, deepens thematic complexity. Their texts show how ethnic and cultural background shapes characters' attempts to locate themselves in unstable environments.

Sorokin and Pelevin do not merely depict multilingual settings; they embed multilingualism into narrative structure so that form (including script) directly shapes meaning. Code-switching, borrowing, and lexical invention present dystopia as a breakdown of shared linguistic and cultural codes. In *Manaraga*, culinary jargon built from multiple languages turns cultural heritage into marketable material, showing how capitalist systems convert meaning into exchange value. In the *Watchman* duology, Pelevin uses semantic distortion, pseudo-etymologies, and multilingual references to undermine stable reference points, linking spiritual discourse to constant semantic instability. In both cases, translingual practices simultaneously represent identity and participation in systems that weaken linguistic authority and authenticity, producing

a form of controlled communicative instability that structures the reader's experience of dystopia.

The distinction between intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic mixing clarifies how these texts handle power relations. Shifts within Russian expose internal hierarchies between social registers, while the use of other languages highlights global and cultural asymmetries. Sorokin's book's 'grill' system makes this explicit by turning literary traditions into commodified objects, where cultural memory is treated as consumable material. Pelevin, by contrast, multiplies and destabilizes cultural references, using languages and forms as unstable signifiers within shifting symbolic systems. These strategies represent post-Soviet reality as a space where meaning is shaped by competing semiotic and economic logics, and where linguistic value is constantly renegotiated.

The analysis of Sorokin and Pelevin has three implications. Theoretically, distinguishing intra- and cross-linguistic mixing clarifies different functions of heteroglossia: internal social differentiation versus intercultural communication and estrangement. Methodologically, close reading of multilingual elements connects literary analysis with sociolinguistics by making indexical meaning and stance visible in textual detail. Pedagogically, these texts support advanced multilingual literacy by training readers to interpret linguistic diversity as meaningful rather than disruptive, and to understand how language reflects ideology, power, and cultural change.

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