Russia – psycholinguistics 1999

[550 words follow on Russian academic's computer programme for analysing the psycholinguistic characteristics of texts:..]

RUSSIA - Psycho-Linguistics

Russian right-wing rabble-rouser Vladimir Zhirinovsky never uses "we" in his parliamentary rants. But a close analysis of his style reveals that the leader of the oddly-named Liberal Democratic Party is not as assertive as he would like to make out. **Zhirinovksy**, famed for his abrasive approach to politics rarely uses the perfect tense when talking about the future. Psycho-linguistic expert Professor Valery Belyanin says this reveals a fundamental lack of self-confidence and disbelief that he can achieve what he claims.

A researcher and teacher with more than 20 years experience at Moscow State Linguistic University, Prof Belyanin has spent the last three years developing a sophisticated computer programme that allows the user to delve behind the surface meaning of texts to discover the deeper motives in speeches, books, articles or advertising.

His **VAAL** Psycho-Linguistic Expert System uses more than 40 different psychological categories to analyse a text in addition to an array of phonetic checks that reveal the urges behind the written or spoken word. Running the programme will reveal whether a text is paranoid, dark, sad and negative, or light, histrionic, feminine and positive, for example. The sounds the spoken word made can also convey meaning: phrases can be pleasant and safe or aggressive and dangerous. "Anything can be analysed to learn what impression it has on the reader or listener beyond the meaning conveyed by the words alone," Prof Belyanin, says.

The programme, held on a CD-Rom or six floppy discs, enables the users such as parliamentary speech writers to swiftly check that they are getting across the message they want, without reveal any hidden motives. For those who want to gain an insight into hidden messages in advertising or business jargon, it has a commercial application, he says. And it can even be used to help the police with their work.

"I've just received a 5,000 roubles grant (UK pounds 125) to analyse criminal texts," Prof Belyanin says, holding up a copy of a letter threatening to bomb a bank in Tomsk, Siberia. "An analysis of this letter shows that the writer uses the imperfect tense 21 times and the perfect only 13. It suggests to me that he would not carry out his threat to bomb the bank."

The programme, which sells for around UK pounds 400 a copy, is yet to make Prof Belyanin a millionaire: so far, he has sold just 25 copies. The Russian economy is still feeling the effects of last year's financial crash and creating a market for such a product is not easy. But Prof Belyanin, who created the programme in his spare time, is undeterred and hopes to find a British or American partner university to develop an English language version. Analysing a text tells us as much about the writer and his world as it does about the reader, he maintains.

Russia's national poet Alexander **Pushkin** is revealed as a manic-depressive character who wrote stories with a classical curve upwards towards excitement and pleasure before a swift descent down to depression. The fact that Russia took this poet to its heart and, 200 years after his birth, continues to celebrate him, suggests that Russians too are a people addicted to life on an emotional roller-coaster.

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