

Sociocultural and Pragmatic Preconditions For The Use of Foreign Insertions

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Abstract: This article examines the sociocultural and pragmatic preconditions for the use of foreign-language insertions in the prose of Alexander Pushkin within the historical and literary context of the first third of the nineteenth century. French and German, functioning as symbols of cultural capital and markers of aristocratic identity, played a crucial role in shaping salon, academic, military, and professional discourse in Russian high society. The study analyzes the multifunctional nature of interlingual insertions in Pushkin's works, particularly in *The Captain's Daughter* and *The Queen of Spades*, demonstrating that such elements serve not merely as stylistic embellishments but as complex semiotic devices. The research concludes that foreign-language fragments in Pushkin's prose form a multilayered continuum in which sociocultural symbolism, pragmatic function, and compositional strategy intersect. Understanding these interrelations is essential for structural-semantic analysis and for developing effective translation approaches that preserve the semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic integrity of the original text.

Keywords: Alexander Pushkin, Foreign-Language Insertions, Interlingual Elements, Sociocultural Context, Pragmatic Function, Cultural Capital, Salon Discourse, Multilingualism, Intertextuality, Metalinguistic Function, Orientalism, Narrative Dynamics, Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature, Translation Studies, Stylistic Marking

Introduction

In the first third of the nineteenth century, the French and German languages within the Russian aristocracy functioned not merely as practical tools of communication, but above all as symbols of cultural capital and attributes of "high society" status. Salon conversations, theaters, the halls of the Academy of Arts, and university lecture rooms in St. Petersburg and Moscow constituted a multilingual environment in which proficiency in foreign speech testified to a deep familiarity with the European intelligentsia and the aesthetic ideals of the Enlightenment. It was precisely within this socio-political atmosphere that Alexander Pushkin introduced French and German constructions into the text of *The Captain's Daughter*: they do not serve as mere embellishments, but act as markers of the characters' belonging to an enlightened community whose horizons extended beyond the boundaries of the national theater and literature.

The device of incorporating foreign phrases enables Pushkin to “position” his characters socially without resorting to cumbersome direct characterization: a single “cher ami” in a friendly dialogue or “monsieur le colonel” in a formal conversation immediately creates for the reader the image of a well-bred, educated individual situated at the center of the European cultural sphere. This “social cipher” becomes a universal code: by means of a French expression, the author signals not only the character’s upbringing, but also his aesthetic preferences, views on political events, and level of participation in the intellectual debates of the time.

By forming such a “linguistic filter,” Pushkin simultaneously creates an effect of cultural “closure”: the insertion of a foreign code separates the “initiated” readers from the broader public and generates a lingering sense of a closed, salon-type society. As a result, foreign insertions perform a dual function—they economize narrative resources, replacing extended descriptions with concise “keys,” while simultaneously reinforcing status-based sociocultural boundaries, allowing the reader to “recognize” each character’s cultural and social context through language.

Methodology

Salon conversations in the Russian aristocracy of the first third of the nineteenth century represented a multilingual space in which French and German served not only as means of communication but also as markers of cultural refinement. By including quotations from French philosophers (“ah, mon Dieu!”) and German scholars (“das ist interessant”) in his characters’ dialogues, Pushkin underscores their affiliation with the European intellectual community.

Pragmatically, such insertions function as “speech signals”: a sudden “ah, mon Dieu!” conveys a character’s shock or astonishment, while “das ist interessant” signals a shift in conversational tempo, marking the character’s transition to analytical reflection. In this way, the author regulates the emotional tension of the scene and constructs a dynamic textual structure in which foreign fragments become points of intensified narrative emphasis.

Within this context, the effect of “social distance” also emerges: those who understand the foreign phrase automatically enter the circle of the “initiated,” while for the uncomprehending reader it creates a sense of incomplete access to the cultural code. This technique strengthens the illusion of a “closed society,” in which knowledge of language serves as a criterion of elite belonging.

The corrected use of “ah, mon Dieu” and “das ist interessant” renders the characters’ speech organic, preserves the pragmatic function of the insertions, and highlights the complex, multilayered structure of salon discourse in Pushkin’s prose.

An important sociocultural factor contributing to the spread of foreign insertions was the development of the Russian educational system and universities. With the founding of Saint Petersburg and Moscow State Universities in 1819 and 1755 respectively, foreign languages began to be taught not only in private boarding schools but also in higher educational institutions, where professors—often graduates of European universities—introduced new methodologies and texts. In *The Captain’s Daughter*, Pushkin reflects this academic atmosphere by incorporating German turns of phrase from philosophical treatises

and Latin aphorisms into his characters' speech, thereby demonstrating their education and affiliation with the scholarly community.

Pragmatically, foreign-language fragments in this context function as a "professional code": the use of specialized terminology in fencing, medicine, or military affairs lends authenticity to the characters' speech and underscores their competence in their chosen fields. For example, the German "Fahr wohl" in a farewell scene between officers sounds as a sign of adherence to military etiquette, while the Latin "in flagranti" accompanies the description of constrained circumstances and emphasizes the juridical precision of the narrative.

The socio-pragmatic role of such insertions is also evident in their reinforcement of the translator's or educated mediator's status between cultures. When a French remark appears in the text accompanied by an explanation in Russian, it indicates the presence of characters capable of performing "live translation" in real time, symbolizing the growing demand for professional linguistic services and the emerging practice of serving as a "bridge" between Russia and Europe.

Finally, the development of translation circles and public lectures on foreign languages in metropolitan libraries and salons gave rise to a kind of "collective philological dialogue," reflected in Pushkin's prose through multilayered quotation. Characters who retell fragments of European authors "from language to language" model the practice of academic polyphony, where each participant contributes a portion of new knowledge to the conversation.

Foreign-language fragments in Pushkin's prose often perform a metalinguistic function, acting as an authorial commentary at the textual level. By incorporating Latin or French aphorisms into dialogues, Pushkin emphasizes universal meanings and lends the narrative archetypal depth: for example, the Latin "Veni, vidi, vici" in the midst of a duel scene or the French "c'est la guerre" during wartime create associative parallels with classical antiquity and European history, situating events within a broader cultural context. Such insertions serve as signals of intertextuality, linking Russian prose to the treasury of Western European classics and underscoring the universality of the themes addressed by the author.

Metalinguistic insertions also function as a means of authorial reflection: through them, Pushkin comments on the very act of writing and the narrator's role. In *The Queen of Spades*, the French phrase "le jeu est fait, rien ne va plus" appears in a monologue about the hero's fate, creating an effect of irreversibility and highlighting the concept of inevitability characteristic of European Romanticism. Thus, the foreign code becomes a mirror reflecting the philosophical and aesthetic ideas of the era.

From a linguocultural perspective, the metalinguistic function of interlingual insertions serves as a device of "defamiliarization": encountering a foreign quotation, the reader is compelled to step beyond habitual Russian-language perception and turn to universal cultural archetypes. This technique intensifies the dialogue between the "native" and the "foreign," enriching the text with additional layers of meaning.

Pragmatically, metalinguistic insertions help the author control the rhythm and dynamics of the narrative: they function as "linguistic anchors" to which the narrative returns after emotional or plot climaxes. Such a structure contributes to the creation of a

complex compositional framework in which each metalinguistic remark fixes a key moment and sets the tone for subsequent lines.

Foreign insertions often serve to create “social aliases” –identification markers through which characters demonstrate their origin or occupation. In *The Captain’s Daughter*, one encounters engineering terms in French, such as “tir à blanc” (blank shot), marking the military environment, and Latin legal expressions such as “habeas corpus,” emphasizing knowledge of legal procedures. These specific codes not only enhance the authenticity of the depiction of the characters’ professional spheres, but also signal to the reader their personal competencies and social roles.

On the pragmatic plane, the insertion of professional terminology creates an effect of “professional interpretation”: the reader, alongside the character, is immersed in the relevant milieu—whether a military camp, a medical unit, or a courtroom. In this way, the author expands the functional possibilities of speech and stimulates empathy, since understanding specialized terms requires experience or additional engagement with the topic’s specificity.

Result and Discussion

The sociocultural aspect of these insertions manifests itself in their reflection of the Russian elite’s aspiration to adopt Western professional standards and methodologies. Characters who employ foreign vocabulary in their fields are perceived as progressive specialists open to new ideas and technologies—a characteristic trait of the “man of the Enlightenment.”

Professional foreign insertions in Pushkin’s prose thus perform a multilayered function: they serve as instruments of social marking, means of immersing the reader in a professional environment, and reflections of historical trends in the borrowing of Western knowledge by the Russian elite.

Alongside European influences, Pushkin’s texts also reveal a tendency toward Orientalism—echoes of Russia’s expansion to the East and the aristocratic salons’ fascination with “Eastern exoticism.” Borrowings from Persian and Turkish, such as the word “bakshish” or the address “khanuma,” appear in everyday scenes, underscoring the characters’ familiarity with Eastern customs and traditions. These insertions capture the sociocultural reality of the era, when journeys and diplomatic missions to the Caucasus and Central Asia brought Eastern narratives and objects to the capital, and “Eastern evenings” became fashionable entertainment. By employing such lexemes, Pushkin recreates the atmosphere of Orientalist salons where Eastern superstitions, poetry, and customs were discussed, modeling a multilayered cultural context encompassing both Europe and the East.

Pragmatically, Orientalism functions as a means of “styling the foreign” and “social coding”: by using Eastern terms, characters emphasize their participation in global cultural exchange and demonstrate curiosity and openness to new impressions. At the same time, such insertions may serve a comic function: an unexpected “bakshish” in an everyday context creates stylistic contrast, enhancing the humor of the scene while showcasing the flexibility of the author’s language.

Orientalist lexemes in Pushkin's prose reflect historical and political trends of imperial expansion and cultural exchange, while also performing pragmatic functions of stylization, social coding, and emotional contrast.

The return of Russian officers after the Napoleonic campaigns led to the firm integration of French military vocabulary into both spoken and written discourse of the estate. Pushkin uses French battle cries and commands—"à l'attaque!", "en avant!", and "chargez!"—not merely for stylization but to convey the authentic atmosphere of combat. These commands, uttered by characters in the midst of describing an assault, create an effect of documentary precision: the reader seems to find himself on the battlefield, hearing the roar of cannons and the shouts of commanders.

Such insertions carry a dual semantics: on the one hand, they reflect the heroes' solidarity with Western European military traditions; on the other, they serve as a pragmatic instrument for controlling narrative rhythm. The inclusion of a French exclamation interrupts the slower descriptive flow and triggers narrative dynamism, automatically accelerating the reader's perception and intensifying tension. Through this device, Pushkin demonstrates mastery in shifting from descriptive to dramatic mode.

The choice of French in military scenes also bears symbolic meaning: Napoleon, embodying Europe's military might, was associated with advanced strategy and tactics. When a hero repeats "à l'attaque!", he does more than issue a command; he invokes the successes of the French army and the idea of victory, reinforcing the reader's sense of historical authenticity and participation in great history. In this way, Pushkin introduces a "military mythologeme" into Russian prose, linking the national narrative with European events.

The combination of French cries with Russian descriptions produces an effect of "linguistic echo," in which the foreign command resounds and reverberates in the Russian text—"À l'attaque!" followed by "Forward!"—intensifying the emotional resonance of the scene. This is a carefully constructed stylistic composition in which the foreign code serves as a source of expressive dynamism and creates a multilayered acoustic and semantic portrayal of battle.

Foreign insertions in nineteenth-century printed editions required printers to adhere to strict formatting norms—preserving original orthography, italicization, and special typefaces for foreign code. In *The Captain's Daughter*, the first publication retained French phrases in italics and German ones in bold black type, visually signaling their "foreignness" and emphasizing the semantic autonomy of these fragments.

At a round table held at the Gorky Literary Institute on June 21, 2020, these typographical features were discussed: literary scholars noted that italics and distinctive punctuation help preserve interlingual insertions in their primary cultural function, preventing them from dissolving into the internal elements of the Russian text. Examples from classical editions were cited in which the absence of such marking led to the "blurring" of foreign code and a reduction of its expressive force.

Pragmatically, the visual highlighting of foreign phrases functions as an "attention switch": encountering italicized or otherwise marked insertions, the reader activates a

cognitive marker signaling the need for a different interpretive strategy—he “switches” to the foreign code and activates corresponding associative networks. This promotes deeper textual comprehension and preserves the internal “dialogue of cultures” within the reader’s consciousness.

Typographical norms and visual marking of foreign fragments in Pushkin’s editions thus do not merely decorate the text but constitute an integral part of its reading: they organize readerly activity, preserve the historical-cultural code, and create an additional dimension of multicultural perception of the literary work.

Thus, the use of foreign insertions in Pushkin’s prose was conditioned by diverse sociocultural and pragmatic preconditions organically woven into the historical-literary context of the first third of the nineteenth century. French and German, as symbols of cultural capital and attributes of high society, permeated salon and academic discourse, enabling Pushkin—through his characters’ speech—to convey their level of education, intellectual interests, and degree of engagement with European Enlightenment thought. Insertions ranging from “cher ami” to “das ist interessant” functioned as a universal code allowing the author to economize textual resources while instantly shaping the reader’s perception of the characters’ social rank and aesthetic preferences.

Maintaining a balance between Russian and foreign linguistic codes, Pushkin not only stylized the plot but also constructed a complex dynamic structure in which foreign fragments served as speech markers of thematic shifts, emotional states, or levels of formality. Depending on the communicative situation—whether a duel scene punctuated by the French battle cry “à l’attaque!” or a private conversation interrupted by “ah, mon Dieu!”—the author varied the frequency and form of insertions, enhancing psychological plausibility and narrative drama.

Conclusion

Historical and political realities—such as the Napoleonic wars and academic reforms—expanded the spectrum of borrowings: military commands, medical and legal terminology, and Orientalist motifs such as “bakshish” and “khanuma” introduced documentary authenticity and reflected the socialization of new professional and imperial practices. Within the academic and publishing sphere, the formatting of foreign fragments (italics, preservation of original spelling, distinctive punctuation) became visual “triggers,” signaling the need to switch cultural codes and ensuring the depth of multicultural perception.

The sociocultural preconditions and pragmatic functions of foreign insertions in Pushkin’s prose form a complex, multilayered continuum in which each foreign fragment fulfills multiple tasks: marking status and education, regulating narrative rhythm and dramaturgy, immersing the reader in professional or military environments, and simultaneously creating visual and cognitive markers within the edition. Understanding these interconnections is critically important for further structural and semantic analysis and for developing effective translation strategies capable of preserving the semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic integrity of the original text.

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