

Language Lessons, Palipaduazennie Aleksander Komarov

According to public opinion polls in Belarus about the future of its political developments and international economic relations, people's opinion are equally divided over whether the country should become part of the EU or remain in union with Russia. Many Belarusian intellectuals consider this result as 'dramatic' and see therein a reason why the Belarusian language is not a common one even in a country with a population of 9.5 million, of which over eighty percent are 'ethnic Belarusian'. Impassioned discussions about the language of the country are held in Belarus between old concepts about a language as a base for national identity and more modern ideas about a language as a construct, which are reflected on intensively. Russian was one language of the Belarusian modernisation from 1918 until the late 1980s. During the early years of Perestroika Belarusian became a form of resistance. In the new Law About Languages it was fixed as an official state language but already five years later the law was changed and both Belarusian and Russian have been indexed as state languages; using one or another language is often considered a statement.

Palipaduazennie

The word is an object, indifferently available to any subject. I did not create a new word but instead altered existing words and fused them together. I have used Latin plant names and Belarusian vocabulary. In the film these words have no referents, they don't have any meanings, they refer to themselves, they're abstract validations.

I invited Belarusian emigrants living in Amsterdam to participate in a language experiment. Many Belarusian's don't use the Belarusian language in their daily lives. According to a study done by the Belarusian government in 2009, 72% of Belarusian's speak Russian at home, while Belarusian is used by only 11.9% of the population. I was interested in researching the roll their "native" language played in their life in general, and how changes from new surroundings reflect on the Belarusian language.

Language fits best within a specific environment, but outside of its native setting it becomes a flexible object. Amongst emigrants, language isn't necessarily critical in establishing their identities. However, language can determine new customs, for instance, communicational hierarchies and public status within society. Prior to meeting, I was aware that no one in the group could speak Belarusian, so I planned on organising some Belarusian language lessons for these Belarusian emigrants - but in more of an experimental way.

Firstly, I asked each member of the group to describe one word they associated with immigration. Some of the words mentioned were: analysis, evaluation, environment and dream. We could not stop, there were so many words related to the topic. I asked each person to select one word and read the word as it was translated in the Belarusian dictionary. The intention was to have the language, sounded out with the correct pronunciation of the words. The following day, I invited the Belarusian group to a sound studio. I wanted to record accurate pronunciations of the words - but of course, we had no way of knowing if the articulations were right. So to move forward, we started using the Latin names of plants and mixing them with Belarusian vocabulary, so that they sounded like Belarusian, but would be foreign to Belarusian speakers - a new Belarusian language. We brought inventiveness to the pronunciation and sounds of the words without worrying about whether or not it was correct. By the end of the day we were joking around using the new words.