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Research paper



The Role of the Russian Language in the Historic and Cultural Development of the Arctic Region of the Russian Federation (as Exemplified by the Murmansk Region)

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze the functioning of the Russian language within the ethnic space of the Murmansk Region. The analysis of the state statistical and archive documents for the Murmansk Region has shown that the Russian language has dominated within the region since at least the 18th century, and this had its obvious economic and communicative advantages, in particular, in education. The Saami, the indigenous small-numbered people of the Murmansk Region, understood and mastered the conversational Russian language since the 18th century. The Russian language dominates within the current polyethnic linguistic environment of the Murmansk Region due to the numerical superiority of the Russians in the region, as well as due to its position as the language of the dominant ethnic group.

Keywords: *The Russian language, language domination, polyethnic linguistic environment.*

1. Introduction

Such transboundary region in the northwest Russia as the Murmansk Region presents great value for productive cooperation within the strategic Arctic region. The Murmansk Region as a near-border Northern region, on the one hand, is an administrative unit, a subject (a constituent entity) of the Russian Federation, and on the other hand, is a part of the adjacent countries called the Barents Region.

The Kola North viewed as a socio-cultural area within the Murmansk Region can be united with several other Northern territories based on a number of characteristics. The processes of populating and industrial development of the "northern territories", as well as the trends of demographic development and interethnic communication, are similar in many ways. The northern industrial cities are similar in typology. Yet the Kola North has distinctive features that make it different compared to other "northern territories". In the mind of the Kola Peninsula inhabitant, the notion of the Kola North, together with the geopolitical and historical representations, is associated with the image of a northerner. The idea of regional identity is important within our research. The regional identity is understood as a person's understanding of belonging to a community of people separated from the others by specific territorial and administrative boundaries [1]. It can be considered as a high degree of adapting to a certain place. Thus, as Razumova justly states, accepting oneself as a Northerner is not strictly determined by one's ethnic background, nor the period of living in the North, not the fact of birth, nor other social-demographic or biographical factors [2].

It is important that the presence of various ethnic groups and their coexistence within the Kola North creates additional conditions for the formation of the regional identity.

The timeliness of our study is determined by the necessity to define trends and prospects of the historical and cultural development of the Russian Arctic region taking into account its multicultural development and forms of existence [3].

The article aims to analyze the functioning of the Russian language within the ethnic environment of the Murmansk Region.

The novelty of the research is based, first of all, on the material it studies – the socio-linguistic processes in the Murmansk Region as a part of the Barents Region's geopolitical area. The unique nature of such region as the Murmansk Region has not been yet determined linguistically; the linguistic domination within the region has not been studied.

2. Methods

Determining the assumptions of the interethnic integration is an important trend of ethnic and sociological studies. Based on the example of the transformation of "the Muscovites", Arutyunyan shows that in the megapolis of Moscow, along with the growth of cultural mosaic, the process of fading differentiation of ethnic groups is developing intensively, accompanied by expansion of possibilities of interethnic integration. The results of the survey that included more than 3,000 people have shown that traditional ethnic boundaries within the Muscovite community are actually disappearing, and that for the overwhelming majority the ethnic identity is relatively indicative [4].

In our study, we used the method of analyzing the state statistical documents and the archive documents of the Murmansk Region State Archives. We studied 1,105 sheets of the archive documents. The results of the analysis show the clear tendency: there are mostly official documents in the archives (decrees, decisions, notes of officials, programs, and reports); private correspondence is presented to a lesser extent. The tone of the documents is posi-

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tive. It must be noted that all the documents record both failures and achievements of the linguistic construction policy.

3. Results

In the scientific literature, the units of the socio-linguistic analysis of a region are the linguistic situation, social and communicative environment, and polyethnic linguistic environment.

A linguistic situation is defined as the aggregate of linguistic formations, that is, languages and language varieties serving a certain society (ethnic group and polyethnic community) within the boundaries of a certain region, a political and territorial union or a state. The linguistic situation can be described both within the borders of a state and within the boundaries of special cultural areas. In their research, Vinogradov, Koval, and Porkhomovsky make a concept of a communicative environment the main and the initial concept, which cannot be narrowed down to the concepts of a social group and ethnic community. Unlike a social group, a communicative environment is a fragment of population with its basic ethnic and linguistic characteristics. Yet the definition of a communicative environment, unlike that of an ethnic community, does not contain any limitations related to its ethnic heterogeneity, and thus has no presumed cultural or linguistic uniformity. The boundaries of communicative environment are neither boundaries of this or that ethnic community nor the language distribution boundaries; communicative environment is distinguished by the degree of intensity of the internal communicative connections, which are characteristic for certain areas and from which a general picture of a country or a geographic area consists [5]. In her research, Bauer understands the linguistic Sprachraum (language space) of the region as a regional systemic-semantic field in the aggregate of interrelated features and characteristics that change dynamically under the influence of new ethnodemographic and geopolitical conditions. According to the author, the regional systemic-semantic field consists of languages of indigenous inhabitants, languages of diasporas, and languages of immigrants, hence the multilingualism with obvious domination of the Russian language as the language of the dominant ethnic group and preservation of "islands" of other national languages [6]. Karelina interprets the concept of the communicative environment of a polyethnic region as a polylinguocultural phenomenon understood as the aggregate of features of linguocultural nature formed (and forming) within the general spatial layout of cultures [7].

Our research aims to underline the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural factor, and not the social one, though it goes without saying that social characteristics will remain relevant to a certain extent.

4. Discussion

In our opinion, the modern socio-linguistic approaches to describing a transboundary region require taking into account factors of regionalization and globalization, of ethnic and regional identity, and the linguistic factor – evaluating the knowledge of the mother/nonmother tongue, which will allow making conclusions regarding the presence of a specific language model within a territory that is subject to joint action of centrifugal and centripetal forces.

The Murmansk Region is a territory inhabited by various ethnic groups: according to the 2002 census, currently people of 160 ethnic groups live within the territory of the Murmansk Region [8]. 124 of them are recorded in the list "The 2002 Ethnic Composition of the Murmansk Region Population" [9] and 152 people are listed in "Other nationalities" [10].

A decrease in the number of other ethnic groups' representatives who consider Russian to be their mother tongue is linked to the fact that during the Soviet period there was the stereotype that speaking only one language was enough. Consequently, according to Dyachkov, in some cases speakers of national languages were so influenced by the state corruptive policy that they disowned their mother tongue and switched to Russian. Except the Chechens and the Ingush, ethnic groups decreased everywhere. During the period from 1979 to 1989, the number of Bashkirs in the Bashkortostan who considered their national language to be their mother tongue reduced by 10.3 %, the number of Karelians in Karelia – by 10.3%, etc. [11].

Since 1991, the number and the composition of the Murmansk Region population has changed: the inhabitants are fewer, and they are getting older, the region ranks 57th in the Russian Federation by the general birth rate factor and the 20th by the death rate factor and has the highest divorce factor in the North-Western District. Within the period from 1990 to 2003, the positive migration balance decreased, same as the number of internally displaced persons [12]. Compared to the 1989 Population Census, the number of the region's population decreased by 272.1 thousand people (23.4%), and the rural population decreased more than the urban population. The main reason for the population decline is migration loss [8]. A portrait of a 2007 Murmansk Region inhabitant can be presented as follows: the average age is 35.6 years, the sex – female (females prevail in the population structure by gender composition), nationality – mostly Russian, mother tongue and knowledge of languages – the Russian language, domicile – cities, level of education – basic general, employment – economy.

The Russians are still the largest ethnic group in the Murmansk Region. Their number amounts to 760.9 thousand people (85.2%). The Ukrainians are 6.4%, and the Belarusians – 2.3% of the total region population. Compared to the 1989 Census, the number of the Ukrainians and the Belarusians decreased almost by half, the number of the Jewish – by 64.8%, the number of the Lithuanians – by 52.9%, the number of the Mordvins – by 41.2%, the number of the Moldovans – by 38.6%, the number of the Poles and the Udmurts – by 37.8%, the number of the Karelians – by 37.1%, and the number of the Tatars – by 30.7%. During the same period, the number of the Azerbaijani and the Lezgins increased by 1.7 times, and the number of the Armenians increased by 1.3 times. According to the authors of the report "The Main Results of the 2002 National Population Census in the Murmansk region" [13], such changes in the ethnic composition were determined by the influence of three factors – natural movement of population, external migration processes after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and changes in the ethnic self-identification influenced by cross-marriages and other phenomena [8].

Actually, the changes in the ethnic composition of the Murmansk Region are not limited to the above only. The analysis of the table "Changes in the ethnic composition of the Murmansk region, 1989-2002" [10] shows that, first, the number of such ethnic groups as the Bashkirs, the Bulgarians, the Nenets, and the Romani changed insignificantly; second, the number of such ethnic groups as the Avars, the Dargins, the Kumyks, the Nogais, the Tabasarans, and the Tuvans has increased significantly; and third, the number of such ethnic groups as the Jews, the Kyrgyz, and the Estonians has decreased significantly. In our opinion, all these facts have different reasons: the increase in numbers of the Avars, the Dargins, the Kumyks, the Nogais, the Tabasarans, and the Tuvans is very likely linked to changed ethnic self-identity of these peoples, and the decrease of numbers of the Jews, the Kyrgyz, and the Estonians due to similar changes in ethnic self-identity was determined by emigration.

Among the population of the Murmansk Region, ethnic groups including more than 1,000 people are the Russians (85.2% of the region's population), the Ukrainians (6.4%), the Belarusians (2.3%), the Tatars (0.9%), the Azerbaijani (0.5%), the Chuvash (0.3%), the Mordvins (0.27%), the Armenians, the Komi-Zyryan, the Karelians, and the Moldovans (0.2%), the Saami (0.19%), the Bashkirs, the Komi-Izhem, the Mari, the Germans, and the Poles (0.1%).

Among the languages that the population of the Murmansk Region speaks, beside Russian, are English (8.6%), Ukrainian (5%), German (2.4%), Belarusian (0.9%), Azerbaijani (0.5%), and Moldo-

van (0.2%). 82 of 124 ethnic groups speak Russian, that is, the number of people of such ethnic groups who speak Russian is the same as the total number of people of this ethnic group. We should note that, according to the table "Population of the Murmansk region by ethnicity and level of Russian proficiency in 2002" [10], there is a difference in 1 unit for 14 ethnic groups, which, in our opinion, means that the census data do not always provide substantial grounds for scientific conclusions. Besides, the fact that 1,175 Russians do not speak Russian is a surprise (according to the census data, out of 760,862 Russians only 759,687 speak Russian).

In 2002, in the Murmansk Region 1,995 representatives of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North were registered [14], which amounted to 0.19% of the total population: the Kets (the Ostyaks speaking the Ket language), the Koryaks, the Kumandins, the Mansi, the Nanai, the Nenets, the Saami (the Lapps), the Ulch, the Khanty, the Chuvans, the Chukchi, the Shors (Shorians), the Evenks (the Tungusic people speaking the Evenk language), the Evens (the Tungusic people speaking the Even language), and the Yukaghir. In 2002, the Saami amounted to 88.6% of the total number of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North [15] (in 1979, their number was 90.5%), the Nenets – to 8.1% (7.7% in 1979), the Evenks – to 0.6% (0.4% in 1979). The number of the Khanty and the Shors (Shorians) is 0.5% of the total indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, the number of the Mansi – 0.3%, the Kumandins – 0.25%, the Kets and the Chukchi – 0.2%, the Evens – 0.15%, the Koryaks – 0.1%, the Nanai, the Ulch, the Chuvans, and the Yukaghir – 0.05%. The dynamics of numbers of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North within the Murmansk Region are obvious. The increase in their numbers is a result of the ethnic self-identity: more and more representatives of a people identify themselves as part of their ethnic group and state their ethnic identity. Yet, the tremendous work carried out by voluntary organizations representing the interests of the Saami (who amount to 0.19% of the population of the Murmansk Region) does not lead to an increase in the number of people who speak the Saami freely. Kuznetsova states that the history knows a lot of cases both when people changed a language yet preserving their old self-identity, and vice-versa – loss of the ethnic self-identity while preserving the linguistic one. The first statement can be exemplified by the Qaratays, the Teryukhans, and the Shoksha, the communities who preserved their ethnic self-identity in spite of the loss of their languages [16]. We believe that the same can be applied to the Saami.

The Saami were always surrounded by the Russian-speaking people in the Kola Peninsula. According to Ushakov, the results of the 1785 census showed that all the Saami men and 70% of women spoke Russian (conversational). The Lapps (the Saami) knew a lot of Russian songs, fairy-tales, and proverbs. While adopting a great many things from the Russians, the Lapps preserved their mother tongue and their unique culture [17]. According to the 1995 statistical data, the most part of the Saami living in Krasnoshchelye and Revda settlements stated that Russian was their mother tongue (85% and 75%, accordingly). The opinion prevailed (92% of those asked) that schoolchildren should study both in the Saami and the Russian languages.

In many aspects, the assimilation of the Kola Peninsula Saami depended on those ethnic groups with which the Saami contacted regarding household and economic life – the Russians, the Finns, the Komi-Izhem, the Samoyedic, the Norwegians, and the Karelians. According to Alymov who studied this issue in the 1920s, the Saami communicated with the Russians along the whole territory of the Kola Peninsula, and with other ethnic groups – only in a certain part of the Kola Peninsula. The Saami had economic and cultural ties to the Norwegians and the Karelians since ancient times but by the beginning of the 20th century, those ties became weak. As a result of contacting each ethnic group and connecting with it, the Saami lost more than gained (lost agricultural lands and pastures, transitioned to a settled lifestyle, cultural influences in their clothes, household life, and meals).

Marriages between the Russians and the Saami were not rare, yet such marriages almost always led to loss of the ethnic Saami features. A Saami woman marrying a Russian or a Finn stops being Saami, and a Saami man transitioning to a settled lifestyle and marrying a Russian woman soon becomes Russian himself. According to Alymov, in the 1920s a strong example of the above were the Saami living in the eastern part of the Kola Peninsula: by transitioning to a settled way of life and marrying Russians, the most part of them became Russians. Yet, representatives of ethnic groups having a settled lifestyle, even if they married Saami, did not follow them to the tundra, nor changed their lifestyle for the one they believed to be inferior [18].

Currently, the number of mixed marriages of the Saami amounts to approximately 50%. The data of the 2000 report by the State Environmental Protection Committee for the Murmansk Region show that today there are only few young Saami families. Approximately 80% of the Saami in Russia aged under 50 were born in mixed interethnic marriages. That is why they forget their mother tongue, they are indifferent towards their native crafts and, as a result, they have lost their lifestyle. Unfortunately, a lot of Saami remember their ethnic self-identity only when state benefits are on the table.

According to the archive documents, the data on the level of Russian proficiency of Saami school-children in the Murmansk Region in the 1930s are contradictory: on the one hand, it is stated that pupils of Saami schools do not know Russian but know Russian political and Finnish songs (from the letter of Antonov, P. to Chernyakov, Z. dated 12/1/1934 [19]), on the other hand, a note also dated 1934 says that nowhere (except in Lovozero village) schools teach pupils in the Saami language [20], which means that pupils were taught in Russian. It should be noted that in those years, children of various ethnic groups studied in schools of the Murmansk Region: in 1933-1934 school year in Babinsky school there were 50 schoolchildren, among them 11 Saami, 5 Finns, 3 Karelians and 29 Russians [21], and in Padunsky school out of 74 schoolchildren there were 38 Saami, 18 Finns, and 13 Russians. Thus, the share of Russian-speaking schoolchildren varied from 58 to 17%.

Even in those years, the Russian language was very important for the indigenous population of the Murmansk Region. This can be confirmed by the fact that the Kildin Saami dialect (language) was singled out among the Tulom Saami and the Jokanga Saami to be the basis for creating Kola Saami writing system because in the areas where the Kildin Saami prevailed there were well-prepared teachers speaking both Russian and Saami.

Missionaries taught Russian to Saami since the end of the 19th century, which is confirmed by the "Azbuka" (ABC Book) printed in Arkhangelsk in 1895 [22] that compensated for Saami not mastering written Russian, regardless the fact that they spoke good conversational Russian.

In the 1970s, only 50% of Saami children spoke their mother tongue but all of them spoke Russian. That is why a certain scientific casus occurred: in 1985 a Saami-Russian dictionary (edited by Kuruch, R.D.) was published by a Moscow publishing house under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences [23] in 1,720 printed copies, though, in the society's opinion, it should have been the Russian-Saami dictionary and not vice-versa, as the Saami spoke Russian perfectly and did not their mother tongue [24].

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the state statistical and archive documents for the Murmansk Region has shown that the Russian language has dominated within the region since at least the 18th century, and this had its obvious economic (see the concept of "Russian-Speaking" economics, [25]) and communicative advantages, in particular, in education. The Russian language dominates within the current

polyethnic linguistic environment of the Murmansk Region due to numerical superiority of the Russians in the region.

The Russians are by a long shot the biggest ethnic group in the region, mostly urban population. In our opinion, the trend of a decrease in the number of other ethnic groups' representatives, who consider Russian to be their mother tongue, is linked to the fact that during the Soviet period there existed the stereotype that speaking only one language – Russian – was enough.

The results of the analysis of the archive documents show the reverse picture: the school statistical data show that there were 58 to 17% Russian schoolchildren in country schools, the mother language lessons were taught in Saami for all ethnic groups (the Finns, the Komi, the Saami, and the Russians). The Russian language prevailed in the situation when schoolchildren did not understand different Saami languages: 4 Saami languages were recorded in the Murmansk Region. See: "According to the statement by Comrade Anvelt who was also present at a lesson taught by Gerassimov, the latter had to provide explanations in Russian as pupils could not understand him at all (as he was speaking the Tulom dialect)" [26]. Yet, the indigenous people of the Murmansk Region could understand and speak conversational Russian since at least the 18th century.

The prospects of the research include the analysis of the so-called contact phenomena, that is, if speakers of one language use another language (first of all, Russian) when speaking to another speaker of their language and to what extent, and to analyze, if possible, which language units they use. Thus, a speaker of Kildin Saami who speaks both Russian and English freely, lives in the Murmansk Region and communicates with her husband and children in Russian, when talking to speakers of her mother tongue uses such Russian words as недавно (recently), мобильник (mobile phone), понятно (understood), плёнка (a film), карточка (a card), наверно (probably), потому что (because), уже (already), вот (so), так вот (now then), ну (well), во сколько (at what time), родительская суббота (Saturday of Remembering the Departed Parents), Троица (the Trinity), после обеда (after lunch), может (may be), праздник (a holiday), сколько (how much), менять (to change), шестьдесят девять (sixty-nine). In our opinion, in this case we can speak about a change of the code, that is, a speech strategy under the influence of which certain words of another language and longer speech fragments are included in the flow of speech. In this case, we should evaluate how skillfully speakers use the change of code and if in their speech there occur indecision, pauses, or repetitions.

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