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***Research paper***

# Functioning of the Russian Language in Transborder Territories of the Arctic Region (As Exemplified by Northern Norway)

**Olga Nikolaevna Ivanishcheva, Anastasiya Vyacheslavovna Koreneva, Inna Vitalevna Ryzkova, Alexandra Vyacheslavovna Burtseva, Lubov Anatolievna Rotaryanu**

*Murmansk Arctic State University, Captain Egorov St., 15, Murmansk, 183038, Russia*

**Abstract**

The research relevance is explained by the need to determine trends and prospects for the historical and cultural development of the Arctic Region with due regard to its multicultural evolution and existence forms, as well as by the importance of addressing the burning issue of the functioning of a national language in the context of globalization. The article aims to identify common trends in the functioning of the Russian language in transborder territories of the Arctic Region (the border area between the Murmansk Region and Northern Norway). The research novelty is in revealing the situation around minority languages of the Russian expat community living in Northern Norway. The article demonstrates that the Russian language is used in everyday communication, advertisements, announcements and signboards in the transborder region of Northern Norway by locals and a large number of Russian tourists but it has not become dominant among the population of the city of Kirkenes. At the same time, the linguistic isolation of Russian-speaking and Norwegian-speaking groups is obvious and is characterized by certain asymmetry like the relationship between Norway and Russia as a whole.

***Keywords***: *language supremacy, polyethnic linguistic situation, Russian language*

## 1. Introduction

The urgency of this study is connected with the need to identify trends and prospects for the historical and cultural development of the Arctic Region with due regard to its multicultural evolution and existence forms, as well as with the importance of addressing the burning issue of the functioning of a national language in the context of globalization.

The authors of the article study the functioning of the Russian language in order to solve micro- and macrosociolinguistic problems for the formation of an efficient linguistic policy in the region. Describing the functioning of the Russian language in the Arctic Region and measures of its preservation in a foreign environment throughout the region history, they have revealed changes in the ethnic consciousness and the transformation of ethnic groups in a multinational environment in this transborder territory into the community of "northerners". The Murmansk Region as a transborder territory in the north-west of Russia represents a valuable resource for productive interaction in the strategic Arctic space. The leading role of the Russian culture and the Russian language in the Arctic zone is practically assured. It is necessary to determine the degree of this influence on linguistic, cultural and political factors of the region's development in the diachronic and synchronic aspects, and outline trends in changing social and political relations in the Arctic Region from the 16$^{th}$ century to the present day.

The specific functioning of the Russian language in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is described in modern literature. Moreover, some scientific works dwell on the functioning of words borrowed into Russian from the Yakut language, showcase results of studying the functioning of the Russian language in Yakutia since the 17$^{th}$ century (based on official papers), reveal peculiar features of the Russian language in the feudal era, give rise to a bilingual thematic dictionary (Russian-Yakut), and help carry out experimental studies of linguistic consciousness [1]. The functioning of languages in transborder regions often addresses a number of more global issues: contact phenomena, the preservation of minority languages, the specific use of language in domestic and official spheres, and the language commodification.

The article aims to identify common trends in the functioning of the Russian language in the transborder territory of the Arctic Region, i.e. the border area between the Murmansk Region and Northern Norway.

The research novelty mainly consists in revealing the situation around minority languages in the Russian expat community living in Northern Norway.

## 2. Methods

The methods used in the research include the analysis of the literature on the problem, questionnaires, polling, observation and interviews.

## 3. Results

Professor J.P. Nielsen points out that the relationship between Norway and Russia can be called asymmetric because Norwegians began to learn Russian before Russians got acquainted with Norwegian [2, p. 35]. The first proof is the presence of such a contact language as Russenorsk in relations between Norway and Russia.

Language contacts between Northwestern Russia and Northern Norway are presented in works describing the Russenorsk pidgin [3; 4; 5, p. 141].

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Since then, contacts of countries, peoples, cultures and languages have been actively developing, including in the framework of the Barents cooperation. The Murmansk Region, the subject of this study, is an administrative unit and a subject of the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and a part of nearby countries, called the Barents Region, on the other hand.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR, Barents Region) occupies the European part that lies beyond the Arctic Circle and covers an area of 1.23 million $km^2$.

The creation of the Barents Region and its historical background are described in sufficient detail by historians and politicians [6; 7; 8; 9; 10].

One of the main factors for the successful functioning of the Euro-Arctic Barents Cooperation and the region as a whole, according to the founders of the regional construction concept, is the formation of a common northern identity and an interethnic sense of unification. There are certain supporting factors, namely: common nature-climatic conditions characterized by a harsh climate, fragile nature, considerable distance from national centers, low population density and common historical and trade contacts between Norway and the Russian Pomorye, and the genetic affinity of the Finnish and Karelian ethnoses.

There are several scientific approaches to the definition of ethnicity (primordialistic, "social constructivism", instrumentalistic, etc.) but for the present state of the problem it is important to understand that ethnicity in every person is primary and the degree of its relevance and expression is determined (constructed) by external social factors and personal attitudes of the individual [11, pp. 9-11]. Language plays a significant role in creating group consciousness and building a symbol of collective identity [12, p. 95].

## 4. Discussion

While analyzing the literature on the subject, the authors have singled out several key points in the study of the functioning of the Russian language in Norway, in general, and in Northern Norway, in particular, i.e. the contribution of Slavic scholars from Norway to teaching Norwegians the Russian language and the role of the native (Russian) language in the development of immigrant children.

Since the end of the 19th century, the scholars Hans Vlom, Olaf Broch, Christian S. Stang and Arne Gallis had been developing courses on the grammar, history and phonetics of the Russian language. An interest in the Russian language was associated with political and economic events (the development of trade in the Russian Pomorye in the late 19th century, the liberation of Northern Norway from Nazi occupants in 1944 and the beginning of Perestroika in 1985). Although A.M. Polovinkina's article focuses on the interest of Norwegians in the Russian culture and Russian literature, this interest seems to be based on economic and political conditions [13; 14, pp. 33-34]. The commodification of the Russian language in the territory of Northern Norway is described in M. Olnova's article that recognizes the commodification as a new sociolinguistic phenomenon and marks its specificity in relation to the Russian language in the city of Kirkenes (by no means a resort). The author of this article analyzes the examples of the linguistic landscape of Northern Norway, including signs, advertisements, announcements and inscriptions. M. Olnova argues that business cannot be done only in English, i.e. one needs to speak partners' native languages to avoid misunderstanding [15, p. 589]. The observation on the functioning of the Russian language in Kirkenes has confirmed this idea since customs services of both countries use Russian and Norwegian (through interpreters) at their meetings to ensure that all provisions are clearly understood. In addition, the knowledge of the buyer's native language attracts new customers to shops and restaurants. However, in the case of Kirkenes this knowledge is provided not by the study of the Russian language by Norwegians but by the involvement of Russian-speaking employees like it is done all over the world. For instance, this practice in Paris differs from that in Kirkenes since the number of Russian-speaking sellers in the European capital depends on the demand for goods by Russian tourists. If the situation changes, Russian sellers can be replaced with Chinese ones. In Kirkenes, Russian-speaking employees are most often business owners, and since the flow of Russian tourists does not decrease with the development of economic ties, it makes no sense to replace Russian-speaking employees with Chinese ones.

The key role in the development of transborder tourism with Russia was played by the introduction of a visa-free regime.

There are some countries for Russian citizens with a free visa regime, a visa given on the border, special or facilitated entry conditions and a minimum period for issuing visas. The countries that have concluded Intergovernmental Agreements on the abolition of visas with Russia are Poland and Norway.

Since May 29, 2012, residents of border towns and villages of the Murmansk Region (Nikel, Pechenga, Zapolyarnyi and Korzunov) have been enjoying a visa-free regime with Norway. As a result, Norway expected to increase the flow of tourists, and the Russian borderland dreamed of a chance to develop its infrastructure.

The situation changed in 2016. The imposition of economic sanctions against Russia after the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine led to a sharp decline in the tourist flow from Russia to the EU member countries. Despite the existing confrontation and significantly complicated interstate relations, further development of cooperation should take place in these regions since it meets interests of their inhabitants. This opinion was expressed at the 5th European forum on a transborder dialogue that was attended by representatives of 14 European countries and took place in Nikel (Russia) and Kirkenes (Norway) on November 6-7, 2014 [16].

The language functioning in a transborder region depends not only on economic and political factors but also on the attitude of its inhabitants to each other and to neighbouring countries.

Between June and September 2012, the authors conducted a survey of residents of the Murmansk Region of different age, nationality and residence duration.

The analysis of the questionnaires filled by young residents of the Murmansk Region (from 18 to 30 years old) has outlined priorities of the younger generation. The youth living in the Murmansk Region associates the North with cold, tundra, polar night and polar day, constant shortage of the sun, hills, northern lights and unique northern nature. The character of northern people (they are known for will power, steadfastness and perseverance) is crucial in the perception of the North by the youth of the Murmansk Region. Murmansk (or any other town in the Murmansk Region) is connected with the notion of "small homeland" but many young people are not going to stay there since they are frightened of cold temperatures and the lack of prospects. Many perceive themselves not only as residents of some city (Murmansk, Severomorsk, etc.) but also as Russian citizens. Therefore, respondents think that to be a Russian means to live in Russia, know its history, act for the good of the country, love Russia, protect it and strive for its prosperity, have Russian parents, speak Russian, be part of the Russian culture, know its literature, geography, be kind, sympathetic and open-minded. In Russia, young people are not completely satisfied with the current situation as they do not believe the government, recognize the contradictory nature of its history but admit that they love their country the way it is.

The closest neighbor, Norway, attracts much attention of the youth in the Murmansk Region. Young residents of the Murmansk Region know cities of Norway (they recognize the capital – Oslo, university towns – mostly Tromsø, the border city of Kirkenes). They would like to travel around Scandinavia (but mostly they want to travel around Europe without choosing one particular country). The image of Norway for these respondents is associated with the image of a civilized fjord country with a measured, calm life. According to young residents of the Murmansk Region, Norwegians are people who love their country, care about nature, live separately and trust their government. Obviously, Norway is the

antipode of Russia (Russians do not trust the government – Norwegians do; Russians are not sure of the future – Norwegians are; everything is unstable in Russia – Norwegians are quiet and calm). The city of Kirkenes is perceived as a cozy and compactly arranged city, a peculiar place where two cultures intersect, a border town where a large number of Russian-speaking population lives.

The Russian youth considers the Barents cooperation as a positive phenomenon since it develops relationships, strengthens trust and friendly ties throughout the territory, and contributes to the rapprochement of Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland. It is an important aspect in the region life, which has significant impact on Murmansk. The Barents cooperation can provide new opportunities in the dialogue of cultures, economic and political relations. However, young Russians regard the border as an old Soviet symbol, including checkpoints, fences, border guards, customs, visas, barriers, border posts, control, posts, men in uniform and German shepherds. It is quite interesting since there are no shepherds on the border with Norway and Finland but their image resurrects memories of the war. Only some of young Russians named more neutral or modern associations with the "border" word like a horizon, opportunities, a place that united. The latter associations are rare; they are found only once but they are seen in a positive light. Due to political changes, the border is viewed as a place of unification rather than separation. However, the prospects of a visa-free regime are negatively estimated by the young Russian generation. They think this regime is unlikely to be introduced (in Russia, many things are prohibited without good reasons). What can change in cities like Nikel? The only change is that more people will leave. Hardly anything will change. Maybe they will build a couple of houses and roads will be repaired in some places. There will be more Norwegians. Nothing will change for the better, that's for sure. However, there is also a positive vision: if a visa-free regime is introduced, Murmansk and other cities of the region will develop, and Murmansk will be improved in accordance with European standards.

The perception of the North by young and elderly residents of the Murmansk region is the same (it is wilderness, cold and permafrost, good and kind people). The analysis of the questionnaires filled by senior residents of Murmansk (from 70 to 85 years old) has revealed different perception of northern territories by people belonging to the generations divided by an entire era – the era of socialism. Elderly people associate the city of Kirkenes with the war, the liberation of northern Norway by Soviet troops, and the introduction of a visa-free regime is assessed as both negative (the life will be worse because of too many foreigners) and positive (it will be better, the areas will develop). The border is associated with a traffic ban. They either have not heard of the Barents cooperation, or only know that it is a cultural exchange and a form of cooperation.

With an interval of four years in June 2012 and 2016, the authors have conducted a survey among residents of the Murmansk Region of different age, nationality and residence duration. The comparative analysis of their questionnaires has demonstrated a change in value orientations, especially among young residents of the region.

The poll of 2016 has showed that political and economic changes affected mainly the youth's perception of their country, city and life prospects.

The native city for young residents of the Murmansk Region is associated with their families, relatives and friends but an increasing number of respondents write about their desire to go to another city. When asked about the direction of their trip, more respondents answer that they would like to travel around the country (the Far East, the Crimea, Siberia). The patriotic component has clearly increased together with pessimism in relation to life prospects and professional activities. Russia and Norway are usually labeled as "neighbouring countries", and a visa-free regime between their cities does not bring a joyful feeling any more rather than indifference, and sometimes negative emotions: nothing will happen, migrants will come, they can take all the jobs. When asked about associations with the "border" concept, respondents express mostly negative reactions, including a barrier, edge, division and even quite unexpected – "order in the country".

While studying the role of the native (Russian) language in the development of immigrant children, it is especially important to discuss methods of teaching Russian as a native language, which is the main objective of seminars and conferences held in Norway [17]. The linguistic behavior of Russian immigrants living in Northern Norway in close proximity with the Russian border was thoroughly studied in A.S. Rogova's article [14] that called linguistic contact phenomena the Norwegian-Russian language. The researcher claims that there is no specific use of the Russian language in Kirkenes, it is considered natural to speak Russian in this city and does not cause negative emotions in the local society [14, p. 34]. The authors consider this situation even more categorical as the population of the Norwegian city of Kirkenes is clearly divided into two disjoint groups: Russians and Norwegians. Russian residents mostly speak the Norwegian language, while Norwegians do not know Russian or know only a few phrases. Communication is immediately oriented towards interlocutors: Russians speak with other Russians in Russian, they use Norwegian with Norwegians; Norwegians speak with Russian immigrants in Norwegian and use English to communicate with Russian tourists.

V.V. Tevlina conducted a study on the preservation of "Russianness" during the integration of Russians (especially Russian children) into the Norwegian society. Her research has showed the same trends: Russian children communicate with Russians in Russian, and when they need to speak with Norwegians they use Norwegian or English [18; 19].

This study of the language situation has demonstrated that, according to teachers of the Russian language (the teacher of the Russian language at the gymnasium of Kirkenes Eivind Sætre, the teacher of the Russian language at the Adult Education Centre of Kirkenes, Lisa Stepanova), the knowledge of the Russian language is valued in Kirkenes due to a significant number of tourists from Russia and active international cooperation in business until 2014. In this regard, teaching Norwegians Russian as a foreign language has been carried out in Kirkenes for a number of years. The average number of Norwegians who studied Russian at the Adult Education Centre was 20 people per year, but no more than 10 people completed the full course. In Lisa Stepanova's opinion, the number of students reduces due to the complexity of Russian grammar that repels those Norwegians who were not ready for tense language training.

In addition to adult courses, the Russian language in Kirkenes is studied at schools (analogue of the Russian secondary school) and gymnasiums (comparable with the Russian senior classes but the age of pupils is higher – 17-18 years). In the secondary school of Kirkenes, Russian is taught in a two-year course to schoolchildren of 14-17 years old. Vera Norbot, a native speaker with pedagogical but not specialized linguistic education (she is a PE teacher), teaches Russian at school. There are two school forms that study Russian (one with pupils at the age of 14-15 years, another with students at the age of 16-17 years), with 20 pupils each. The Russian proficiency among Norwegian pupils is determined by a teacher as basic and elementary depending on the first or second year of learning. The project the authors carried out within the framework of the Federal Target Program "Days of the Russian Language and Russian Culture in Northern Norway" (2017) included a number of school activities and offered interactive work forms for Norwegian and Russian pupils. The second-year pupils have limitedly used Russian in communication with Russian fellow students but the first-year pupils have not been ready for it yet. Their active vocabulary did not exceed 300-400 basic words.

According to the deputy director of this school, 15-20% of pupils are children from mixed or Russian families and speak fluent Russian.

The gymnasium of Kirkenes is located 6 km from the city. Students are trained there after high school. It is obligatory to graduate from the gymnasium to study at the university. Several teach-

ers of the Russian language changed at the gymnasium in the previous five years. It should be noted that employees working in the gymnasium had specialized pedagogical education. According to the data of 2013-2014, two teachers of the Russian language worked at the gymnasium, including a native speaker, Lyudmila Dvoinikova (currently on maternity leave) and Norwegian Eivind Sætre (left for Trondheim). The gymnasium director also spoke Russian.

Students of the Kirkenes gymnasiums participated in a two-week winter language school in the city of Murmansk in 2013 and 2014 and showed a high level of motivation to study the Russian language (three girls planned to enroll into the University of Tromsø and study at the Faculty of Russian Philology) and possessed Russian language skills at A2-B1 level. The greatest difficulty for Norwegian students was grammar (mainly, case forms). However, the motivation of students was partly related to the popularity of Eivind Sætre as a teacher. Pupils said they would like to speak Russian as their teacher did and recalled that he often used Russian films and cartoons in the classroom.

Bilingual preschoolers and junior pupils with both or at least one Russian-speaking parent study Russian in Kirkenes with a private teacher of the Russian language – Elena Korostel. According to the Norwegian legislation in the field of education, a commune or municipality should provide children and their parents with the opportunity to study their native language but in practice it is not always possible either for financial or ethical reasons. For example, a native language is not taught in the chosen commune. Most well-off communes provide one lesson of a native language per week. According to Elena Korostel, the municipality of Sør-Varanger cannot afford to pay for Russian courses for all pupils, and the lessons are also paid by parents. The classroom rent is covered by the teacher. Parents do not always create a favorable language regime for their children (one parent – one language) and are mostly interested in mastering the Norwegian language at a high level. The Russian language for children is often represented only by partial bilingualism, and such types of speech activity in Russian as writing and less often reading are not developed enough. Elena Korostel says parents do not pay much attention to the Russian language and do not follow necessary instructions, which, along with other factors, contributes to the weakening of the language identity and, extremely rarely, to the child's conscious refusal to speak Russian and study it.

The observation made in 2013 in the kindergarten of Kirkenes showed that there were also Russian-speaking teachers and children. Accordingly, Russian parents of bilingual children or Russian-speaking children who do not speak Norwegian try giving their children the opportunity to get into groups with a Russian educator. A favorable climate has been created in the kindergarten for the adoption of the ethnic and linguistic identity of children – nonnative speakers by the rest of the group: the most "important words" (etiquette words – *thanks, hello;* basic words – *bread, I, you*) are studied in the nonnative speaker's language by the whole group. If a teacher does not speak the child's language, they seek help from the parents. The teacher noted that the task of maintaining or studying the native tongue was not specifically set in the kindergarten but such work enabled to provide psychological comfort for the child – nonnative speaker in the group and not only to ensure the socialization of this child but also to develop tolerance of other children.

## 4. Conclusion

The Russian language is actively used in everyday communication, advertisements, announcements and signboards in the transborder region of Northern Norway by locals (30% of the population of Kirkenes is Russian) and a large number of Russian tourists but it has not become dominant among the population of the city of Kirkenes. Its use is limited to a closed group; it is not the language of office or university. This situation can be explained not only by the lack of legislation in relation to Russian as a minority language (unlike the Sami language, for example) but also by the reluctance of residents to implement such a language project [see the description of this situation with regard to the Russian language in Finland in the 18th century: 20, p. 283]. A minority language is usually characterized by low prestige so a school system is slow to teach pupils in this language and municipal services do not use the language in record keeping.

The situation around the Russian language in such a transborder territory as Northern Norway or the Murmansk Region is somewhat different, i.e. the flow of Russian-speaking tourists is growing due to historical and cultural ties, as well as a visa-free regime, which increases the need of the Russian language in travel business. At the same time, the linguistic isolation of Russian-speaking and Norwegian-speaking groups is obvious and is characterized by asymmetry like relations between Norway and Russia as a whole [20, p. 35].

A new prospective research can be the study of similar situations in other transborder regions, the main feature of which is "ethnocultural space shared with a region located on the other side of the border". Transborder territories can be regions forming on both sides of state borders or formed during a long period as regions with single ethnocultural space, long-standing ties and, due to some circumstances, recently separated by state border [21, p. 80].

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