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## 2 Internal migration and language maintenance in Moscow

**Abstract:** This chapter focuses on the linguistic aspects of the internal migration to Moscow from other regions of the Russian Federation. We explore the functions of languages other than Russian in the Moscow region and identify factors of language vitality in urban settings. We also compare the situation in the Moscow region with the general linguistic situation in particular regions of Russia. The main source of the data on functions and evaluation of minor languages was a collected corpus of sociolinguistic interviews of bilingual and multilingual Russian citizens residing in Moscow for a long time or permanently.

### 1 Data and methodology

The multilingualism of Moscow is represented by three major groups: the languages of the Russian Federation, the languages of the post-Soviet territory and the languages of other foreign countries. The chapter provides official and unofficial statistics on the migration from the autonomous entities (mainly republics) of the Russian Federation. In this paper, we use the term “minority languages” for all the languages other than Russian (“minority” here only means minority in the context of the Moscow urban area). For a detailed analysis of the languages of the post-Soviet territory in Moscow see Baranova, Fedorova and Ter-Saakova (this volume).

For the general overview we analysed data and some other resources like data and estimations of public organisations, official bodies of the compatriots and permanent missions of Russian republics in Moscow. We also analysed the activity of Moscow ethnic groups in the media, that is the number and the content of ethnic minority websites and social networks intended for Moscow residents. However, the main source of the data on functions and evaluation of minor languages was the corpus of sociolinguistic interviews of bilingual and multilingual Russian citizens residing in Moscow for a long time or permanently. We used a mixed-method approach: individual and group interviews, questionnaires, and in-group observations. The

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semi-structured interviews were based on the questionnaire designed during the “Languages of Moscow” project, which was carried out in the Institute of Linguistics (Russian Academy of Sciences) in 2016–2018. The questions included personal socio-linguistic history and domains of language use. Some of the interviews and in-group observations were conducted by community members with academic backgrounds.

2020 census data<sup>1</sup> is quite unreliable when it comes to recent migrants, since figures on migrants in the census data were significantly lower than those given in the statistics of the official migration service (Mukomel 2013; Federova and Baranova 2018: 227). But census data for the resident population in other regions look quite reasonable and are used in the comparison below.

Most data for this research were gathered in 2016–2018, so the general picture and the conclusions describe the pre-pandemic situation. Restrictions on migration due to the pandemic, limitations of personal contacts, and the rapid development of all kinds of online communication, on the other hand, could lead to significant changes to the linguistic situation in Moscow. This topic requires additional research and is not covered in this chapter.

## 2 Internal migration to Moscow: History and current situation

Internal migration in Russia in the twentieth century was determined by processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. The main direction was migration from villages to towns and cities (Zajonchkovskaja 1999). The rural area is traditionally the place where minor languages maintain communicative functions. In the republics of the Russian Federation, where people can speak languages other than Russian, even in small towns, let alone district centres, the preference for Russian in everyday communication is very strong. The main factors are school education and the dominance of Russian in mass media and official institutions. Another reason is the heterogeneous population of towns, where people who speak only Russian live alongside bilinguals. Thus, Russian becomes the main means of communication in towns. As a result, the direction of migration does not support the vitality of minor languages in Russia.

In the last three decades Moscow has become one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse cities in the world. The fall of the USSR in 1991 as well as local military conflicts in some regions of the post-Soviet territory and some other

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<sup>1</sup> Known officially as Census 2020, it took place in 2021 due to the Covid-2019 restrictions.

factors such as cancellation of obligatory registration at the place of residence led to massive migration to the cities. The largest number of internal migrants has come to Moscow and Moscow region (Shcherbakova 2019: 20).

### 3 Overview of Moscow's multilingualism

The population of Moscow is 12,655,050 (2021). Moscow is the capital of the Russian Federation, a country with 85 constituent entities, 24 languages that have an official status in a republic of RF and circa 130 other minority languages without such status. Evidently, languages of RF constituents with an official status and administrative support have certain advantages that smaller languages do not possess. Apart from them, circa 150 languages are spoken by recent immigrants from other countries.

Since the capital city is the most attractive locus for migration for economic reasons, education, career prospects, employment etc., speakers of almost all languages of the RF are represented in Moscow. There were speakers of 182 languages in Moscow, according to the 2010 census (Koryakov 2017: 27). The linguistic situation in Moscow can be characterised as superdiversity, “the world in one city” (Vertovec 2007).

Russia is a multiethnic and multilingual country; at the same time the Russian language has a special status and dominates all over the country. This dominance has economic and political reasons; it started long ago, during the Russian Empire, and increased during the Soviet period (Alpatov 2000: 146). The functions of all other languages of the Russian Federation have been reducing over time: the number of publications has decreased, many media outlets have been closed, language teaching at schools has decreased or disappeared completely, fewer people use minor languages for communication etc.

### 4 Language maintenance in urban settings

In general, acquisition of major language(s) and language maintenance of minor language(s) are among the challenges facing migrants in any metropolis of the world. However, Russian citizens coming to Moscow do not have any difficulties with Russian despite their place of origin. They can speak a regional variant of Russian or sociolect, they may have an accent or specific ethnolectic peculiarities, but the differences between variants of Russian across the country are minimal and have no impact on understanding in communication.

By contrast, language maintenance and transmission of minor languages faces multiple challenges. The main reason is that in Moscow there is no practical need

for languages other than Russian as Russian dominates in all domains of life (we do not consider foreign languages here); therefore there is no natural linguistic environment for non-Russian speakers. The specificity of the resettlement to Moscow is that there are no “ethnic districts”, although people of a certain ethnic background may prefer some districts over others. There are districts with cheaper accommodation, which are more attractive for labour migrants, but different groups of migrants and permanent Moscow residents live there together. Vendina et al. (2019: 6–8) claim that Moscow is characterised by relative ethnocultural homogeneity: even in areas distinguished by different levels of ethnic diversity the mosaic index value is relatively low.

A significant group of inner migrants are students who come to Moscow every year for better educational and economic opportunities. They live in student hostels together with students from different regions of RF and maintenance of their mother tongue is not the frontmost challenge that they face in the competitive environment of the capital.

In towns, regional centres, and the capital cities of Russia’s national republics, only two languages compete – Russian and the respective official language of the republic. In this context, within the language ideologies framework, different languages are ascribed different values. High or low prestige can play a role in the linguistic behaviour of a person (Blommaert et al. 2005). In Soviet times, minor languages were often seen as rural and backward-looking and Russian as urban and progressive. According to some researchers (Kutsaeva 2019; Moskvicheva and Safina 2018; Emelkina 2020), this situation has been changing recently, ethnic languages are becoming more popular and are acquiring higher prestige as markers of self-identification. But in the context of the metropolis, where speakers of more than a hundred languages live together, the factor of prestige fades into the background and practical considerations come forward. Russian (and English as an international language) covers all communicative needs in everyday life and there is no external necessity to use any other means. The only real motivation for maintaining a heritage language for permanent Moscow residents is internal necessity. Bilinguals, themselves, have to create special circumstances for using their language.

## 5 The main functions of minor languages in the capital

While official languages of constituent republics have certain statuses in their entities, are taught at schools, are present in official organisations and linguistic landscapes, in Moscow the Russian language covers all the domains of language

use – education, official documentation, mass media, linguistic landscape (besides ethnic shops, restaurants and organisations). Russian is also used as a means of inter-ethnic and international communication. Nevertheless, languages other than Russian are present in the capital and play an important role in the self-identification of the migrants and their children.

Kutsaeva (2018: 124) identifies a list of functions of minority languages in an urban environment. We examine the most important functions with regard to the Moscow settings.

The main function of language is *communication* and transmission of information. Only a few speakers of minor languages in Moscow can keep this function in full. The most important domain is communication with family members. Some people have an opportunity to use a language other than Russian at their workplace, as there are some organisations which prefer to employ their fellow countrymen (Ay-bazova 2018). Globalisation, the Internet, and social networks are beginning to play an important role in the support of minor languages in the urban areas. While earlier the communication between Moscow dwellers and their relatives and friends in their areas of origin was mostly limited to periods of vacations and visits, nowadays the availability of electronic means of communication and mass media<sup>2</sup> allows the use of minor languages even for those who do not have such a circle of friends in the capital. This is good news for minor languages.

A more marginal communicative function of minor languages is a *secret language*, when people can discuss matters in their own language while preventing other people from understanding. Sometimes, parents use this function when they do not want the children to understand them.

The most important function of minor languages in urban settings is *symbolic* when the language indexes belonging to a certain culture and community and self-identification of the person (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 2–3; Belikov and Krysin 2016: 180) This function does not imply deep knowledge of the language: even semi-speakers and people with a certain ethnic background who can say just a few words use their heritage language in symbolic function. These words or phrases can create communities and circles of friends, they can be used in ethnic festivals or other activities in Moscow, while the predominant language of communication will be Russian in these cases.

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2 There are regional mass media (TV, radio, news channels) in every Russian region. Those with an official language other than Russian tend to have some programs or a section of the website in this regional language. These programs and news are easily available on the Internet. There are also some links to electronic resources especially designated for different ethnic groups of migrants to Moscow on the 'Languages of Moscow' website <http://languages.msk.ru/ethnic-media/> (accessed 21 June 2023)

*Listening to songs* in ethnic languages is a part of the symbolic use of languages, see Kutsaeva (this volume). For many people this is the only use of language in urban areas and the main form of the heritage language transmitted to children who were born in towns and cities.

Use in *rituals and religious ceremonies* is very important for some languages. This is also a strong motivation for some people to preserve and transmit a minor language to the second generation.

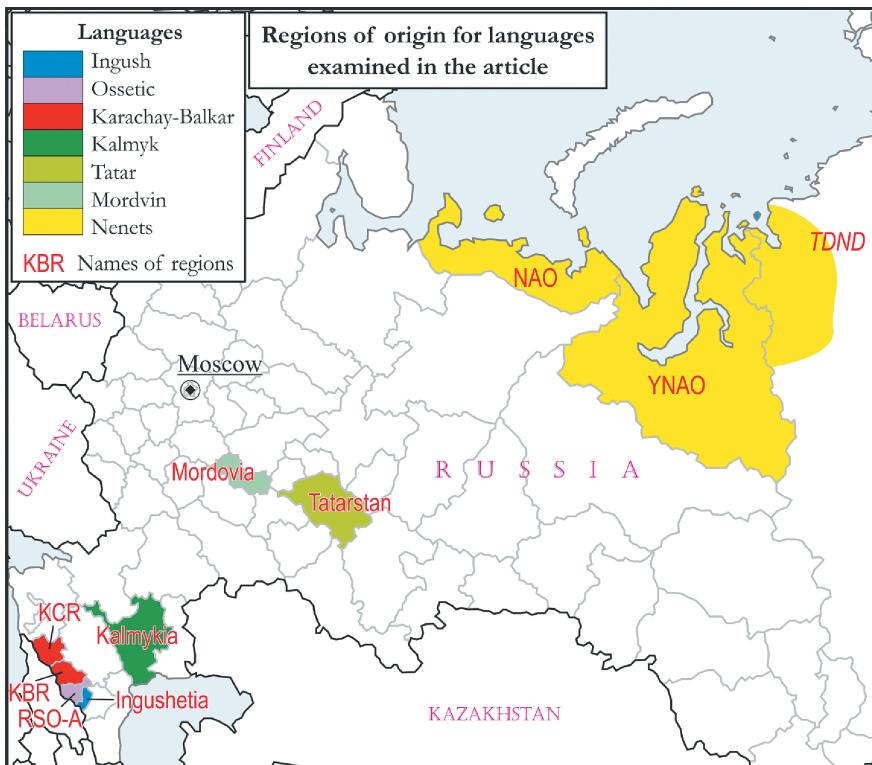
Finally, when a person does not have regular contact with other speakers, the minor language can be used as an *inner speech* without real communication (speech with oneself, with pets and so on). The inner speech in a mother tongue or heritage language is an indicator that the language has a certain value for the speaker in its own right, not as a means of communication with others (Sinirova 2010).

In the next section, we discuss the examples of these functions in some communities in Moscow.

## 6 Case studies

In this section we compare the linguistic vitality and ways of language maintenance in the territory of the relevant RF constituent with the urban context of Moscow. We consider the following issues: the linguistic situation and vitality in the area of language origin; the number of speakers in Moscow; sociolinguistic characteristics of the Moscow community; relationship and similarity of the community's culture to the mainstream Russian culture (interethnic marriages, role of religion and other); contacts of the community with the area of origin; institutional support (official and civic organisations, ethnic media and networks); main functions of the language in the Moscow region; ways of language maintenance and transmission in an urban context; and language evaluation.

We discuss, in detail, the sociolinguistic features of some Moscow communities – Ingush, Ossetic, Karachay-Balkar, Kalmyk, Tatar, Mordvin (Moksha-Erzya), Nenets (see Map 2.1). Comparison of Moscow communities by various sociolinguistic factors is given below in Table 2.1 on pages 40–42. Their languages, except Nenets, have official status in the corresponding republics. Nenets is a co-official language in the areas where Nenetses live.



Map 2.1: Regions of origin for languages examined in the article.

## 6.1 Ingush

The Ingush language (Nakh group of Nakh-Daghestanian family) is mainly spoken in the Republic of Ingushetia, Northern Caucasus. Almost all Ingushes in their traditional area in the Northern Caucasus (323,510) can speak their language, including those in urban areas. Ingush has one of the highest levels of vitality among the languages of Russia.

According to the 2020 Census, there are 2,850 Ingush people in Moscow, and 1,797 indicated Ingush as their mother tongue.

This is quite a closed community with a high level of ethnic solidarity and strong institutional support. The traditional Ingush society is based on the clan system. When Ingush people reside outside the Ingush Republic, they usually form a community with a hierarchical structure according to the clan system. This means that in-group marriages prevail. Even outside their traditional terri-

tory young people mostly find a suitable partner (or their parents do so) within the Ingush community. The cultural affinity to mainstream Russian culture is low. Religion (Sunni Islam) plays quite an important role in the community, with Arabic as the language of religious ceremonies (mainly, reading of the Koran). There are some other specific cultural features, including appearance, that quite clearly distinguish Ingush people from other communities. Ingushes never forget about their ethnic origin and strive to adhere to the norms and rules of their ethnic group (Pavlova 2013: 429).

The level of knowledge of the Ingush language in Moscow is very high. According to (Pavlova 2013: 408) 97.5 % of the Ingushes who live in Moscow consider Ingush their mother tongue. 47.5% respondents can understand, speak and read in Ingush, 35% can understand and speak, 35% can understand but cannot speak, while only 2.5% respondents cannot understand or speak Ingush. The level of Russian varies depending on personal history. Ingush-speaking people may have a specific accent and other grammatical and lexical peculiarities of speech due to linguistic interference.

Interview fragments:

(M, 49) Recently, knowledge of Ingush has become popular, even prestigious. You must know Ingush, your mother tongue.

(F, 22) We are six children in our family, our ethnicity is Ingush.

(Interviewer) You mean no mix of blood?

(F, 22) No.

(Interviewer) What language do you use between yourselves? Parents, brothers, sisters?

(F, 22) Ingush.

(Interviewer) And Russian?

(F, 22) We do not use Russian, maybe sometimes only.

(F, 82) We knew Ingush better, no doubt. And when we lived there [in Siberia, in times of deportation of Ingush people in 1944–1957] we haven't forgotten Ingush, it was as a law.

We can conclude that the main function of Ingush in Moscow is communicative, as this language is transmitted to the young generation even in the urban context and is used actively as a family language. In-group marriages increase the opportunity for language transmission as both parents can speak Ingush as their mother tongue. Ingush is mostly used in oral communication, while speakers more frequently write and read in Russian. Ingush is also used as a language for business, as Ingush people prefer to employ fellow countrymen and work together.

## 6.2 Ossetic

Ossetic is an Eastern Iranian language, spoken in North Ossetia–Alania (NO-A), a region in the Northern Caucasus, and South Ossetia (de-facto independent state, south of NO-A). The total size of the ethnic group in Russia is 485,646 (the 2020 census), 439,949 of them live in NO-A. The number of speakers is 456,564, of them 427,868 are in NO-A. It means 97% of Ossetians in NO-A speak Ossetic. The share of speakers among ethnic Ossetians reaches 97% in rural areas and drops to 83% in the capital of the republic, Vladikavkaz (The 2010 Census data).

The level of knowledge of Ossetic in lexicon and grammar has been decreasing recently in the younger generation (as our linguistic fieldwork data shows). People mostly speak Russian, or Russian mixed with Ossetic in towns, especially, in the republic's capital, Vladikavkaz. According to sociolinguistic research (Kambolov 2007: 68), 55.1% of Vladikavkaz residents speak Russian better than Ossetic.

Officially there are around 7,000 Ossetians in Moscow, but according to some estimations, there may be more than 50,000 people with an Ossetic background. Ossetians is one of the biggest, oldest, and well-established communities in Moscow. Migrants from Ossetia play an important role in politics, economics, business, and culture. Bonds between the Ossetic community in Moscow and the Ossetic Republic are very strong. Moscow Ossetians have powerful institutional support: the Permanent Mission of North Ossetia in Moscow ensures interaction between federal authorities and the government of the republic. The department of Permanent Mission – Youth Mission – helps young people from Ossetia to find other Ossetic migrants in Moscow and organises traditional festivals and other activities. For many years, the Ossetian fellowship in Moscow has been assisting the people in various issues and creating conditions for maintaining contacts.

Ossetians traditionally belong to the Orthodox branch of Christianity, although Ossetic Christianity has some peculiarities, its own holidays, and, especially, revered saints. There is a church with the services partly in the Ossetic language (Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Kulichki). There are no barriers to marriages with Russians or other nationalities. Many young people come to Moscow as students, set up a family and settle down.

The level of knowledge of Ossetic is not very high on average, especially in the younger generation. Although activists and ethnic organisations strive to maintain and popularise the Ossetic language in urban settings and create opportunities to learn and use it, the major function of Ossetic in Moscow is symbolic, since Russian or Russian with Ossetic elements is preferred as a language of communication.

Interview fragments:

(Interviewer) Are there many Ossetians in your circle of friends in Moscow?  
 (M, 71) Yes, very many. . . I speak only Ossetic with them. Only. But . . . They answer me mostly in Russian. They know the language, they understand, but they prefer to communicate in Russian. I scold them, of course.  
 Semi-speakers, who have grown up or even were born outside Ossetia can still consider Ossetic as their mother tongue and a marker of ethnic identification.

(Interviewer) What language do you consider native?  
 (M, 84) I cannot divide. . . I grew up in Russia, only four years I lived in Ossetia, but I can't say that Ossetic is not my native language. . . I think and write in Russian, but you can't divide me, both Russian and Ossetic. . . I can't write in Ossetic, but I can translate from it.

Accordingly, in the Moscow region the communicative function of Ossetic is restricted to some speakers and Russian is preferred in communication, but the symbolic function is very important as the Ossetic language is one of the main features that unites a lot of people with Ossetic backgrounds.

### 6.3 Karachay-Balkar

Karachay-Balkar (Turkic family) is the language of two closely related ethnic groups, Karachays and Balkars. It is spoken originally in the highest areas in Karachay-Cherkessia (205,849 speakers) and Kabardino-Balkaria (119,032 speakers) correspondingly. Most Karachays and Balkars in their republics speak their ethnic language.

The total size of both ethnic groups in Russia is 351,315 (the 2020 Census), and the number of speakers is 343,372. Circa 70% of the ethnic group speak the language in large cities (Nalchik and Cherkessk), but in the rural areas and smaller towns, the share increases up to 97%. Almost all speakers are fluent in Russian and use it in cities more frequently than Karachay-Balkar.

According to the 2020 Census, the number of Karachays and Balkars in Moscow and the Moscow region is 1,404. It is hard to tell the definite number due to circular migration. This is a well-established community that includes qualified specialists, doctors, scientists, sportspeople and students; a lot of famous people from Karachay-Balkar Republic live in Moscow.

As other people of the Caucasus, Karachays and Balkars have a high level of ethnic solidarity – they unite in associations and fellowships. They have a medium level of cultural affinity to the Russian-speaking community. Religion (Sunni Islam)

plays a smaller role in everyday life – Moscow Karachays and Balkars are quite secular people integrated in modern society. It has been shown (Elchinova et al. 2016: 107) that the autochthonic urban population in Karachay-Cherkessia is highly mixed genetically despite the traditional preference for monoethnic marriages. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for in-group marriages even in urban areas (Aybazova 2018: 22–23). Knowledge of Karachay/Balkar is high in general, in the first generation of migrants, but transmission to children faces difficulties in urban contexts, as parents use Russian more often.

(F, 32) Children in Moscow. . . They generally lose their native language. Russian in Moscow is the main language for everyday use, Karachays and Balkars are full speakers of Russian with some slight accentual features in the speech.

(F, 32) . . . As my colleagues are of the same ethnicity, we can switch from language to language. Professional matters are discussed in Russian, of course.

(Interviewer) And for conspiracy?

(F, 32) It is hard to make secrets, because there are Tatars, Kumyks. . .

A very influential Karachay and Balkar non-commercial organisation, “Elbrusoid” (<http://www.elbrusoid.org/>), organises different cultural activities, ethnic celebrations, and supports language maintenance in Moscow. This organisation sponsors translating books, films, and cartoons for children into Karachay/Balkar; develops dictionaries and apps for learning Karachay/Balkar. Before the pandemic hundreds of Karachay and Balkars regularly took part in ethnic festivals and events (Aybazova 2018: 29–31).

Therefore, Karachays and Balkars in Moscow make up a relatively small but very active community, where the Karachay/Balkar language may play a communicative role in some cases, although the next generation born or grown in Moscow acquires the ethnic language in reduced form and uses it mostly in symbolic function.

## 6.4 Kalmyk

Kalmyk is a Mongolian language spoken in Kalmykia, a region between the Northern Caucasus and Volga. There are 179,547 Kalmyks in Russia. Ethnic Kalmyks comprise 56% of the region’s population, but only 60% (107,742) speak Kalmyk in the 2020 Census.

This share is higher in rural settlements, with a high share of Kalmyks (59% for rural settlements, with at least 50% Kalmyks; 65% for settlements, with at least 80%). Urban Kalmyks mostly do not speak Kalmyk. The share of speakers among

ethnic Kalmyks in three cities (Elista, Lagan, Gorodovikovsk) is circa 24%. Even most of those who know (or claim to know) Kalmyk do not use it regularly preferring communication in Russian. The modern linguistic situation in Kalmykia has roots in the dramatic history of deportation of Kalmyks in 1943 and resettlement in Siberia. According to Bitkeeva (2018: 63) the first language of Kalmyks is Russian and Kalmyk has a symbolic function, even in Kalmykia. Naturally, the situation does not change when they arrive in Moscow.

According to the 2020 Census there were 3,964 Kalmyk people in Moscow. The exact number cannot be estimated due to permanent mobility. Kalmykia is close to Moscow, the trip is quite cheap, so people go and come back in search of a job and for family matters.

Some members of the Kalmyk community in Moscow are integrated people who had arrived young to obtain an education and a job and settled down. Another group are temporary migrant workers who look for a job in the capital because of low salary and unemployment in Kalmykia. In Moscow they usually obtain a low-skilled job, which does not correspond to their actual qualification (Baranova 2016).

The religion of Kalmyks is Tibetan Buddhism, with Tibetan as the language for religious ceremonies in honor of the Buddhist holidays. Quite a lot of people come to these ceremonies organised in Moscow. In some ceremonies, like traditional healing conducted by lama, the Kalmyk language is used (Baranova 2016: 94)

The community of Kalmyks in Moscow is solid, through social networks and personal contacts, people help each other to find jobs, special services and ethnic goods, places to live and so on (Baranova 2016). Kalmyks who have successfully settled in Moscow help their fellow countrymen in Moscow and Kalmykia. Some events are organised in Moscow for ethnic holidays such as Zul (New Year) and Tsagan Sar (White month, first month of the spring). However, official organisations of the Kalmyk Republic in Moscow do not seem to play an active role in the life of Moscow Kalmyks. This community is also not active in the media or in promotion of ethnic culture and language.

Kalmyks speak Russian as a first language and do not have any noticeable accent. Although this ethnic group is characterised by the high level of loyalty to Kalmyk identity, the Kalmyk language has very restricted symbolic functions.

Interview fragments:

(F, 43) Russian language, to tell the truth, for modern children is the first language. . . I am also from the generation for whom Russian is native, of course. . .

(Interviewer) Did you speak Kalmyk in your childhood?

(F, 43) With elder relatives, in the family, yes.

## 6.5 Tatar

Tatar is a Turkic language spoken in the Republic of Tatarstan and neighbouring regions around the middle Volga. The number of Tatars in Russia according to the 2020 Census was 4,707,343 and the number of mother tongue speakers 4,073,253 (87%). It is the second most frequently spoken native language in Russia. The percentage of speakers in Tatarstan is much higher: there are 1,977,548 speakers out of 2,091,175 ethnic Tatars (95%). This number is not so high in the republic's capital, where only 85 % of Tatars speak Tatar.

Tatars are the largest and one of the oldest communities in Moscow. According to the 2020 Census, there were 84,373 ethnic Tatars in Moscow and 42,635 speakers of the Tatar language among them. Tatars have been living in Moscow since the Russian Empire and as far as integration is concerned, this ethnic group does not differ much from indigenous Muscovites. Newcomers from Tatarstan can obtain all kinds of institutional support, as people with Tatar background have a substantial presence and influence in politics, economics, business, education, culture, and other spheres of life. Moscow and the Republic of Tatarstan have very strong political and economic bonds.

Culturally, Tatars differ from Russians: they are mostly Sunni Muslims but as sociological research shows, most of the Tatars, as well as Russians – even those who identify as Muslims and Orthodox Christians – in general are not very religious and do not comply with all religious rituals and requirements. Thus, in the context of a globalised metropolis “Weak institutional religiosity of both Tatars and Russians does not create any significant barrier between them in everyday life, in their daily contacts” (Kosach 2007: 70). Marriages between Russians and Tatars are very common.

There are many opportunities to use the Tatar language in Moscow. Many people use Tatar for family communication. Mass cultural events with an ethnic component are organised regularly (or at least it was so before the pandemic). The Old Mosque on Bolshaya Tatarskaya Street was built in 1823. The Tatar cultural centre organises courses of the Tatar language for children and adults. According to research by Moskvicheva and Safina (2018: 287) some adults who come to learn Tatar are not even ethnic Tatars and their motivation to study the language is to have an opportunity to speak Tatar to their spouses, relatives, and friends with Tatar ethnic background. Some people want to improve their knowledge to be able to transmit the language to their children and grandchildren. Of course, the level of knowledge of Tatar in Moscow varies substantially, from full speakers to those who do not know the language at all. However, this community demonstrates an active position, not only in maintaining but also in promoting the language and creating opportunities for using it in urban environment of Moscow.

## 6.6 Mordvin

Mordvin(ic) is a group within the Uralic family comprising two languages: Erzya (60%) and Moksha (40%). There are 484,450 Mordvins in Russia, and 344,295 (71%) speak one of the Mordvin languages.

They are traditionally spoken in the Republic of Mordovia (Moksha in the western part, Erzya in the eastern part). But only 316,079 Mordvins lived in 2021 in this republic and 229,648 (73%) spoke Moksha or Erzya. The exact number of Moksha or Erzya is hard to determine since most speakers prefer to designate their language in the census as just Mordvin.

The number of Mordvins in the Russian capital according to the Census is 6,992. Usually, Mordvins come to Moscow to study or to work and then settle down permanently. This ethnic group is well integrated into Moscow society and does not differ significantly from Moscovites. Researchers (Emelkina 2020: 332) argue that the common history, territory, traditions, and peculiarities of the lives of Mordvins and Russians contributed to the development of similarities in the perception of events and world view. Thus, there are no cultural barriers to intermarriage with Russians. Children born in such marriages, in the urban environment of a metropolis, as a rule, become native speakers of the Russian language exclusively.

The interviewed residents of Moscow call Moksha or Erzya their native language and note that before entering school they either did not know Russian at all or knew it to a lesser extent than one of the Mordvin languages. Indicating their fluency in both Russian and Moksha/Erzya they note at the same time that they use their native language exclusively orally and read and write only in Russian. They count in Russian but in the types of “inner speech”, as expected, there is a variety of responses: for expressing emotions, addressing animals, etc. both languages are used. The respondents note that in Moscow there is a very limited number of situations when they use the Moksha or Erzya languages. Only those who live with their families use Moksha/Erzya for family communication. Children born in Moscow cannot usually speak Moksha/Erzya but they can learn it to some extent by spending their holidays in the countryside with their grandparents. The bonds between the Moscow community and the Republic of Mordovia are strong; circular migration is very active, because Mordovia is quite close – just a 9–10 hour trip by train from Moscow.

Mordovia has good institutional support in Moscow, there is a Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mordovia under the head of state, a Mordovian community, which provides support to Mordvins who came to Moscow and other organisations. Cultural events and ethnic festivals are regularly organised (Akimova, Mitina 2013), where the Moksha and Erzya languages are used in a symbolic function and Russian is used for communication.

## 6.7 Nenets

Tundra Nenets is a Samoyedic language (Uralic family) spoken in three regions of Russia: Nenets autonomous region (NAO), Yamal-Nenets autonomous region (YNAO) and Taymyrsky (Dolgano-Nenets) district (TDND) of Krasnoyarsk krai. The total size of the ethnic group is 49,646 and the number of speakers is 38,405 (77%). The label “Nenets” in censuses includes both Tundra Nenets and related but much smaller Neshan or Forest Nenets (ca. 1,000 speakers in southern YNAO and northern parts of Khanty-Mansiysk autonomous region).

Language vitality varies greatly between regions with the lowest figures in the middle (eastern NAO: 0–2%), intermediate figures in the West (western NAO; 10–45%) and highest ones in the East (YNAO and TDND; 60–98%). Tundra Nenets is spoken primarily by reindeer herders. Those settled permanently in urban centres speak mostly Russian.

It is hard to identify Nenets people in Moscow as a community because there may be just a few people in the whole metropolis. Nevertheless, we would like to present this small group as a good example of the role of personal language activism. People with a high awareness of ethnic identity, originating from small ethnic communities, who were educated in the city and integrated into the new environment, feel a heightened responsibility to preserve and promote their culture and language. Such people can have institutional support, for example, The Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East of the Russian Federation is an all-Russian public organisation that aims to protect the rights and defend the interests of the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.

Nenets people maintain a traditional nomadic way of life and animistic beliefs that are hardly compatible with modern urban reality. But still, there are people in Moscow who not only maintain their traditions but also promote them as a part of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country.

Khadri Okotetto is a journalist, artist, and keeper of traditional knowledge and folklore of the Nenets people. He made a traditional chum (Nenets house made of hides) in Moscow, which serves as a museum of nomadic culture and is a very popular point of attraction. In his interview he says that there are about ten people in Moscow with whom he can communicate in Nenets, and he speaks Nenets to his children to transmit his native language to them. The Nenets community in Moscow is a vivid example of creating a linguistic environment and promoting traditional culture in a broad cultural context.

Table 2.1: Comparison of Moscow communities.

Factors	Community						
	Ingush	Ossetic	Karachay-Balkar	Kalmyk	Tatar	Mordvin	Nenets
<b>Number of mother tongue speakers in Russia 2020 Census</b>	507,087	456,564	343,372	166,726	4,073,253	344,295	38,405
<b>Number of mother tongue speakers in Moscow 2020 Census</b>	1,797	3,449	1,063	2,322	42,635	2,783	10
<i>Percentage speakers to ethnic group (acc. to 2010 census):</i>							
- all traditional area	99	90	95	44	98	70	49
- rural areas	100	97	97	59-65	99	84	59
- cities	99	83	66	24	85	48	85

Distance to Moscow, km	1,800	1,800	1,700	1,400	820	650	4,200
Distance to Moscow, hours by car	19	19	18	15	11	8	60
Cultural affinity to the mainstream Russian culture	low	high	medium	medium	high	high	low
Traditional religion	Sunni Islam	Christianity (Orthodox)	Sunni Islam	Tibetan Buddhism	Sunni Islam	Christianity (Orthodox)	Shamanism, animism
Interethnic marriages	rare	many	few	many	many	many	few
Institutional support of linguistic activities	Events with ethnic component, social networks	Language courses for children, regular events with ethnic component, component, social networks	Regular events with ethnic component, websites, mass media, social networks	Events with ethnic component, social networks	Language courses for children and adults, regular events with ethnic component, websites, mass media, social networks	Events with ethnic component, social networks, websites, mass media, social networks	Events with ethnic component, individual activism

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Factors	Community					Nenets
	Ingush	Ossetic	Karachay-Balkar	Kalmyk	Tatar	
Transmission of the language to the second generation in cities	high	low	low	very low	medium / low	low
Main language functions in the Moscow region	Communicative in a family and a workplace	Symbolic, occasional communication with family or friends	Symbolic, communicative in a family and a workplace in some cases	Symbolic, communicative in a family and a workplace in some cases	Symbolic, communication with family or friends	Symbolic, occasional communication with family or friends

## 7 A sociolinguistic typology of ethnic communities

As our data shows, the situation of different languages can vary substantially for a number of reasons. We propose a typological comparison of the cases discussed.

## 8 Conclusion

We carried out a study of Moscow communities speaking a number of minority languages of the Russian Federation. We were interested in actual language use, language maintenance in the city and an evaluation of minority languages in such communities. We discussed the cases of several noticeable communities, such as Ingush, Karachay-Balkar, Ossetic, Kalmyk, Mordvin, Tatar and Nenets people who have been living in Moscow for a long time or permanently. We argue that the situation in every community is unique and is determined by a vast number of factors.

The general tendency of migration behaviour that begins even in small towns is to abandon ethnic languages and to favour Russian. We suggest that a complexity of sociolinguistic, economic, geographical, and historical factors plays a role in the sociolinguistic situation and linguistic vitality of a particular language in the urban area. The main factors are 1) the linguistic situation and vitality in the language's area of origin, 2) the number of speakers in Moscow, 3) the sociolinguistic characteristics of people in the Moscow community (level and time of integration), 4) the relationship and similarity of the community's culture to the mainstream Russian culture (interethnic marriages, role of religion and more), 5) contacts of the community with the area of origin, 6) institutional support (government and civic organisations, ethnic media and networks), 7) language attitudes of the speakers. It seems that the combination of these factors varies substantially in different communities.

There is almost no practical necessity for using ethnic languages in Moscow because every adult citizen of the Russian Federation, regardless of the region of birth, knows Russian thanks to their school education. Russian (together with English for international contacts) covers all the communicative needs in the capital – and this is standard in everyday life.

However, the ethnic languages do not just dissolve in the fast-paced life of the metropolis, because, besides practical considerations, people also have a deep psychological need for self-identification and belonging to their communities. Therefore, at some point, once migrants solve the main problems of integration

into Moscow life – study, finding a job, a place to live, making friends and family – they also feel the need to find their own place in this hugely-populated, multicultural city, to identify themselves. This may also be the case for the second or even the third generation of migrants, who no longer face the difficulties of integration. For some Russian citizens of an ethnic background other than Russian, the ethnic language and the loyalty to a certain culture often become symbols of belonging to the roots, to the ancestors. And to such people, Moscow offers opportunities to maintain or learn ethnic languages but they need a certain motivation to be involved in these activities.

The research reveals that individual motivations of speakers that cannot be reduced to their ethnic and social backgrounds play a major role in the language vitality in the city, as was identified by Smakman & Heinrich (2018: 2). Ethnic activism and individual initiatives play an important role in the formation of the sociolinguistic situation in Moscow.

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