

# Language use in Moscow schools with an ethno-cultural component (based on schools with the Armenian and the Azeri ethno-cultural component)

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## Introduction

This paper investigates the language situation in Moscow schools with an ethno-cultural component – a new form of national schools. The analysis is based on interviews which were recorded in 2007, in two Moscow schools, one of which had an Armenian ethno-cultural component, and the other, Azeri. All of the interviews were carried out in Russian. The sample included ten students from each school (five boys and five girls). Each student had to answer questions concerning their language use at school, in the family, with friends, and in public places. The respondents were 15-18 years old – thus, pupils of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> grade (the two last years of high school), who came to Russia with their families 3–15 years ago.

My goal is to analyze the process of linguistic integration of Azeri and Armenian children into modern Russian society. The choice of these two groups is motivated by the fact that people from the Caucasus, including the Azeris and Armenians, suffer from xenophobic attitudes in Russia, more so than any other national minority of the former USSR. The comparison between these two groups is particularly appealing, because the effects of Soviet Russification, and the language situations in general, were different in Armenia and in Azerbaijan. I will show that this difference influences the use of language by Azeri and Armenian children.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 1, I briefly outline the history of Soviet Russification in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and its consequences. Section 2 sketches the history of national schools in the Soviet Union and Russia, and de-

scribes the characteristic features of the teaching of Russian and the national languages in the two schools under analysis. In Section 3, I discuss the degree of knowledge of Russian and of the national language, at the moment of immigration, and at the present time. Sections 4 and 5, which are the main focus of this paper, analyze the use of Russian and the national languages, in specific situations involving oral (Section 4) and written communication (Section 5). This analysis allows me to discover important dimensions in the use of Russian, and of the national language, in the everyday life of Azeri and Armenian school students.

## 1. Russification in Soviet society

It is well-known that the Soviet government paid special attention to language politics. However, these politics changed significantly from one period to another.

In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks carried out the politics of *korenizatsija* ('indigenization'), which encouraged each person to use his/her national language in all communicative situations. They tried to reach this aim by promoting the national languages of the USSR. For instance, all legal documents, and cultural productions were translated into each national language. Special committees of linguists created alphabets for unwritten languages, on the basis of the Latin alphabet, and some written languages were Latinized. This period of language politics was called 'language building' (*jazykovoje stroitel'stvo*).

The situation changed radically under Stalin. The 1930s witnessed the politics of Russification, the opposite to language building. Studying Russian became compulsory, and the government changed the alphabets of the languages which had just been latinized, to alphabets based on Cyrillic. The Soviet leaders after Stalin continued to pursue this policy of Russification.

This policy was abandoned only during *perestroika*, a period of liberalization in the 1980s. The government passed a number of laws which gave more freedom to all of the nationalities of the Soviet Union, including cultural and linguistic autonomy. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the subsequent years were marked by mass immigration from former Soviet republics to Russia, especially to Moscow. Given the long period of Russification in the history of the USSR, it is natural to expect that the new migrants did not have difficulty speaking Russian.

Turning to Azeri and Armenian: these two languages, just like all of the other national languages of the Soviet republics, were considered secondary to Russian in the hierarchy of language use (Alpatov 1991). This hierarchy reflects the use of different languages in various spheres of life. National languages were used in many spheres: for instance, in newspapers, magazines, literature, or in the local administration. Therefore, Azeri and Armenian had a relatively high status, and stable traditions. However, their fate in the Soviet period was very different.

The politics of Russification affected Azeri more than Armenian. Traditionally, this difference is explained by the developed national consciousness of Armenians, the high level of development of their language, and by the fact that Armenia was the most ethnically homogeneous republic of the Soviet Union. All of these features made Armenia more resistant to Russification. However, this was not the case in Azerbaijan. In contrast to Armenia, where the script has not changed since its creation by Mesrop Mashtots in the 5th century, the Azeri script has been changed three times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic writing; then, Cyrillic replaced the Latin alphabet; and finally, in 1991, when Azerbaijan became an independent country, a change to the Latin script was effectuated again. All of these facts prove that language traditions were stronger and more stable in Armenia, than in Azerbaijan.

## 2. History of national schools, and modern schools with an ethno-cultural component

Schools with an ethno-cultural component, which emerged in the Post-Soviet period, are a new form of the national schools that used to exist in the beginning of the 20th century. The history of national schools in Russia (especially in Moscow) can be divided into three periods: 1) before Stalin; 2) from Stalinism until perestroika; and 3) from the end of perestroika until now (see Alpatov 2000 and Daucé 2007 for details).

National schools existed in Russia long before the Soviet period. After the Bolsheviks came to power, they began to implement new language policies. They founded, throughout the whole territory of the USSR, many national schools where the education was held in the national languages. Under Stalin, ethnic groups were deprived of their official status, and all ethnic schools and ethno-cultural associations were banned. They completely ceased to exist during the Second World War.

Only under Gorbachev, when liberalization began, did national movements in the USSR become stronger. In 1989, the first national school opened, for the victims of the earthquake in Armenia. Then, in 1990–1991, during the “Parade of Sovereignties,” many laws were passed which gave all sorts of liberties to national minorities, including language sovereignty, and national schools began to emerge again. In 1997, the Moscow government adopted the Regulation on Educational Establishments with an Ethno-cultural (National) Component (*Položenije ob obsčeoobrazovatel’noj škole s etnokul’turnym (nacional’nym) komponentom obrazovanija v g. Moskve*<sup>1</sup>), so the ethnic schools acquired the status of State institutions.

<sup>1</sup> The text of the regulation is accessible at <http://www.etnosfera.ru/centr.php?id=9&tv1=cccccccccccc&prjid=68&ctree68=cccc&onewnd=center&list=tasks&taskid=4&pv=no>

The education in these schools is based on an application of the federal educational programme, common to all schools in Russia, and of the ethno-cultural component, which includes courses of the national language, history and culture. Although each school has only one ethno-cultural component, these schools can accept all children, irrespective of their nationality, including Russian children. Schools with an ethno-cultural component are mostly financed by the Moscow Department of Education, but they may also get financial support from the countries whose language is studied at these schools.

All subjects, except those which are included in the ethno-cultural component of education, must be taught in Russian. The government (for instance, the government in Moscow) demands that the schools give particular attention to teaching Russian as a vehicular language. Besides this, these schools give the children of immigrants the opportunity to attend a course of Russian as a foreign language, at the beginning of their stay in Moscow.

It should be noted that schools with ethno-cultural components correspond better to the needs of national minorities than Russian schools. Alpatov (2000) observes that each language speaker has two “needs” which must be satisfied: the need for identity, and the need for mutual understanding. The need for identity is the desire of each individual to speak his/her mother language, whereas the need for mutual understanding is the need to be able to speak to everyone without any problems. Schools with ethno-cultural components satisfy both needs: on the one hand, children’s identities are preserved because they can speak to each other in their mother tongue, and study their own language and culture; on the other hand, children study Russian in order to be able to communicate with everyone in Russia. In standard Russian schools, Azeri and Armenian children satisfy their need for mutual understanding by studying Russian, but they lose their identity, because they do not study and/or speak their mother tongue. However, the disadvantage of schools with an ethno-cultural component is that it is more difficult for children to study there than at standard schools, because the pupils have to follow a double educational programme: the federal programme, and the ethno-cultural component.

Both schools at which the present research was conducted have the official status of schools with an ethno-cultural component. However, there are some differences between them. The school with the Armenian ethno-cultural component is almost mono-national, whereas the school with the Azeri component is multi-national: the number of Azeri children at this school is equal to the number of Russian children. Furthermore, at the Azeri school, there are more Russian teachers than Azeri ones; by contrast, at the Armenian school there are almost no Russian teachers. In all other aspects, these schools are organized in the same way: at both schools there are centers of national culture, which offer different activities to the children (circles of national dance and song, lessons of national musical instruments, and so on). Both schools have a museum, where national dress and other cultural items are exhibited. The number of children in both schools is relatively small, in comparison with other Moscow schools.

The teaching of national languages is organized in different ways in the Azeri and the Armenian schools, which is due to the fact that one of the schools is multi-national, and the other one mono-national. At first glance, it seems that the aim of preserving the national language and culture is more important to the administration and teachers of the Armenian school, than to those of the Azeri one. At the Armenian school, the national language is taught more thoroughly. First of all, at the Armenian school, each class has four lessons of the national language (Armenian) per week, whereas in the Azeri school there are only two lessons per week, and in the last two years, children do not study Azerbaijani at all. Moreover, at the Azeri school, the Azeri lessons often take place at the end of the day, after all of the other courses, when the children are already tired. At the Armenian school, Armenian lessons are scheduled at a more convenient time. Beside this, at the Azeri school, many children in my sample did not show any interest in Azerbaijani. My sample even included Azeri children who confessed to shirking the lessons of the national language, because they did not believe them to be really useful. This is why they do not progress in their language, and completely lose their knowledge of written Azeri. In contrast, Armenian children are really interested in studying their national language. The level of their knowledge of oral and written Armenian is really high; for instance, in the last years of school, they can easily write compositions in courses of Armenian literature.

To analyze these differences, I use the conception proposed by C. Baker (1993). Baker analyzes possible forms of bilingual education, and divides them into two subtypes: “strong forms” and “weak forms”.

**Strong forms of bilingual education** serve the purpose of making children bilingual. At the end of their education, they are supposed to speak two languages perfectly: their mother tongue, and the official language of the country where they live (in our case, it is Russian). This form of education presupposes that children not only study the official language in order to achieve professional success in the “accepting country,” but also to maintain their mother tongue. In contrast, bilingualism is not the ultimate aim of **weak forms of education**. It is, rather, regarded as an intermediate stage between monolingualism in the mother tongue, and monolingualism in the official language of the “accepting country”.

I propose that in the school with the Azeri ethno-cultural component, **the weak form** is used. Since knowledge of Russian becomes sufficient for Azeri children, and comes to the foreground in their practical life, they do not see any need to continue learning their national language. Even the school cannot stimulate their interest in the Azeri lessons. In contrast, the school with the Armenian component uses **the strong form** of bilingualism, because it offers the children equal opportunity for studying Russian and the national language.

Therefore, Armenian children should eventually become bilingual, whereas many of Azeri children gradually lose their knowledge of Azerbaijani.

The Regulation on Educational Establishments with an Ethno-cultural (National) Component requires that all children at schools with an ethno-cultural component pass the same exams as pupils in standard Moscow schools; that is,

they have to take all of the exams in Russian. As the administrations of the Armenian and the Azeri schools are interested in the success of their pupils, this causes them to give particular attention to teaching Russian. However, despite all of these efforts, children at the two schools sometimes do not reach the level of Russian that is considered to be sufficient to pass the Common State Examination (graduate exam) in the Russian language.

All of these facts show that education in schools of this type is not unproblematic. Below, I will show that these schools, which contribute much to the integration of the children into Russian society, nevertheless cause some tension between Russian and the national languages.

### 3. Knowledge of Russian and of the national language

In this section, we want to compare the children's current knowledge of Russian and of the national language, with that at the moment of immigration, in order to estimate the dynamics and the rhythm of their integration into Russian society.

Most of the families of our Azeri and Armenian informants left their countries because of economic problems. In almost all cases, the emigration was forced and unexpected; therefore, the emigrants did not have time to learn Russian. This is why children who arrived in Russia did not speak Russian at all, or had insufficient knowledge of Russian to use it for everyday communication. However, most of the Azeri children spoke Russian better than the Armenian children. This fact results from some particularities of the current educational system in Azerbaijan. In this country, some schools belong to the so-called "Azeri sector," where most subjects are taught in Azerbaijani, and others to the "Russian sector," where pupils learn Russian, and most subjects are taught in Russian. Some of the Azeri children in our sample studied in the Russian sector prior to their immigration. In Armenia, a strong tradition of teaching Russian exists, but there is no division into two sectors parallel to the Azeri one. There are only Armenian schools, where Russian is taught as one of the subjects.

A better knowledge of Russian by the Azeri children is also related to the fact that Russification was stronger in Azerbaijan than in Armenia. Even children who did not study in the Russian sector acquired an elementary knowledge of Russian from their parents. Therefore, there is nobody among our Azeri informants who did not know Russian at all at the moment of immigration, whereas among the Armenian informants, there are such children. However, even the children who knew Russian had only a passive knowledge of this language – they could understand something in Russian, but could not speak it. This caused many of them to take private lessons of Russian, at the beginning of their stay in Moscow.

With time, this difference in the knowledge of Russian between Azeri and Armenian children disappeared. This was due to the fact that children who arrived in Russia at an early age managed to learn basic Russian in the shortest amount

of time (3 months for children of 6–10 years). For those children who were older at the moment of their arrival to Russia, learning Russian could take a bit more time. In general, the knowledge of Russian by our informants is comparable to that of Russian children of the same age.

As to the national language: at the moment of emigration, the children did not have any problems with their national language. They spoke it well, and were monolingual. The problems began later, when Russian started to drive out their national languages from the spheres of everyday communication. Currently, the children are bilingual, but their bilingualism can take different forms. As far as the time of acquisition of Russian and of the national language is concerned, in the case of most informants we can speak of the consecutive, but not simultaneous, form of the bilingualism – i.e., the national language is learnt, and is spoken in the family, before the children start to learn Russian at school (see Belikov, Krysin 2001, on different types of bilingualism).

Concerning the correlation between the two languages, we can say that most children have the coordinative form of bilingualism (they have equal knowledge of both languages). 15 informants in our sample can pretend to the status of ideal bilinguals: they have perfect knowledge of both languages. However, the problem is that in fact, the status of Russian and of the national language is not entirely equal: 13 out of 15 pupils admit that it is already easier for them to use Russian in most situations. For instance, in the emotional situations of quarrels and disputes, when they do not control their choice, they often switch to Russian.

The remaining 5 children in our sample, whose school results are below average, have mastered spoken Russian, but do not understand that this is insufficient, and that they should also learn the written Russian language. Even after many years in Russia, their Russian vocabulary is limited, and lets them touch only upon a restricted range of subjects. They continue to make serious mistakes in writing. Thus, their bilingualism is subordinative: the notions of Russian are perceived through the notions of the native language.

Therefore, all informants know Russian and their national language very well, but all of them feel the tension which occurs between the two languages. Below, we will analyze the distribution of the languages across the spheres of communication.

#### 4. Use of Russian and of the national languages in oral communication

Our analysis of the use of Russian and of the national languages by the Azeri and Armenian children is based on the scheme proposed by Joshua Fishman. According to Fishman 1965, the use of a particular language is determined by several parameters or dimensions: membership in a social group; the situation of communication; the subject of conversation; the “channel” of communication (oral

vs. written communication), and so on. Using the responses of the informants to my questions, concerning their use of the languages in each of the spheres, I analyzed the use of Russian and of Armenian/Azerbaijani within the family, with teachers, with classmates and friends, and in public places. I also investigated the use of language in written communication.

#### 4.1. Family communication

18 out of the 19 children I interviewed said that they speak their mother tongue in the family, and only one Azeri girl speaks Russian (in fact, the whole family speaks Russian – they chose to speak Russian in order to integrate more easily into Russian society). The case of this girl is unique: all of the teachers at the two schools assert that normally, all pupils speak their national languages within the family. These statistics are illustrative, because they show that the sphere of family communication is the most resistant to the difficulties that accompany the process of integration. It is also resistant to time, since even those families which immigrated to Russia more than ten years ago have not turned to Russian in family communication. Nevertheless, even this sphere could not remain unchanged.

The general tendency is that most children sometimes use Russian within their families when they speak to their younger brothers and sisters, who do not know Armenian and Azerbaijani very well (they were born in Russia). The elder members of some families (mostly women who are housewives, and do not have to use Russian at their work place) do not speak Russian very well, and therefore, do not understand their children when they are speaking Russian to each other. The knowledge of Russian increases and the knowledge of the national language decreases from the oldest generation to the youngest one. Thus, in this case, Russian becomes a factor in the segregation of the older and the younger generations.

Most children use Russian when they just cannot find the right word: for instance, they do not know scientific terms, the Russian variants of which they are exposed to at their schools, in their mother tongue (it is possible to say that they use a sort of pidgin). This proves that the mother tongue is used only for everyday communication, whereas Russian is used for more complicated subjects. The parents have different attitudes toward their children's use of Russian in the family. Most of them do not mind it, because they understand that Russian is more important for the future of their children than Azerbaijani or Armenian. However, there are parents who rebuke their children, and ask them to speak their national language at home.

The length of time that the children have lived in Russia also plays a significant role: only two persons in our sample – Armenian children who moved to Russia less than five years ago – never switch to Russian when speaking to their family members.

Communication within the family is a situation where the parents determine the “tonality” (decide which language to speak), and where the children should accommodate to their choice. The use of the ‘pidgin’ helps them in this situation.



## 4.2. Communication with teachers

Communication with teachers at school is mostly carried out in Russian. According to the Regulation on Educational Establishments with an Ethno-cultural (National) Component, all subjects must be taught in Russian, except those which are included in the ethno-cultural component (national language and culture). The ideology of these schools is based on the primacy of Russian in the process of education; therefore, all teachers must watch the children in order to realize this idea.

In general, the children assert that their teachers observe these rules. For instance, one of the Armenian girls told us that when she greets the teacher of Russian, who is Armenian, with the Armenian phrase *Barev dzez!* 'Hello!', the teacher tells her that she should speak Russian at school. However, sometimes teachers in both schools switch to the national language, in order to be better understood by the children. As I have said in Section 2, in the Armenian school almost all of the children are Armenian, whereas in the Azeri school, only 50% of pupils are Azeri, and the rest are mostly Russian. Because of this, Russian is used as a vehicular language in the Azeri school. Thus, we could expect that in the Azeri school, the Regulation is always observed, because the teachers would also violate the pedagogical ethics if they speak Azerbaijani in the presence of Russian pupils. Nevertheless, the teachers sometimes speak the national language in both schools. Moreover, in the Azeri school, Russian children usually learn some Azerbaijani words, in order to understand what their teachers tell the Azeri children. As to the Armenian school, my informants say that the course of mathematics is simultaneously taught in both languages, contrary to the Regulation, to help the children understand the subject better.<sup>2</sup>

## 4.3. Communication with friends and classmates

I combine communication with friends and classmates into one type, because in most cases, the friends of our informants are at the same time their classmates, and communication with them usually takes place at school. However, it is primarily informal, which is why the formal school rules imposed by teachers are no longer in force. The children are relatively free in their choice of language, but this choice depends on multiple factors.

First, the use of language depends on the interlocutor: whether (s)he knows Azerbaijani/Armenian, or not. Of course, the children in our sample use Russian as a vehicular language in communication with those of their friends who do not speak Azerbaijani or Armenian. In contrast, the use of language in communica-

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<sup>2</sup> This manner of teaching mathematics ideally corresponds to the representation of the mother tongue in linguistics. Some linguists suppose that to find out which language is more important for a bilingual person, it is sufficient to ask him/her which language (s)he counts in mentally, because each bilingual always chooses the language which is best fixed in his/her mind for counting (Zemskaja 2001). During my research, I asked all informants which language they count in. As it turned out, all of them use their national language for this purpose, even those children who assert that it is easier for them to speak Russian than Azeri or Armenian.

tion with Azeri/Armenian friends is conditioned by the topic of the conversation, and by the presence/absence of pupils who do not speak Azerbaijani or Armenian.

Note that in this sphere, the difference between the two schools under analysis is also significant. As I have shown, in the Armenian school, all children are Armenian, so they can use Armenian during the breaks. But in fact, what the pupils use is a mixture of their mother tongue and Russian, including many Russian words for which they do not know the equivalents in their mother tongue (the same sort of pidgin which they use in family communication). Nevertheless, rather often, our Armenian informants completely switch to Russian, mostly when they discuss the material learnt at school, or their homework. The only reason is that the principal language of education at this school is Russian, so they know many terms, such as “Newton’s laws,” or “Periodic table of chemical elements,” only in Russian, and can hardly translate them into their mother tongue.

As far as the Azeri children are concerned, the distribution of the two languages is the same: Russian is used for discussing school subjects, and Azeri (or rather, a mixture of Azeri and Russian) for all other topics.

Now I pass to the second factor – the presence/absence of pupils who do not speak Azerbaijani or Armenian. Situations in which communication takes place in the presence of children who do not understand Armenian are very rare at the Armenian school. But at the Azeri school, everything is more complicated, because Azeris study side by side with Russians. Therefore, unlike Armenian children, the necessity of respecting the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975) – that is, speaking a language which can be understood by all participants (Russian) – weighs upon all Azeri children. The problem is that this principle is not always respected. Sometimes the children do not control themselves, and continue to speak Azerbaijani even in the presence of Russians. Moreover, it sometimes happens that they speak Azerbaijani on purpose, when they want to tell their Azeri friends something that ought to be kept secret from Russians. However, they claim that this does not lead to any conflicts.

#### 4.4. Communication in public places

Communication in public places is a particular sphere. I have found that the choice of language in this situation, by Azeri and Armenian children, obeys other rules than those relevant for family communication, or communication with friends and classmates. If an Azeri or an Armenian child is in a public place (in public transport, or in the street), it is not important to him/her who (s)he speaks to, and what (s)he speaks about. The crucial thing which determines the characteristic features of the communication is that a child is surrounded by strangers who do not speak his / her national language.

In this situation, the children use different arguments to explain their choice of language. Most of them say that they must speak Russian to show respect to the Russian-speaking people around them (that is, the Cooperative Principle is also important here) – accordingly, they always speak Russian in public places. This

argument is used mostly by the Armenian children, especially by girls, and more rarely by the Azeri children.

Another argument used is that the children speak Russian because they are afraid to be identified, and of differing from the majority of people: this is explainable, taking into account the large number of nationalists in Moscow, and especially the xenophobic attitude towards Caucasian immigrants within Russian society. Very often, it is the parents fearing for their children, who insist that they speak Russian in public places. The children do not always follow their parents' advice.

In contrast, there is an argument which makes many children speak their national languages in public places: they say that they are proud to be Azeris or Armenians, and consider it to be humiliating to hide their ethnicity. This argument is mainly used by Azeri children, and much less by Armenian children. Hence, one could conclude that in this situation, the national identity is more important for Azeri children than for Armenian ones, and that the latter are more polite than the former. However, these conclusions would be hasty and superficial. It is more precise to say that for Azeri children, who choose their national language for communication in public places, affirmation, and sometimes even proclamation, of their national identity is the crucial thing in this situation – whereas for Armenian children, it is more important to avoid a conflict.

## 5. Use of Russian and of the national languages in written communication

In this paper, we use the term 'written communication' in a broad sense: it covers all situations of everyday life where our informants have to use the written form of the language, either for emission (writing), or for reception (reading).

When the families of the children in our sample moved to Russia, their use of the written form of the national languages began to decline, whereas their use of Russian in written communication increased: the children prepare their homework in Russian; it is difficult to find any books or magazines in their national languages in Moscow, and so on. As it turned out, the most frequent situation in which the national language is used, is during lessons of this language. Thus, knowledge of the written language depends directly on the manner of teaching the language at school. The forms of bilingual education at the two schools under analysis have been examined above (see Section 2). It is obvious that the pupils of the Armenian school, where the strong form is represented, know the written form of the national language better than those of the Azeri school (weak form). Among our Armenian informants, only one boy cannot read and write in Armenian, and this is due to the fact that he used to study at a Russian school, and entered the school with the Armenian ethno-cultural component only one year ago. As to the Azeri children, cases like this are more frequent, even for children who

have always studied at the Azeri school. Their answers show that they have additional difficulties, related to the recent change from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin one. There has not been a change of the alphabet in the history of the Armenian language.

In situations involving written communication, the importance of knowing not only the grammatical and lexical mechanisms, but also the whole system of the communication norms of a language, becomes more evident. In other words, if a person is able to apply the grammatical rules of a language, and write without mistakes, it does not mean that (s)he can understand the classical literature in this language, or express his/her thoughts in the form of a school essay. Our informants can distinguish these two types of knowledge of the written language.

I asked the children to estimate the level of their written expression in Russian, and in the national language, and I found that the Armenian children have an equal level in the two languages: many of them can easily write texts in Russian and in Armenian without mistakes. As to the Azeri children, they assert that their level in written Azerbaijani is rather low; almost all of them make some mistakes in writing. By contrast, most of them (except those whose school results are below average) say that they make much fewer mistakes in written Russian. Because of this, the Azeri children feel embarrassed when writing Azerbaijani. However, in situations involving informal written communication (SMS, short letters), when nobody can accuse them of spelling errors, the children may use their national language. Zemskaja (2001) claims that emigrants who have lived abroad for a long time often feel embarrassment at writing in their national language, because they may make a mistake.

In order to find out whether my informants know the whole system of communicative norms in the two languages, and whether they can express their thoughts in the written form, I asked them to think in which language it is easier for them to write a school composition. As it turned out, for most Azeri and Armenian children, it is already easier to do it in Russian, despite the fact that in the Armenian school, children often write compositions in their national language. Many of the informants referred to the fact that they have a limited vocabulary in their national language, which does not allow them to write anything on serious topics. This is not the case with children who have lived in Russia for less than five years – their communicative skills in the national language still outrank their skills in Russian.

If we consider, in more detail, our informants' ability to compose written texts in Russian, it turns out that everything is not so good. Many of the children confess to using templates of school compositions, which one can buy in any bookshop in Moscow. Thus, we can conclude that their communicative competence is insufficient for writing connected texts by themselves.

As to the reception of written texts in the national language, and in Russian, the situation is *grosso modo* the same as with the emission of written texts: almost all children find it easier to read in Russian than in their national language, irrespective of genre, be it classical literature, school-books, magazines, Internet

websites, and so on. However, many informants have problems with comprehension of Russian classical literature: some of them read Russian classics in the brief adapted version. This proves that it is difficult for immigrants' children to master the communicative norms of written Russian.

I conclude that Azeri and Armenian children gradually lose their knowledge of the written form of their language, whereas the written form of Russian comes to the forefront. However, only a very small number of pupils attain a high level of written Russian. Moreover, one should not forget that knowledge of the written language depends directly on the length of time since emigration.

## Conclusions

In the present paper, I have shown that schools with an ethno-cultural component, while assisting the children in integrating into a new environment, at the same time cause significant tension related to language use. The children have to follow a double programme, and since time does not always allow them to concentrate equally on studying Russian and the national language, they are forced to choose between them. In this situation, all of the informants pay more attention to Russian, because they associate it with their future success at school and at work. However, they do not refuse their national language, either, because they need it to "feel their roots". For Armenians, the two aims – to integrate into the Russian society, and to preserve their language and culture – are equally important. This is why the Armenian school is almost mono-ethnic, and the Armenian children are motivated in learning Armenian. Although Azeris also realize that preserving their language and culture is crucially important, in practice, the aim of integrating into Russian society appears to be much more important.

The comparison between knowledge of Russian and the national language, at the moment of emigration, and the present time, showed us that the Azeri and the Armenian children integrate into the Russian society rather quickly. The rhythm of the integration depends first of all on the ambition of the children and their parents, which manifests itself in the effort they make to learn both languages (persevering work at home, private lessons vs. passive attitude).

In oral communication, Russian and the national language are distributed among the spheres of communication. The analysis of the spheres (communication with family members, with teachers, with friends and classmates) allows us to conclude that the use of the national language is mainly restricted to everyday life, whereas Russian is employed in a wider range of situations (for Armenians, this distribution is more apparent than for Azeris). The case of communication in public places is an exception to this rule, because in this particular situation, children often switch to Russian due to fear of xenophobia. As to the written forms of the languages, it is possible to say that this form of the national language cannot develop normally in emigration. It retreats to the background, and surrenders its position to written Russian.

The distribution of the languages among the spheres is not complementary. In the family, at school, and in other spheres, the children in our sample may switch

from Russian to Azerbaijani/Armenian (in other words, we see a situation of interference). Therefore, language use by the Azeri and Armenian children in our sample can be regarded as a case of bilingualism, with some elements of diglossia (functional distribution of languages).

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