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### Languages of a Nation

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**Abstract**—Two postulates about the role of ethnic diversity and the fate of languages in the world are revised on the basis of Russian materials. The author makes the following conclusions: (a) the ethnic fragmentation of the population and language diversity of the countries in the world do not correlate directly with their levels of democracy, presence of conflicts, and economic success and (b) widely publicized predictions about the quick extinction of most languages in the world have turned out to be a myth, and international campaigns and declarations in support of endangered languages were excessively politicized. The process of revitalization of languages is under way; they are acquiring a higher status, acknowledgment, and support on the territory of the former Soviet Union, including the minority languages of the peoples of Dagestan, the North, and Siberia. The state policy of providing an official status for regional languages and the ethnic component of the federative system as ethnocultural autonomy for individual regions and ethnic communities play a key role. A list of endangered languages is given; motives and factors of assimilation in favor of the Russian language in Russia are explained. Categories and social practices based on them, such as *mother tongue* and *national language* are revised in favor of multiply and mutually nonexclusive approaches.

**Keywords:** ethnic and linguistic diversity, linguistic situation, minority and majority languages, language policy in Russia, language status, native (ethnic) language, state (national) language.

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My scholarly and public experiences have assured me that, in countries with a complex ethnic and linguistic composition of the population, problems and crises spring up where and when the state and institutions of civil society are unable or unwilling to offer an adequate formula of national identity, to build the statehood itself to fit the complex composition of the population instead of redoing “a nation to fit the state,” to elaborate a positive program and mechanisms of ethnocultural development, and to prevent and resolve contradictions and conflicts. Therefore, we should speak not so about the “friendship of peoples” as the desired goal but more about a “cohesive nation,” in which group and local–regional differences make an organic whole and in which various traditions, languages, and beliefs enrich one another and comprise a complex community based on a country-wide identity, common historical and cultural values, and jointly experienced accomplishments and dramas.

Similar target conditions apply to other countries with culturally complex populace. The Russian experience and results of scholarly analysis can be used in many countries, but self-awareness is useful for Russia too outside of an isolationist paradigm, especially if we take into account the debate around polyethnicity and

a policy of multiculturalism, as well as the burning problem of compatibility of Christians and Muslims within one state. Despite many scholarly works and public practices, a number of crucial questions remain unanswered: to what extent does the ethnocultural, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity of a state promote or hinder its stable performance? To what extent must the state sponsor or oppose such diversity? What should the world expect: total cultural mingling, accompanied by conflicts between life foundations and values, or nation-states where political (civic) nations will retain their fundamental magnitudes but will rethink them in favor of their cultural complexity?

On May 16, 2013, *The Washington Post* published material on the map of the most multiethnic and most monoethnic countries of the world. It concerned a project performed by a group of social scientists of the Harvard Institute of Economic Research on the basis of national censuses, encyclopedias, the CIA database, and *The Atlas of the Peoples of the World*, published by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1964, as well as *Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook* of 1998 [1]. The authors surveyed 650 ethnic groups in 190 countries. The degree of “ethnic fragmentation” was measured by the degree of difference in the answers to the question on ethnic identity. Finally, correlation tables were drawn; on their basis, the American colleagues

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made, in my opinion, both trivial and debatable conclusions.

The authors believe that the most ethnically homogeneous are countries of Europe and Northeast Asia, among which the most monoethnic are Japan and Korea. Here, ethnicity and nationality almost coincide. In the middle are the countries of the Americas. They are sufficiently multiethnic, except for Chile and Argentina. The most multiethnic are African countries. The highest index of “ethnic fragmentation” is in Uganda, then comes Liberia. The Middle East is diverse but multiethnic as a whole. Russia with its, as I see it, “unique multinationalism” is somewhere in the third ten. Conflicts, according to the authors of the project, occur most often in multiethnic countries, but their cause may also be poverty, since ethnic diversity correlates with a low level of development. Rich countries are more monoethnic; strong democracy also correlates more with monoethnicity. The presence of numerous ethnic communities in fragmented societies imposes limitations on political freedom, because some groups strive for control over others. The existence of culturally different groups requires each group to have its own leaders, manipulation, and lobbying, and politicians often use fragmentation to mobilize “one’s own” or to exclude “others.” Monoethnic societies are managed democratically more easily due to the smaller number of conflicts. The main conclusion of the project was that ethnic and language fragmentations correlate (the higher the fragmentation index, the worse the indicators are) with economic development, social conditions, and the quality of governance institutions. However, the authors admitted that they had been unable to reveal convincing regularities [2–4].

We may agree with these conclusions to an extent but not in substance: *diversity is largely a resource and not a source of risk; stability and development do not have a direct correlation with the degree of ethnolinguistic fragmentation of the population.* The same is true of the level of democracy. Monoethnicity in a number of countries resulted from discrimination and even violence in order to ensure ethnic “purity” of some nations. However, the destinies of the 15 states of the former Soviet Union, from monoethnic Armenia and Turkmenistan to the most multiethnic Russian Federation, in no way coincide either with indicators of their economic development (per capita income of the GDP) and democratic structure or with the presence/absence of conflicts. The stability and cohesion of various societies depend on other factors and circumstances without rigid correlation with the number and profile of culturally distinctive groups that constitute one society or another. The very ethnic and linguistic diversity in many cases is a historical reality for many states, which has its own dynamics, changeable in a way and in a way unchangeable for decades. What

is happening to this diversity in different countries and, primarily, in Russia?

### THE MYTH OF THE EXTINCTION OF LANGUAGES

In 1996, UNESCO published *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*, followed by its two revised editions in 2001 and 2010, which announced as endangered 2500 languages out of the 6000 languages existing on the planet. The latest edition stated that 230 languages had disappeared after 1950. Various degrees of extinction also endangered 116 languages on the territory of the Russian Federation. The *Atlas* specified which languages were dying irreversibly, which were threatened by extinction, and which were in a dangerous situation. Among the disappearing languages were announced all the languages of the small nationalities of the North and Siberia, Udmurt, Kalmyk, and the languages of the peoples of the North Caucasus; among the endangered were listed 20 languages, including Chechen, Tuvan, and Belorussian.

The *Atlas’s* publication finalized an ambitious project with which an international campaign to preserve linguistic diversity in the world had begun. UNESCO adopted several regulatory acts: The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism, approved by the UNESCO General Assembly in 2003. Numerous public actions and scholarly discussions were held on the preservation of languages, language policy, and linguistic rights. The conclusions of the campaign’s initiators and participants were discouraging: only several hundred languages would remain by the end of this century, the rest would disappear. The recommendations were varied, but the main point was to study and document dying languages, support their teaching and use, and counter the discrimination against native minority-language speakers, especially those for whom it is the main or only language of knowledge and communication. On the whole, this campaign strongly affected the scientific community, and in many publications on global evolution, the authors accepted the following postulates as indisputable [5, p. 27]:

In the 21st century, up to 70% of the existing languages are expected to disappear. In a couple of centuries, 500–600 languages will survive only.

Every two weeks, one language becomes dead. In other words, 24 languages die every year, and this will continue.... In order to preserve a language, the number of its speakers should exceed 100 000 people. Today, 400 languages are considered disappearing.

The desire to preserve the languages of small-numbered peoples as part of cultural heritage is, of course, praiseworthy. Nevertheless, here UNESCO and the authors of the project were gripped by armchair-romantic and politicized concepts of language and its role in the life of contemporary people, societies, and states. Here, we see the insufficient knowledge of the compilers of world language atlases of the real linguistic situation in various countries and regions. Equally, linguistic ethnonationalism served us poorly, making the issues of language status and use part of the struggle for self-determination, power, and other resources, as well as a means of suppressing some culturally distinctive groups and encouraging the dominance of others.

As for the Russian situation, its analysis and recommendations appear to have been perfunctory as well as politically motivated. Note that Russian data was prepared with the participation of Russian specialists, mainly, sociolinguists. In the mid-1990s, they prepared the *Red Book* of languages of the Russian Federation, where they listed, by the example of endangered animal and plant species, more than half of the languages that existed in our country. It is interesting that many travelers and academic experts wrote about the inevitable extinction of the Siberian and Caucasian languages back in the late 19th–early 20th centuries [6–8], but, at least in the 20th century, languages in Russia did not disappear, except for two-to-three dialectal variants of minority languages. E.A. Pivneva, who investigated this issue, concluded that the discourse about the extinction of northern aborigines at historical stages was largely emotional and political, although the reduction in their number, epidemics, and the distressful situation with health care had really happened [9]. Population growth in some indigenous groups over the past decades is associated not only with improved living conditions but also with a certain “reverse assimilation,” i.e., the transition of people who had once lost their identity or had mixed origins back into this category. This has occurred owing to legislative and other preferences that indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation have received.

Nevertheless, the world’s linguistic mosaic has not remained unchanged. In due time, a large number of various language variants (dialects) were replaced by standardized literary languages, which, no doubt, was a positive phenomenon and necessary for the origin of modern centralized states, as well as for the development of industrial economies and urbanization. For example, the dialect of the region called Ile-de-France became the basis for the French literary language, and the Moscow regional variant of Russian became the basis for the standard Russian language. Of course, the variants of indigenous languages could have disappeared during the colonization of Siberia and other regions of the Empire, but we would hardly

agree that a much greater number of languages existed in this region a century ago. Russian censuses, starting from 1897 and up to the latest, show a similar list of languages, although their names have changed together with changes in the nomenclature of ethnic groups and their consolidations into so-called “socialist nations and nationalities.” What really changed in Russia was a reduction of the habitat of small-numbered peoples, a decrease in the number of native speakers, and the transfer of a large number, if not the majority, of the representatives of small-numbered peoples to the Russian language. Relative to Northern peoples, N.B. Vakhtin called it a *language shift* [10]. I prefer a more definite name—*linguistic assimilation in favor of the Russian language*. It is possible that coercive measures were sometimes used in some places, but on the whole, it was a voluntary choice in favor of a more powerful and more important-for-life language of communication in this country. In some regions (primarily, in Dagestan and the Volga region), this process was caused by the need to overcome extreme language diversity through establishing a common language of communication; in other regions, language assimilation (or Russification) was affected by the development of the economy, education, the growth of cities, and migration.

Some inadequate evaluations of linguistic problems also came out during late-Soviet and post-Soviet liberalization. As V.M. Alpatov notes [11],

During perestroika and the first post-Soviet years, ideas spread across contemporary Russia that only a “totalitarian system” hindered the functioning of small languages, and the replacement of the social system might lead to their “restoration.” In addition, restoration often implied that a language would acquire functions that it did not have previously or had at the very beginning of the Soviet period. The real experience of countries whose social systems were considered as models was not taken into account in the heat of action.

However, during this period, another important process was going on in the language situation on the territory of the former Soviet Union, including Russia, namely, the “nationalization” of the languages of the former Soviet minorities, who acquired full state independence or a higher status within the Russian federal system and renewed through the “parade of sovereignties.”

I entitled my article “Languages of a Nation,” which is a certain revision per se, since a national language usually implies the language of an ethnic entity, while two or three languages in one ethnonation is a rarity (two languages have Mordovians and Maris in Russia). The enthusiasts of a nation-state based on one dominant ethnicity put a somewhat different sense into this notion. They understand a national language quite correctly, as a state language, but the state itself is declared as an exclusive property of the “dom-

inant” ethnonation. This ethnonation is unwilling to share the language—the most important capital and symbol of sovereign titularity—with other numerically smaller groups within one state. Regrettably, all states in the former Soviet Union’s space, except for Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, follow exactly this scenario.

In my opinion, the *language of a nation* is a conventional notion; it is used as the language (or languages) of the predominant majority or significant ethnic groups, which becomes the language of the institutions of a nation-state, from the army and justice to technical instructions and mass culture. In other words, this is the state language at most, if such is declared in the state. The language of a nation in its single option with regard to a human community of a civic–political and even ethnocultural type is most often a nationalistic utopia. It does not correlate with the linguistic situation in real life, which is almost always multilingual and which many want to simplify to their own language. As for the state and its institutions, here operates, having justified itself, the global practice of constituting one or two state languages, which are used not only by bureaucracy but also by the majority of the population. In Russia, such a language is Russian; in China, Chinese (Han with its six dialects); in Japan, Japanese; in the United States, English; and so on.

However, this happens far from everywhere. A singular state language is accepted best of all by the population when the explicit majority of citizens belong to one linguistic community or when there is no such majority at all. In the latter case, the language of the elite pretends to be the state language, which, as a rule, falls heir to the colonial system (for example, English in India) and which is used in this status. By the way, a second state language, Hindi with dialects, was added with time to state English in India as the language of the most numerous and dominant linguistic community (over 400 million people, or 41% of the population, speak it).

If a country has a second demographically and culturally important linguistic community that claims to be equal in status to the first one, here the conflict-free option is official bilingualism (Canada, Belgium, Finland, etc.) or trilingualism (Singapore). Cases of official quadrilingualism at the country level are rare (Switzerland). Some countries have regions where the official languages are even more numerous (14 official languages in Dagestan, 11 official languages in the Canadian province of the Northwest Territories).

I think that, for a civic nation, it is important to have a linguistic unity, but this condition is not compulsory. For two-community states, the best option is the establishment of two state (official) languages. The struggle for official bilingualism is long and persistent (as in Canada and Belgium) and sometimes explodes into open conflicts (as in Sri Lanka and Ukraine), but,

judging by international experience, it always results in the recognition of more than one official language. It appears that several countries are now on the road to the recognition of official bilingualism; among them are the United States (English and Spanish), Ukraine (Ukrainian and Russian), and Kazakhstan (Kazakh and Russian).

A state language is a special concern of the authorities and society, because it is not only the language of the majority, but often one country or another is the only place on earth where a particular language has this status and where its existence is guaranteed in a competitive world order. Therefore, the one-sided enthrallment with the preservation of multilingualism, primarily, small languages, clashes with the interest of the existing civic nations to ensure their linguistic unity and protect the status of *majoritarian* languages. This enthrallment may contradict the private family and individual strategies, whose interests lie not in preserving the “language of ancestors” but in competitive mastering of the language that is dominant in the country. The nowadays decision-makers and experts are seeking a proper balance: how to combine linguistic centralization and on its basis to ensure common civic identity with the need of a part of the citizens of the same country to preserve their ethnic languages. Many countries have not yet found the balance between practicing the language of larger society and the use of the languages of minorities. Russia also has such problems.

First of all, we should clarify fundamental categories excessively loaded with emotion and symbolism such as *mother-tongue* or *national language* in the sense of *the language of their nationality*. Modern scholarly approaches have no satisfactory definitions of these notions, just as no generally accepted opinion exists that a human being must have a mother tongue and that this must be only one language. Simplified opinions also exist in Russia. For example, E.O. Khabenskaya thinks that the *native language* is the language of an ethnocultural entity with which individuals associate themselves, i.e., strictly speaking, their “mother tongue” [12]. Domestic scholars and social practice stick to the same position [13; 14, p. 157; 15]. The titular public in Russia’s republics, as well as representatives of disciplines such as pedagogy and ethnopsychology, defends it especially zealously [16].

The position closest to mine is that “the mother tongue is not necessarily native and that the native language is not necessarily the first” [10, p. 46]. However, this statement is insufficient; many still think that the native language should be considered the mother’s language [17] and that two native languages cannot exist just like there cannot be two mothers. For example, in the opinion of V.G. Kostomarov, “a language learned... may become in human life more important than the native one, which, however, even if neglected,

**Table 1.** The number of languages in the countries of the world

Number of languages in country	Number of countries with this number of languages	% of total countries
1	6	4
2	22	14
3–5	27	18
6–10	24	16
11–50	46	30
over 50	28	18

Source: R. W. Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society: Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1995), Vol. 1.

remains the mother, although maybe less beloved than the stepmother” [18, p. 11]. Actually, this is far from being the case in real life: the language of principal knowledge and communication becomes native, and the first language learned or heard from the mother has no special predispositions.

Language is not only a pillar of culture, ethnic identity, and group solidarity. Of no less importance is the fact that it is an instrument of nation-building. Language and language policy may cause interethnic, social, and other tensions and even open conflicts, and an adequate language policy is a condition for the national security of states with a complex (including multilingual) composition of the population. Language in the past and even to a greater extent today is a means of ideological and political influence (indoctrination), as well as intergroup and interstate domination and competition, and a sphere of special state responsibility, including legislative regulation. At the same time, language with its forms and variants, choice and command of it, spheres of application, and linguistic communication is a basic human right and important civil freedom, which is guaranteed by the constitutions and laws of a country and its constituent formations, as well as by the system of international declarations and charters. New trends have also appeared here, for example, the right for linguistic assimilation as an equally fundamental right for the preservation and use of a language.

Finally, it is possible and necessary to speak about equal opportunities for languages but not about their parity. There is an implicit hierarchy, the top place in which is occupied by the so-called world languages, among which is Russian. In addition, not only the number of language speakers but also the cultural capital created by it also matter, as well as the sociopolitical role that a language plays primarily thanks to states where it is recognized as a state language, or as an official language of international communication.

Global competition is going on among top-world languages. Today we observe the global expansion of

English as the language of politics, business, science, mass culture, information, and communication. In this situation, the role of the Russian language in our country is acquiring a new aspect: *it is becoming a protective barrier for small languages*, whose speakers master Russian and not English as a second language, remaining within their native (!) linguistic milieu with their compatriots, who also speak it.

#### NEW TRENDS IN THE WORLD LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

A basic manifestation of the cultural complexity of contemporary nations is the linguistic diversity of the populations of the countries of the world. This diversity is not a new phenomenon: it existed from the time when early polities emerged and centralized and modern states formed after. For example, the population of Ancient Rus', the Moscow Tsardom, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union spoke different languages [19, 20]. Attempts of the nation-builders of modern states from the time of the Westphalian system and the French revolution to destroy “dialects” and make only one language the language of a nation were hardly a success anywhere. France, apart from a large number of French dialects, has preserved all through its history the Breton and Corsican languages; Britain is reviving the Gaelic and Welsh languages, to say nothing of the Scottish and Irish dialects of English. The United States, despite the assimilative doctrine of the melting pot, has always preserved the languages of the main emigration countries and aboriginal population's languages, and after the annexation of Mexican territories to the south of the Rio Grande in the mid-19th century, millions of Spanish-speaking citizens found themselves in this country.

The linguist R.W. Fasold gives the following table of the linguistic diversity of the countries of the world (Table 1). This table is based on data about the so-called autochthonous, or permanent, population at the beginning of the 1980s, when a regular cycle of national population censuses was under way. The situation has changed significantly since then.

Over the past 30 years, we have witnessed processes of not only language shift and the disappearance of the languages of small-numbered groups but also the revitalization of languages, a strengthened status of regional and minority languages. The European, American, Asian, and former USSR countries, including Russia, have been successfully conducting scientific research and social initiatives to preserve linguistic diversity and introduce the teaching of small (minority) languages [21]. The world has been experiencing a linguistic renaissance rather than the mass extinction of languages that was predicted by some experts and public activists.

The post-Soviet states have experienced a large-scale “comeback” of the languages of large and some small peoples to all spheres of life, as well as the attainment of new titular<sup>1</sup> ethnations of a higher status by them, primarily, through the system of constitutional provisions and language legislation [22, 23]. True, not everywhere has this meant complication of the linguistic composition of the populations of new states. The linguistic nationalism of new titular nations has strengthened the positions of new state languages by reducing the spheres of the use of the Russian language and the number of the Russian-language population. Certain excusatory arguments existed for this process, because linguistic Russification in the former Soviet republics (primarily initiated by local leaders) had substantially challenged the positions of the languages of large Soviet nations (mainly Russian was heard in the streets of Kiev, Tashkent, Alma-Ata, and other republican capitals). In a meantime, the union’s republics also witnessed the flush of linguistic creativity through professional culture and science. The so-called national–Russian bilingualism was becoming almost a universal norm of the Soviet people of non-Russian nationalities [24–26].

Primarily the positions of new state languages and, in a number of cases, contrary to the official policy, individual minority languages (Polish, Rusyn, and Hungarian in Ukraine; Kara-Kalpak in Uzbekistan; Uzbek in Kirgizia; Gagauz and Gypsy in Moldova; and so on) became stronger during the perestroika years and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Certain ethnopolitical separatist conflicts embodied a strong linguistic component, which in the long run led, for example, to the strengthening of the positions of the Abkhazian and Ossetian languages in the partially recognized states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The movement for strengthening the positions of the Svan and Mingrelian languages took place in Georgia. In Russia, almost all languages of large non-Russian peoples gained an official status at the regional level.

A large-scale migration exchange in population, especially along the south–north line, occurred during these 30 years, when new ethnic groups of migrants moved to Europe and North America, taking root and acquiring linguistic rights there. All West European and North American states, Australia, and some Asian states (Malaysia and Singapore) comprise the category of recipient countries and those with increasingly complex ethnolinguistic profiles. The Russian Federation also belongs to the countries with an increasingly

complex ethnolinguistic composition, having become after 1991 the world’s second migrant-hosting country following the United States [27]. Thus, the table proposed by Fasold should be updated to increase the number of multilingual states and decrease the number of monolingual ones.

In other words, all contemporary nations of the world are multilingual.

This is a very important conclusion, entailing correction of the notion of *national language*, or *nation’s language*, widespread in domestic social studies [28, pp. 325, 326; 29, pp. 34–36]. Thus far this category has been used primarily in relation to ethnic groups that often take shape as sociocultural groupings by linguistic similarity. However, first, there are ethnic groups that do not take shape by the principle of linguistic distinction (for example, in the Arabic or Spanish-speaking world), and there are ethnations that have more than one language but perceive themselves (or are perceived by the external environment) as one group. Second, for the majority of Russia’s non-Russian population, the main language of knowledge and communication, i.e., the *first language* (a term that can be offered as an analog of the notion *native language*) is the Russian language and not the language that coincides with the ethnic identity of an individual. A similar situation has also formed among the indigenous peoples of the New World whose overwhelming majority speaks English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish, except for certain Arctic groups in Canada, Indian communities in Amazonia, and the aboriginal peoples of Central America (the Indians of Guatemala and the Mexican state of Chiapas).

Since the category *national language* is absent in academic discourse and social practices and both political and ethnic nations differ by multilingual composition, it is reasonable to replace this category with a more adequate one at least in the scientific and legal language. As for nation-states (civil or political nations), the categories *state language* and *official language* are operational, and as for ethnic groups, the categories *ethnic language* or *the language of a nationality* (the latter is seen as a compromise option that takes into account the domestic practice of using the term *nationality*) are operational. This approach accounts better for the global trend in linguistic processes and international sociolinguistic and anthropological terminologies.

#### ON THE ROLE OF FEDERALISM AND THE STATUS OF LANGUAGES IN RUSSIA

The principle of the federative structure of states, let alone federalism with ethnic asymmetry, when certain federative units (regions, states, provinces) have the status of ethnoterritorial autonomies, is criticized

<sup>1</sup> The term *titular* (to replace the term *indigenous*) is used relative to ethnic communities (ethnations) whose names (ethnonyms) are used in the names of states and internal ethnoterritorial autonomies (in Russia, these are republics, autonomous oblast, and autonomous okrugs), as well as groups whose languages are acknowledged as official languages but are not reflected in the names (titles) of states (Abazins and Nogais in Karachay–Cherkessia, the peoples of Dagestan).

by many. Special critique is aimed at *ethnic federalism* in Russia [30]. At the same time, declarations are often heard, especially on the part of ultra-patriotic politicians, that ethnic republics as federal units with certain special rights and statuses are the unfortunate legacies of the Soviet regime and that this situation must be corrected by abolishing the republics or reorganizing them radically, taking into account the demography and natural habitat of one nationality or another. I have substantial objections on that score.

Ethnic federalism (a conventional term) is not exclusively Soviet invention. Most of large countries with culturally complex populations have a federal structure, and their internal administrative borders take into account ethnic and linguistic factors (except for the United States and Germany). Some countries have long established and successfully managed internal ethnoterritorial autonomies as regions and provinces (in China), cantons (in Switzerland), federal districts (in Belgium), provinces (in Spain and Canada), and so on. Almost all of these formations have a special status, at least, a special linguistic status (for example, the Law on the French Language in Quebec, or the status of the Catalan language in the Autonomous Statute of Catalonia, and the Basque language in the constitution of the Basque province) [31]. In addition, Imperial Russia had also accumulated historical experience of internal autonomies and language regulations, and the Soviet experience of “national-state” construction was acknowledged by international public and foreign experts as a positive example of providing ethnocultural development for the multiethnic population of a large state [32–36].

With the formation of new Russia, old federalism with republics and autonomous oblasts and okrugs acquired a new meaning, but its essence remained: this was the form of internal self-determination for the most of non-Russian peoples who preserved more or less compact habitats and traditions of statehood or self-governance [37]. Significant innovations were also introduced into the post-Soviet language policy in terms of the legal status of non-Russian languages after Russian acquired the status of a countrywide official language. According to regional (republican) legislations, 35 languages acquired the status of official languages in republics even where the ethnic groups that spoke these languages did not constitute the majority of the population and, in a number of cases, were sort of “double minorities” (a minority among the predominant groups in a region, as in Adygea, Bashkiria, Karelia, and autonomous okrugs). This played an important role in preserving language diversity and ensuring interethnic accord and stability in Russia. Most speakers of non-Russian languages in present-day Russia have the opportunity to learn their language and be taught in it, as well as to enjoy government services and information on the territory of Rus-

sian republics, autonomous okrugs, and in the country’s large cities. This is an important argument in favor of preserving the current Russian federalism, including the existing republics and autonomous okrugs.

The linguistic situation in our country is specific primarily due to how it is explained by experts and formalized politically. Many Russians (about one-fourth of the population) were born and grew up in ethnically mixed families; they often speak their mothers’ and fathers’ languages equally well; many, having grown up in a monolingual environment, then find themselves in different surroundings during studies, military service, work, etc. Therefore, millions of our compatriots command and use two or three languages. According to the 2010 population census, Russian citizens have a command of 230 languages, 170 of which are the languages of Russia’s nationalities or their subgroups. Maris and Mordovians speak two different languages, and Andic–Tsezic peoples, who are considered to be a part of the Avar nation, speak nearly a dozen living languages. There are so-called single-village languages, when one or two mountain villages populated by several hundred people preserve for centuries their own “rural” language and also speak the languages of more numerous groups, as well as Russian. Some small groups of Northern peoples have languages spoken by only dozens of individuals. However, the census list of languages which the country’s citizens have a command of includes those of nonresident dwellers, as well as languages studied by professionals and amateurs. For example, the list contains African and other exotic languages, not related to the Russian language situation. However, this figure, even reduced by 50–60 languages, needs critical analysis. The growing number of ethnic categories in Russia (128 in 1989, 157 in 2002, and 193 in 2010) was caused not only by more open expression of ethnocultural identities registered by census-takers but also by ethnic group lobbying, the increasing number of immigrants, and more sophisticated procedures in the implementation and publication of census materials [39]. As a result, the list of Russian peoples, or ethnoses, contains those that do not have a distinct language, if ethnic activists or romantic experts did not invent one hastily (we are speaking about, for example, Assyrians, Besermyans, Cossacks, Kamchadals, Kryashens, Pomors, Soyots, Cherkeso-gais, and others). Moreover, we are actually dealing with the loss of language competence, especially by the assimilated descendants of early migrants or autochthonous inhabitants of the Russian state (for example, the Dutch, Danes, Russian Germans, Swedes, the French, and the Japanese who are present on the list of Russia’s nationalities). Their remote ancestors switched to Russian, and their old languages were forgotten. By our estimates, about 150 languages exist in the Russian Federation, but this is also too

many. Hence, observable is the need for linguistic research and a more sensitive language policy.

In my opinion, most languages of Russia that are listed in the UNESCO Atlas are not among the endangered or extinguishing languages. Chechen, Yakut, Tuvan, Buryat, and others are powerful languages with their own writing systems, literature, folklore, and even local bureaucracies to support the ethnic language and native education in the respective republics. Moreover, on the basis of the 2010 census data, it is possible to distinguish a category of the majority ethnicities and languages (30 groups numbering over 50 000 people); these are peoples that have ethnoterritorial autonomy and speak languages that enjoy an official status along with the state Russian language.

The 2010 census data indicate that the degree of language competence among non-Russian peoples with ethnoterritorial autonomies in the form of republics is high: from 37% among Karelians to 99% among Chechens of the number of titular groups who live in the republics. The number of the speakers of these languages is quite large: from 17 000 among Karelians and 38 000 among Khakases to 1.2 million among Chechens. The degree of preservation and use of a language depends not only on demography (the larger the group, the higher the percentage in it of those who know the ethnic language) but also on the character of spatial distribution. *The less dispersed the group and the higher its share in the population of "its" republic, the better the competence, the broader the use, and the safer the position of a non-Russian language are. The very fact of the existence of an autonomy and constitutional recognition of the official status of a language (or several languages) on par with Russian affects decisively the language situation.*

History factor also plays an important role, namely, how long ago the integration of the territory of the main residence of an ethnic community into the Russian state occurred and how widespread the presence of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people was on the territory of the republic. For example, Mor-dovians, who settled dispersedly and integrated (including those who converted to Orthodoxy) into Russia 400 years ago, differ greatly from Chechens and Avars, who merged into the Russian Empire much later, settled more compactly, worship Islam all without exception, and have a higher birth rate. In the past decade, Avars and Chechens have found themselves in the first ten of the most numerous nationalities in the country, preserving compact residence in their republics. The degree of competence in the ethnic language among these two peoples, as well as among other peoples of the North Caucasus, is very high (from 70% among Adygeis to 99% among Chechens who live in the corresponding republics). Even the 14 years of collective exile and the liquidation of the autonomies did not change the linguistic setup of Chechens and other

ethnic groups who suffered deportation under Stalin. At the same time, the deportations and residence outside of the historic homeland also promoted a high degree of competence in Russian among the peoples of the North Caucasus [40]. In this respect (the level of Russian language competence), they equal more integrated from the point of history and religion non-Russian peoples of the Volga region and Siberia. In other words, among majoritarian nationalities exist ethnic communities who, in fact, are almost fully bilingual. Avars and Chechens take the first place here. Dargins, Lezgins, Karachays, Balkars, Ossetians, Cherkesses, Kabardinians, and others are in the same group. It is noteworthy that bilingualism in the majority of North Caucasians is not in favor of the ethnic language: the number of Russian speakers is higher, and, if we consider those who live outside of "their" republics, its knowledge and use is noticeably higher than the language of their nationality. For example, among Dagestan's Chechens (Akkins), 64.6% speak Chechen and almost 100% speak Russian.

Competence in the ethnic language is somewhat lower among the peoples of the Volga region and Siberia (except for Tuvans, Tatars, and Yakuts: 96.7, 92.4, and 86%, respectively). The most linguistically Russified after Karelians are Kalmyks, Udmurts, and Mor-dovians. Even in this part of majoritarian groups, the speakers of the ethnic language number tens of thousands, and the threat of extinction of these languages is out of the question. At least, this will not happen in the observable historical perspective.

Unfortunately, the acting formula of the Russian census questionnaire does not consider the identification of the level of language competence and spheres of its use. Individual perceptions of what it means to have a command of a language, internal and external moral and ideological setups concerning the language of one's nationality, as well as an attitude to the Russian language, may influence the answers. Nevertheless, census data remain most comprehensive and authentic, although census results require critical analysis and knowledge of census procedures [41].

## PROBLEMS OF SMALL LANGUAGES

Table 2 shows 60 minority groups (fewer than 50 000 people) and the number of ethnic-language speakers recorded in the 2010 census. These data require adjustments concerning some small-numbered peoples of Dagestan. The Avar and Dargin dominance in Dagestan manifests itself in the inclusion of the groups of Avar–Ando–Tsezic and Lezgin-language peoples into larger categories of Avars or Dargins. During several Soviet censuses, representatives of these small groups were reregistered by local census-takers, or people preferred to call themselves Avars or Dargins, as if renouncing their small group identity [42]. Judging by the two post-Soviet censuses, this



**Table 2.** Minority languages and ethnic groups in the Russian Federation (under 50 000 people)

Ethnicity	Number	Number of those who know ethnic language	Ethnicity	Number	Number of those who know ethnic language
Abazins	43341	37831	Oroks*	295	47
Aleuts *	482	45	Orochs*	596	8
Andis	11789	5800	Rutuls	35240	30360
Archins	12	970	Samis	1771	353
Akhvakhs*	7930	210	Selkups	3649	1023
Bagvalals*	5	1447	Soyots*	3608	n/a
Bezhtas*	5958	6072	Tazes*	274	n/a
Botlikhs*	3508	206	Tats	1585	2012
Veps	5336	3613	Telengits	3712	n/a
Votes*	64	68	Teleuts	2643	975
Hinukhs*	443	n/a	Tindins*	635	n/a
Godoberins*	427	128	Tofalars*	762	93
Hunzibs	918	1012	Tubalars*	1965	229
Dolgans	7885	1054	Udeges*	1496	103
Izhorians*	266	123	Ulchis*	2765	154
Itelmens*	3193	82	Khantys	30943	9584
Kamchadals*	1227	Use the Itelmen language	Khwarshins	527	1737
Karatas*	4787	255	Tsakhurs	12769	10596
Kaitags*	7	n/a	Tsezes/Didos	11683	12467
Kereks*	4	10	Chamalals	24	19500
Kets*	1219	213	Chelkans	1181	310
Koryaks	7953	1665	Chuvans*	1002	Use the Yukaghir language
Kubachins*	120	n/a	Chukchis	15908	5095
Kumandins	2892	n/a	Chulyms*	355	44
Mansis	12269	938	Shors	12888	2839
Nanais	12003	1347	Evenks	37843	4802
Nganasans*	862	125	Evens	22383	5656
Nenets	44640	21926	Enets	227	43
Nivkhs*	4652	???	Eskimos	1738	508
			Yughis*	1	1
			Yukaghirs	1603	370

\* Endangered languages.

practice is preserved in the arsenal of local politics. Let us take, for example, Archins, whose language belongs to the Lezgin language group. The first Soviet census in 1926 recorded 863 representatives of this nationality; then Archins disappeared. In 2002, 89 people called themselves Archins; in 2010, 12 people (who resided outside of Dagestan). Meanwhile, according to Dagestani ethnographers, the number of Archins is about 5000 people [43, p. 283]. Then, it becomes clear why almost 1000 Dagestanis announced their knowledge of the Archin language in 2010. Of course, measures are necessary to preserve this language, in particular, by teaching it at elementary grades in villages where Archins live. However, we should take into account that, under the conditions of the long cohabitation and the dominance of Avar language in the republic, Archins were subject to Avarization. Many of them speak Avar or have even switched to either Avar or Russian. In other words, Archins who know their ethnic language are trilingual, and those who have lost it are bilingual. Their identity is also multiple: it is Archin and Avar in the ethnic aspect; they consider themselves Dagestanis as the regional identity and Russian citizens (Rossiyane) in the civic plane.

Another small Dagestani people of the Andic group is Bagvalals (or Bagulals). They numbered 3054 people according to the 1926 census, 40 according to the 2002 census, and 5 (again residing outside of Dagestan) according to the 2010 census. However, the latest census showed that almost 1500 Dagestanis know this ethnic language. It is clear that these are autochthonous speakers and not strangers who learned this language for the sake of curiosity. Consequently, this language is also alive, as well as the corresponding ethnic group. Bagulals are heavily Avarized linguistically, and, probably, almost all of them preferred to register as Avars in the census, even if they did not face administrative coercion or ideological pressure. Bagulals are not a high-status people in the republic, and any life promotions under the local conditions can encounter problems for this reason.

Table 2 has no data about Kajtak speakers, and as for the number of Kajtaks themselves, the number 7 is given, although, according to ethnographic and linguistic sources, their number reaches 25 000 [43]. Why there are no data about the speakers of this language is a question that should be addressed to the republic's statistical bodies. Kajtaks and their language could not simply have disappeared from the world ethnographic map. Hardly explainable are the data given in Table 2 about Chamalals, who live compactly in Dagestan's Tsumadinskii district and in other districts of the republic, as well as in Chechnya. Specialists think that this people numbers about 10 000, including 7000 who live in Dagestan and 2000 in Chechnya [43, p. 222]. In the 2010 census, 19 500 people stated that they speak Chamalal. Why only 24 people called themselves Cha-

malals is a question to be addressed in character of the census procedure rather than for scientific analysis. A similar picture occurs with Khwarshins, a people of the Tsezic linguistic group, whose number, according to ethnographic estimates, is about 2500 people [43, p. 273], and the census shows 527 people and 1737 people who speak the Khwarshin language. If representatives of this group number at least 2000–3000 and half of them know their ethnic language, it is reckless to consider this people and their language extinct. The census does not give the number of those who know the Tindin language, although, according to expert estimates, the number of Tindins (Tindals) is 8500–10 000 people [43, p. 214]. It is easy to see the explicit understatement of the number of Tindins (635 people) who live mainly in Tsumadinskii district of Dagestan. Thus, Dagestan's unique ethnic and linguistic mosaic is burdened by rigorous political arrangements and the desire to reduce the population to the officially stated 14 local ethnations, between whom command positions, prestigious places, and some other resources are divided. The Avarization and Darginization of almost 20 ethnic groups is under way; these peoples are, in fact, denied recognition as distinct communities. This process has gone too far, but trilingualism remains preferable in the linguistic sphere: a local ethnic language (it is also called a rural language), Avar or Dargin (the latter is for Kajtaks and Kubachins), and Russian.

If we speak about the languages of Dagestan that are really endangered, these are the Akhvakh, Botlikh, Godoberin, Ginukh, Kajtak, Karatin, Kubachin, and Tindal languages. The speakers of the rest of the minoritarian languages number in the hundreds and even thousands, and they cannot be attributed to endangered languages. As for the 14 larger nationalities of Dagestan that enjoy the official status together with their languages, we may speak only about the support and development of their languages, as well as about the balanced combination of teaching and using them alongside the countrywide Russian language.

A special story is the small-numbered peoples of the North and Siberia, who, unlike the small peoples of Dagestan, have a special legal status, fixed by the Federal Law On State Support for Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation. We should admit that about 20 languages of this group are in a critical situation due to the extreme paucity of language speakers and their advanced age. The Aleut language (45 speakers) can be attributed to such languages only conventionally, since another 450 Aleutians know it in the United States, where, after the adoption of the Alaskan aboriginal rights acts in the early 1970s, bilingual school education was introduced [44, p. 181], as well as the Votic (68 speakers), Ingrian (123), Kamchadal/Itelmen (82), Kerek (10 speakers, including 4 proper Kereks), Ket (213), Nganasan

(125), Orok (47), Oroch (8), Tofa (93), Tubalar (229), Udege (103), Ulch (154), Chulym (44), Ainu (43), and Yukaghir (370) languages. Thus, 15 languages of the small-numbered peoples of the North and Siberia are in danger of possible extinction, but it would be a mistake to attribute all languages of this group of Russia's nationalities to the endangered category.

#### RUSSIAN AS THE LANGUAGE OF A CIVIC NATION

Each national (at the country level) situation differs by the degree of distribution and use of languages, as well as the state policy conducted in relation to languages. The Russian Federation with its diversity of languages accumulated a rich experience of “language construction” during the Soviet period, and it has initiated post-Soviet legal acts and other measures to recognize and support languages of large and small nationalities. Nevertheless, when is it possible to speak about *the language of a nation* not only as a state language but also as the language of common knowledge and communication? This setting of the problem of the Russian language in Russia is quite justified, which, by the way, cannot be said about many other countries with a culturally complex population. According to the 2010 census, 99.4% of the permanent population in Russia have a command of the Russian language. This shows a high degree of assimilation in favor of the Russian language and/or the distribution of bilingualism among non-Russians.

Some politicians and specialists consider this phenomenon negative or a sort of betrayal of the language of their nationality. Their argument is “dead language, dead people.” However, there is the right of people and the right of parents to choose a language for themselves and for their children, and this choice is made not just out of ideological considerations or under emotions and ideas but also out of practical rational considerations. Usually, a language is chosen because it is spoken by most citizens of a country and has an official status; therefore, it is easier to be successful in life if one knows it. As E.I. Filippova writes, “it is hard, if not impossible, to compete with the bread-winning language, the language of “bread and craft,” which opens up access to social growth and a better and more secure life” [38, p. 7]. As is known, emigrants from Russia of the second, if not of the first, generation switch to the language of the host country. The zealots of the preservation of the native language rarely condemn this; moreover, they see it as a norm of linguistic behavior, unlike the similar situation of language shift within one's own country.

The Russian language has always been dominant in Russia. *The multiethnic Russian people are able to communicate in one language, and this can be called the linguistic unity of the Russian nation, and Russian can be called the language of the nation or the national lan-*

*guage.* In many cases, this this is not just the command of Russian but the full or partial shift to the Russian language as a second native language or the only native language. It is important to know and recognize it as a norm and not as an anomaly.

Thanks to primarily voluntary choice in contemporary Russia, non-Russian peoples use the Russian language to a greater extent than the language of the corresponding ethnicity of a citizen. The lowest level of command of ethnic languages is among Belarusians (24%), Ukrainians (35%), and Buryats (45%). Many representatives of peoples who have long been within the Russian state and among whom Orthodoxy is widespread have lost the knowledge of their ethnic languages. These are the Volga-region peoples (Mordovians, Maris, and Udmurts); Christian Ossets, Kabardians, and Adegees have the largest linguistic assimilation in favor of Russian among the North Caucasian groups. The small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, as well as representatives of nationalities who live mainly in urban environment (Jews, Gypsies, Russian Germans, etc.), have switched to Russian as their first language.

The most important in language shift in favor of Russian is its voluntary character and promising perspectives for individuals who speak it since childhood. Here, it is important not only to admit the right to shift languages and to state two native languages but also to encourage Russian–ethnonational bilingualism. The recognition of the right to native bilingualism removes tension and the feeling of inferiority, which many Russian citizens experience when they have to choose between the native languages of their fathers and mothers or just between two languages equally native for them. This is especially important for Russia, because the majority of the non-Russian population speaks equally Russian and their ethnic language or even speak Russian to a greater extent. Unfortunately, the real degree of dissemination of Russian as the native (first) language is not properly reflected by censuses and surveys.

Language is very important for the state and for the people who are united under one sovereign power. The state is primarily institutions, bureaucracy, the army, law texts, technical instructions, etc. Of course, it is better, cheaper, and even safer if the state speaks one language—the language of the majority of the population. It is clear that army orders and technical regulations for power plants and reactors must be written in one language. The language of the demographic majority, in rare cases the language of a politically dominant minority, is established as a state (official) language. In our country, the Constitution and the Federal Law On the State Language of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2005, envisage it to be Russian, which is protected in various spheres of its application, particularly, in the mass media, communication,

advertising, signs, and documentation. The law speaks about “the norms of modern Russian literary language,” “the rules of Russian orthography and punctuation,” and that the Russian government determines the procedure of their adoption. Problems in this issue are associated with the understanding of the language norm, the obligation of its use, and its significance in the life of modern society. In my opinion, we should focus on the observance of the Russian linguistic norm primarily in Russia itself. Somewhat different variants of the Russian language, which deserve recognition and investigation, are forming in the CIS countries and the Baltic states [44].

The domestic system of languages and language policy is an original variant of the charter as distinct from the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages [45]. Overall, two outstanding language hypostases are present in Russia. *On the one hand, our country has a unique linguistic diversity, preserved and supported by the state; on the other hand, it is responsible before the world and itself for its national language, Russian, without which it is impossible to imagine world culture and contemporary civilization.*

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