

Preface

Russia, its languages and its ethnic groups are for many readers of English surprisingly unknown territory. Even among academics and researchers familiar with many ethnolinguistic situations around the globe, there prevails rather unsystematic and fragmented knowledge about Russia. This relates to both the micro level such as the individual situations of specific ethnic or linguistic groups, and to the macro level with regard to the entire interplay of linguistic practices, ideologies, laws, and other policies in Russia. In total, this lack of information about Russia stands in sharp contrast to the abundance of literature on ethnolinguistic situations, minority languages, language revitalization, and ideologies toward languages and multilingualism which has been published throughout the past decades.

Aims of the Book

This book aims at bridging the gap between the lack of studies on minority languages and language policies in Russia published in English and the highly complex situation of languages and minorities in Russia, which in its diversity deserves as much attention as all other regions of the world. The chapter authors analyze the fates of minority languages in Russia and the whole Russian Federation and at the same time mirror the situation in Russia on a neighboring region whose linguistic diversity has received by far more attention in academic writing in English and other Western languages—the European Union. The book thereby aims at familiarizing the readers with assumingly little-known contents by comparing different minorities and indigenous groups within the Russian Federation, but also relates these analyses to a framework that will be much better known for most readers. The central question addressed by the authors contributing to this volume is how minority languages and minority language communities can survive in circumstances with traditional communities dispersing and new types of superdiverse ecolinguistic systems simultaneously emerging. At the same time, the book relates to the increasing awareness of the cultural value of endangered languages and the

benefits of multilingualism among many academics, in civil society, and in some political circles, although the political debates regarding the need for language protection continue and, in many countries, often take a fearful and hesitant tone.

The lack of knowledge about Russia among many Western researchers dealing with minority issues or questions of multilingualism is certainly, among other reasons, heavily based on the limited access to information on Russia—even though more than 20 years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Major obstacles in this are the lack of Russian language skills, and at the same time the only slowly increasing academic exchanges between Russian and Western academics. The small number of scholars who, in Western academic circles, read Russian—a language which is the mother tongue of approximately 144 million speakers and a second language or language of higher education by another 120–130 million individuals—is a clear indicator of the “otherness” of the discourse on minorities and languages in Russia and other post-Soviet countries. At the same time, even though knowledge of English in Russia and other countries with a high proportion of Russophones is increasing, there are few international publications providing research-based (as opposed to official or census-based) information on the situation of minority languages in Russia written by scholars with an access to the Western (European) academic semiosphere. This state of affairs has not only been caused by the language barrier. The ideological divide that for more than seven decades prevailed between many Western and Soviet academic communities has had consequences also on possible objects of academic study, as well as on available research materials and common methods of research implementation.

Since the main aim of the book is to contribute to spreading information about Russia, the focus of the chapters is on studies of situations in the Russian Federation, both from individual and contrastive perspectives. The parts on the European Union are to be understood as additional information which provides a reference frame for the situations in Russia. The single chapters are meant to complement each other—even though written by different authors, it has been the explicit aim to perceive the entire book as one unit, which sheds light on its major topic from different angles. The contributions are thereby concerned with socio-political, legal, and ideological processes which contribute to language loss or maintenance and revitalization of particular minority identities and languages. The case studies elaborate the multifarious factors that contribute to situations in which minority languages cease to be used in certain social contexts, move to other domains of social life, disappear and perish or, sometimes, are reinforced and revitalized in new domains of use. Consequently, many articles are of multidisciplinary nature, including aspects of linguistics as well as political and social sciences. The contributions thus tackle the question as to what are the essential components of cultural and linguistic survival in the twenty-first century from many different angles. The authors of this volume therefore wish to demonstrate how different politics, language policies, and sociocultural circumstances cause various outcomes for the prospects of minority language communities but also that there are limits to how these outcomes can be related to similar developments in other contexts.

Background and Content of the Book

The scholars who have contributed to this book have been engaged in joint research activities aiming at enhancing understanding between Russian and Western academic discourses. Most of these activities have taken place within an informal interdisciplinary research network called *Poga—The Language Survival Network*. This network was founded in 2007 as a body uniting scholars specializing in questions relating to minority languages and ethnicity in the European Union, the Russian Federation and other Eurasian countries. The members of the network represent different academic disciplines such as linguistics, sociology of language, history, ethnic and revitalization research, indigenous studies, legal anthropology, human rights, political science, and minority protection law. The network lays emphasis on a comparative research approach and fosters cooperation and exchange of ideas between scholars with Russian and non-Russian backgrounds. One of its main objectives is also to empower researchers of Russian origin working among their own minorities to become more successful in their work through a better knowledge of minority situations and policies elsewhere. The network members have been interested in understanding the diversity of elements that positively influence the commitment of minorities to promote and maintain their languages and cultures. At the same time, the researchers are interested to identify factors that inevitably have had a negative impact on the “cultural survival” of minority communities. Central to the network’s activities are also its emphasis on Russia and the simultaneous, comparative and interdisciplinary approach to minority communities.

Some of the contributions to this volume are based on papers which were first presented on the network’s first symposium which took place in Lovozero (Murmansk oblast, Russia) in 2007, other papers were initially presented at symposia in Inari (Finland) in 2009, Petrozavodsk (Karelian Republic, Russia) in 2009, in Mariehamn (Åland Islands) in 2010 and Tallinn (Estonia) in 2010. Drafts of the contributions were continuously circulating among network members, who collaboratively discussed their content and suggested additions, improvements and updates in order to best fit into the general topic of this book.

The book contains 12 chapters which are grouped into three parts. The first part with the title *Languages, Identities and Human Rights* includes three contributions that deal with general issues related to minority language maintenance. It is opened by the introductory chapter “[Change and Maintenance of Plurilingualism in the Russian Federation and the European Union](#)” by Janne Saarikivi and Reetta Toivanen. The chapter provides an overview of important contexts in which minority language decline and maintenance takes place in Russia, contrasted to the countries of the European Union. The authors discuss questions related to language extinction and maintenance in Russia, and highlight in which way they are similar to or different from languages in other geographical and cultural contexts. The chapter also introduces central theoretical viewpoints on language endangerment

and maintenance and scrutinizes the ways in which members of the rapidly changing communities of the twenty-first century use minority languages.

The introduction is followed by Suzanne Romaine's contribution on "[The Global Extinction of Languages and Its Consequences for Cultural Diversity](#)." This chapter provides an overview of the phenomenon of language death and its consequences for humanity at a global scale. The author points out that 50–90 % of the world's 6,900 languages are predicted to be extinct by the end of this century. Because a large part of any language is culture-specific, people feel that an important part of their traditional culture and identity is also lost when their language disappears.

The third chapter by Theodore S. Orlin on "[The Death of Languages; the Death of Minority Cultures; the Death of a People's Dignity](#)" discusses the extinction of minority languages and cultures from a human rights law perspective. It explores the question of when the loss of language may constitute a violation of human rights and by its negative impact on minority cultures may threaten democratic principles. The author points out that where state policy and/or action reflect the preference of its majority at the expense of the minority, then concerns are raised as to the protection of human dignity and identification of a minority.

Part II of the book is called *Case Studies on Cultural Change and Minority Language Maintenance*. It consists of studies describing challenges and problems related to individual situations of minority language and culture maintenance. All of these studies indicate in which way there are similar issues on minority languages at stake both in the European Union and in the Russian Federation.

Five chapters are included in this part. The fourth chapter by Reetta Toivanen discusses "[Obstacles and Successes](#)" for minority language activism among the Sorbs in Germany and the Sámi in Finland. It addresses problems faced by minority representatives when they act on behalf of the minority group. Looking at the cases of the Sorbian minority in Lower and Upper Lusatia in Germany and the Sámi home territory in Finnish Lapland, the author argues that the representatives of minorities face severe problems in trying to keep a balance between an authenticity acknowledged by the majority (state) and an authenticity recognized by the members of the minority.

The fifth chapter "[Fallen Ill in Political Draughts](#)" by Indrek Jääts deals with changes in social status among the users of Komi-Permyak. The main problem in preserving and developing this language has always been the weakness of the Komi-Permyaks' ethnic identity which has even been described as ethnic nihilism, and the related belittling attitude toward their own language, caused by an interplay of different historical factors, and, to a large extent, policies on nationalities by the Russian state. Despite these processes, however, tens of thousands of Komi-Permyaks are still living compactly in their villages. The chapter discusses the role of the language and culture today in relation to urban and rural settings.

The sixth chapter on "[Finnic Minorities of Ingria](#)" by Natalia Kuznetsova, Elena Markus, and Mehmed Muslimov is dedicated to the complex analysis of the language situation in contemporary Ingria by paying major attention to Ingrians and Votes. The authors present a summary of the results of their extensive

sociolinguistic and language sociological research during the last years and propose an analysis of the underlying reasons for the present language situation of these Finnic minorities in Russia.

The seventh chapter on “[The Challenge of Language](#)” is based on a research project by Lennard Sillanpää in collaboration with a group of researchers from the Russian Academy of Sciences. They conducted interviews with members of smaller ethnic groups in Russian Siberia to discuss, among other topics, the importance of their mother tongues and their future perspectives for ethnic survival. While many older persons interviewed claimed a working fluency in their mother tongues, most of those in their twenties, thirties, and forties confessed, often with tears, how they had completely lost any proficiency they once may have had or only possessed rudimentary skills sufficient to convey greetings or to produce snatches of phrases.

The eighth chapter “[Uneven Steps to Literacy](#)” is co-authored by Florian Siegl and Michael Rießler. They analyze the creation of literacy standards for indigenous languages in the Soviet Union and sketch this development from the perspective of four indigenous languages of the Russian North and Siberia, i.e. Skolt and Kildin Sámi, Dolgan and Forest Enets. In the context of this contrastive volume, it is of particular relevance that one of the languages discussed, Skolt Sámi, is also spoken in the European Union.

Part III of the volume, entitled *Why Some Languages Survive. On Language Laws, Policies and Changing Attitudes* deals with revitalization processes and current changes in minority identities and political frameworks. It provides answers to the central question as to why some minorities are able to successfully connect their cultural and linguistic heritage to the modern world while others face extinction.

The ninth chapter by Ekaterina Gruzdeva on “[Explaining Language Loss](#)” in the case of Sakhalin Nivkh provides a sociological survey of language use among Sakhalin Nivkhs from diachronic and synchronic perspectives. It traces the development of language shift, analyses political, economic and cultural reasons for language marginalization, and describes attempts for standardizing, teaching and preserving Nivkh at different stages of its history.

The tenth chapter by Heiko F. Marten on “[Parliamentary Structures and Their Impact on Empowering Minority Language Communities](#)” discusses the impact of political decentralization processes on minority language policy and language maintenance efforts. It demonstrates how new channels of decision-making have been used by minority language speakers and activists, and compares these ways of influence in the light of different models of decentralized parliamentary representation. The Scottish Parliament and the Sámi Parliaments in Norway are contrasted with the situations of Frisian and Sorbian in Germany, the political framework in multilingual South Tyrol, and the situation of Latgalian in Latvia.

The eleventh chapter by Konstantin Zamyatin deals with “[The Evolution of Language Ideology in Post-Soviet Russia.](#)” The author provides a comparative analysis and evaluates the effectiveness of language policies implemented in the Republics of Udmurtia and Mari El in the light of the goals of language policies.

Udmurtia and Mari El are compared to the Republics of Tatarstan and Chuvashia where more successful language revival projects have been implemented.

The final chapter on “[The Impact of Language Policy on Language Revitalization](#)” in the Case of the Basque Language, by Xabier Arzoz describes language policies implemented in the Basque Country after the proclamation of the Spanish constitution in 1978 and the transformation of Spain’s authoritarian unitary regime into a decentralized democratic state and their impact on the revitalization of the Basque language. The author points out that the Basque experience shows the effectiveness of selective intensive policies that focus on those segments of population most engaged and supportive of social change. Thereby, the chapter rounds up the collection by providing another contrastive picture from Western Europe which may serve as a point of reference for the Russian cases discussed previously.

The map on the following page illustrates the geographic area of investigation and shows all languages discussed in this book. More detailed maps, zooming in on the relevant areas are included in all chapters presenting case studies on specific languages.

The appendix includes an index, which refers back to all languages and peoples mentioned in the single chapters.

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