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Learning and Teaching Russian as a Pluricentric Language

ABSTRACT

Teaching Russian as a foreign language outside the nation might still be oriented towards the norm and conventions of contemporary metropolitan Russian, but in the minority situation, which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and massive migrations, teaching should absorb the newly developed local lexis and formulate the rules reflecting regional changes in the structure. State-of-the-art language pedagogy rejects stringency of approach to communication and accepts the reality of translanguaging and regional varieties, considering them in the curricula. Clearly, teaching Russian in the situation of the new linguistic contacts calls for innovative methods and flexible approaches. The article is based on the interviews and informal conversations with Russian-language teachers and school owners, as well as on meta-analysis of the already published data. This article aims to show challenges confronting Russian-language teachers in various countries, with examples drawn from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, Norway, and Slovakia.

Key words: *Russian language studies, heritage learners, diaspora, language maintenance, Russian as a pluricentric language, translanguaging, Russian language abroad*

Teaching Russian as a second language

Russian is spread across a large territory and interacts with hundreds of languages. The contact varieties of Russian range from pidgins to mutual influence in *Sprachbunds* (a case in point is convergence with the Fenno-Ugric and Turkic languages). Some contacts have lasted for thousands of years, whereas others are quite recent. As compared with language acquisition in the process of spontaneous everyday interactions, language learning following structured curricula and based on textbooks is much younger. Indeed, goal-oriented tutoring started only in the middle of the 17th century thanks to the efforts of John Amos Comenius, who wrote a treatise outlining a theory of language acquisition.

The system of teaching Russian as a second language developed in several stages. The earliest Russian-language teaching abroad was initiated by ethno-linguistic minorities, such as Old Believers. Having emigrated, they organized their own schools, mostly for religious purposes. Then, there were members

of the international high society who provided multilingual education for their children. In some countries, Russian-language teaching started with the military invasions, which required organization of the infrastructure in the Russian language, including schools for children of the contingent left in the new territories to maintain order, as well as for clergy, entrepreneurs, medical doctors, workers, and others. To preserve their role in society, local elites had to become Russified, which means that they would send their children to the educational institutions operating in the Russian language. To make a career one had to be proficient in Russian. This trend persisted in the Soviet times and remained as a legacy in the post-Soviet space. The Soviet rule should be credited for spreading literacy and education to all layers of society, yet many teachers, including Russian-language instructors, lacked professional competence (Ketola, 2007, Pavlenko, 2011, Protassova, 2018).

On a large scale, teaching Russian as a foreign language outside the Russian-speaking world started relatively late, after World War II. Earlier, Russian had been studied by philologists as a university discipline. In the postwar years Russian was taught as a compulsory subject in many Eastern bloc countries at school and in pre-primary educational institutions. To support and intensify its political and economic influence upon its allies, the USSR offered free higher education in every domain of science, technology, and medicine to young people from these countries. Since instruction was in Russian, the students took intensive courses of Russian in the first year prior to academic studies. In the dorms, they often shared rooms with Soviet students, so academic studies were combined with true language immersion and they attained high proficiency in Russian (Yelenevskaya, 2015). Upon return to their home countries after graduation, these alumni had nostalgic memories of their student years and the Russian language, and many came back with Russian spouses. These people lobbied for Soviet interests in their respective nations.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and thanks to technological advances in language pedagogies models of teaching Russian have diversified. Depending on a country's language policy, attitudes to multilingualism, and above all, political and economic relations with Russia, every country chooses its own policy toward the Russian language and its role in the education system. These policies determine the scope of teaching and the status of Russian courses, taught as mandatory or elective. The site of *Rossotrudnichestvo* (rs.gov.ru) cites the number of Russian speakers in various countries: 146 million in the RF and 127 million abroad, with 36.8 m living in Ukraine, 13.5 m in Kazakhstan, 11.8 m in Uzbekistan,

9.3 m in Belarus, 5.5 m in Poland, 5.4 m in Germany, 4.9 m in Azerbaijan, 3.5 m in the U.S.A., 2.7 m in Kyrgyzstan, 2.5 m in Tajikistan, 2.4 m in Georgia, 2.1 m in Armenia, 2 m in Bulgaria, 2 m in the Czech Republic, 1.95 m in Estonia, 1.8 m in Latvia, 1.7 m in Moldova, 1.4 m in Serbia, 1.3 m in Slovakia, 1.3 m in Lithuania, 1.2 m in Mongolia, 1 m in Israel, 0.9 m in Turkmenistan, 0.7 m in China, 4.1 m in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, 2.7 m in Asia, 1.3 m in the Middle East and North Africa, 0.2 m in the Latin America, 0.1 m in Sub-Saharan Africa. The site also gives numbers for the self-proclaimed political entities of Transnistria (0.5 m) and Abkhazia (0.45 m). Some of these estimates seem to be inflated or fake. They may have been based on the statistics of the Soviet era, when Russian dominated in all the 15 republics of the USSR, and the population of the Eastern bloc countries had to study Russian in state schools, thus adding to the number of proficient speakers. Importantly, the site adds statistics of recent migrations of Russian speakers.

In the republics of the Soviet Union, there were two types of schools: so-called *national schools* with the titular or local language being the main tool of instruction and Russian used as an additional language, and Russian, or *multinational schools*, where children of dozens of ethnicities studied together in Russian, which served as the medium of interethnic communication, while the local languages were studied as a subject. Most of the schoolbooks for Russian studies were authored and published in the center, in Moscow or Leningrad, but in many national republics, professional journals for teachers of Russian were published. The principles behind textbooks differed for Russian as L1 and the main language of instruction, and for Russian as L2. The authors of the latter conceived them for groups of typologically similar languages, so that the typical interferential errors could be treated in the same way. For the republics with relatively big languages, such as Ukrainian or Kazakh, Russian textbooks were written separately, because there were enough learners to justify separate editions.

Struggle for the rights of the national languages started prior to the dissolution of the Soviet regime, during the perestroika. The situation changed in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the former national republics, which became independent states, there were still many predominantly Russian-speaking bilinguals and even some Russian monolinguals who preferred to use Russian in everyday life and professional settings. Many native Russian speakers migrated to other countries due to new nationalist policies that obliged everyone to use titular languages in the public sphere while Russian was in decline. As time passed, the new independent states came to teach Russian as a foreign language, rather than L2. They

began publishing their own textbooks and dictionaries of the Russian language based on the regional varieties, and even to teach Russian to foreigners, using the regional lexis and phraseology some of which deviated from the norm ruling in the metropolis. There are still very few efforts to establish new codified norms of Russian that would not mirror the rules used in Russia itself, but there are attempts, especially in the Baltic States and Kazakhstan, to introduce orthological guidelines as to how to use Russian for the regional purposes.

As stated in different sources, the Russian language occupies the 8th–10th place in the world, in terms of its spread, and it is used in the public sphere of at least 27 countries. Yet, according to a report prepared by the Federal State Autonomous Sociological Research Center (sociocenter.info) in 2018, the number of foreigners learning Russian shrank almost by half (Sociocenter, 2019). At the beginning of the 1990s, 74.6 million people studied it outside the nation, while in 2018, there were only 38.2 million learners. If we deduct those who live in the territory of the former Soviet Union (FSU), there will be a decrease from 20 million to a little more than one. In Eastern Europe and on the Balkans, there were 38 million Russian speakers in 1990 while in 2015, only 8 million remained. The numbers also dropped from 119.5 to 82.5 million in the independent states in the territory of the FSU. By contrast, the number of Russian speakers has grown in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand from 1.2 to 4 million. The experts (e.g., Arefiev, 2017) estimate that by 2025, those who speak Russian will represent approximately 2,7% (215 million) out of 8 billion inhabitants of the Earth. One can expect the number of those who study Russian to grow thanks to the children of the Russian-speaking immigrants from the FSU. Research conducted in immigrant groups in different countries testifies to the intention of parents to maintain the Russian language in the home communication with the second generation and send children to Russian or bilingual kindergartens and Russian afternoon schools (Moin et al., 2013; Perotto,Niznik 2014; Zbenovich, 2016; Ringblom et al., 2018; Karpava, 2019). In addition, from 2014 to 2018, the number of students learning Russian grew in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Sociocenter 2019). Practitioners' observations confirm that what motivates parents to send their children to learn Russian is better educational and career opportunities. Moreover, at least some Russian proficiency is required of circular migrants shuttling between Russia and home countries in CIS and employed in building and other manual jobs in Russia. Their children in Russia have to be taught differently from those born in the Russian-speaking families and growing up in Russia. Russian educators experiment adjusting teaching methods to these audiences; e.g., an interdisciplinary approach is

demonstrated by Tolstova, Kozlovtseva, 2018 who try to fill in the gap in the knowledge of the immigrant children in Moscow, and Kryahtunova, 2018 introduces immigrant children to the basics of Russian while they play with objects.

The educational institutions operating in the Russian language abroad

In Russia itself, schoolbooks for Russian as the mother tongue still mostly follow the tradition of the previous centuries focusing on orthographic and theoretic drills. Some new tendencies arise as alternatives, but they are not yet widespread. According to the vice-director of the Vinogradov Institute of the Russian Language of the Russian Academy of Science, Vladimir Plungjan (2012), methods of teaching native speakers in Russia lag behind or even contradict up-to-date methods of linguistic analysis applied in other countries. Language and literature studies are still divided into two different subjects. Classic literary texts dominate in exercises, while essay writing and composition come only late in the curriculum. Despite an ongoing discussion about modernization of language pedagogies, most linguists fear that it is hardly possible to make schoolteachers adopt more up-to-date methods of teaching and change their views on the language structure and rules governing use (see e.g., personal interview with Alexey Shmelyov, professor of the Moscow Pedagogical State University). Reading material for schoolchildren is drawn primarily from the classics of the 19th and 20th centuries, abounding in descriptions of nature, peasant work and weather. Media texts or pieces of contemporary literature are not included. The layout is obsolete, and reproductions of the classical Russian and Soviet paintings, drawn in the style of social realism, are chosen as illustrations. They form the canon of the language and culture perception reproduced over and over again.

The authors writing schoolbooks abroad try to bring them closer to the language of children's environment (Guelfreikh, Golubeva, 2019). They do not only use illustrations reflecting contemporary life and pupils' experience, but they fill them with content that can help children navigate in the contemporary world. New schoolbooks written for young diasporans structure teaching in the way consistent with new pedagogical developments (e.g., various materials prepared by Olga Kagan and Anna Kudyma, as well as Dubinina, Kisselev, 2019). The corpus-based methods of the Russian language teaching (e.g., Ol'khovskaya, 2019) are just entering the field (e.g., the website vsrussian.com). Another valuable resource of the Russian language exercises, texts, videos, and tests for children is the site pushkin.institute/projects/russkiy_yazyk_dlya_nashih_detey.php.

According to Akifyeva (2016), who conducted her research in Spain, Russian-speaking families abroad seek to organize structured activities for their children, trying to preserve old and familiar principles of rearing and upbringing in pre-primary and school education. Parents aim to form a circle of Russian-speaking friends for their children. They wish the young ones to learn and maintain the home language, and involvement in the community life helps to transmit the culture. Similar results were demonstrated in Germany by Meng (2006) and in Israel by Zbenovich, Lerner (2013). Family language policies (see Schwartz, Verschik, 2013, Haque, Le Lièvre, 2019) contribute to development of bilingualism and biculturalism among the second-generation children of the Russian-speaking parents. Such tendencies are not exceptional but are quite typical of many immigrant parents (Holloway, Jonas, 2016).

Many Russian-speaking expats permanently residing abroad are determined to provide their children with opportunities to receive education in Russian. The RF considers the general education in Russian abroad an important factor in its political and humanitarian influence in the world community that should serve to strengthen the position of the Russian language and spread Russian culture and values outside the nation. On 04.11.2015, the President of the RF approved the "Concept of the Russian school abroad", which defines the priority goals and objectives of the state policy of the RF in relation to general education in Russian in the international educational space. It specifies approaches ensuring access of Russian and foreign citizens, as well as stateless persons to general education in Russian abroad and enumerates types of state support for educational organizations that teach in Russian in foreign countries (Concept, 2015). Information support (textbooks and course materials) for Russian schools abroad is provided in order to strengthen the prestige of Russia. Rementsov et al. (2017) claim that teaching Russian to bilinguals and multilinguals abroad should be patriotic and emphasize the role of the Russian ethno-cultural components in the courses of history and geography. Krezhevskyikh et al. (2018) want to promote Russian cultural heritage, including regional traditions. Both projects target online-learning. Khamraeva (2019) advocates strengthening cognitive aspects of L1 maintenance and meta-disciplinary ties in bilingual children abroad. A group at the Pushkin Russian Language Institute in Moscow is developing tests for bilingual children of different age living abroad (e.g., Bezrukova, Kalenkova, 2016, Kalenkova, Zhiltsova, 2018, 2019). Some researchers compare various aspects of the language teaching methods when Russian is taught as L1, L2 or a migrant language (Balykhina, 2017). The VIA LIGHT

Association unites educators working at Russian schools in various parts of the world and organizes congresses "In Russian. In the Multilingualism Context". In fact, many private complementary schools abroad function almost independently of the Russian governmental organizations.

Diverse publications reflect the experience accumulated by the schools operating in Russian outside Russia in the system of general or complementary education. There are publications of general interest (Dronov et al. 2009, Protassova, Rodina, 2010) and studies focusing on different regions and various problems of bilingualism and biculturalism: China (Tsjuj Sjuepin, 2014), France (Zaprometova, 2017), Great Britain (Gasparyan, 2017), Italy (Kotikova, Yashina, 2017, Guelfreikh, 2018), Latvia (Gavrilina), Marocco (Krylova, Sukhov, 2012), the Netherlands (Peeters-Podgaevskaja, 2008), Poland (Mizerniuk-Rotkiewicz, 2016), Switzerland (Hugentobler, Sorvacheva, 2012). Krivoborskaja (2019) raises the question of the first language maintenance with adopted children in Spain. Various special issues of the journal "Russian Language Abroad" (Russkij jazyk za rubezhom), available at journal-rla.pushkininstitute.ru, are dedicated to Russian studies in Bulgaria, China, the CIS-countries, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iran, Italy, Japan, Poland, Spain, South Korea, the USA, Vietnam and give a rich overview of the multifaceted use of Russian in respective countries. Ryazanova-Clarke (2019) analyzes the situation with the cultural leaders in the UK and finds that they represent different tendencies in the relationships with the country where they live, the country of their origin, with themselves and other entrepreneurs within the Russian diaspora.

In the following part of the essay we chose Estonia and Kazakhstan as two countries on the territory of the former Soviet Union (FSU) which pursued completely different language policies towards the Russian language, and Finland, Germany and Israel as countries in which Russian-speaking communities can be divided into returning diaspora and immigrants. In addition, we present Norway and Slovakia as countries with relatively recent Russian-speaking forms of schooling. All these countries have sizeable communities of Russian speakers (i.e. mono- and plurilingual speakers, heritage speakers of different generations, L2 speakers including those who studied in Russia, speakers of one of the Russian regional varieties because of their background, etc.). In general, it is better not to conflate 'speakers' and 'learners' because this can lead to incorrect categorization and numbers and mislead evaluations of the vitality of the Russian language. In each of the analyzed country, there are numerous cultural institutions catering to the needs of co-ethnics, which is also beneficial for Russian-language

maintenance. We anticipated that comparative analysis of dissimilar diasporic communities would make similarities in their language ideologies and motivation for Russian-language maintenance particularly meaningful and useful for academic linguists as well as for practitioners. Our main goal in these sections is to demonstrate how the situation in the country influences the specificity of learning and schoolbooks used there. Having conducted projects in these countries we could have a good view of the state-of-the-art in Russian-language pedagogy there. Moreover, we aim to show that Russian language pedagogy abroad has no universal strategy but must adjust to different language ideologies and educational policies in the host countries.

Estonia. Approximately 25% of the 1,3 million population of the country speak Russian as their L1 (stat.ee/34267); they live predominantly in the capital area and in the North-East of the country. Some Russian speakers belong to the confessional group of the Old Believers and have lived there for centuries. Their language displays some peculiarities, so does spoken Russian all over the country, where the mutual influence of the native and non-native varieties is crucial for emergence of contact phenomena (Adamson, 2019, Kostandi et al., 2020). Proximity to Russia and a high concentration of native speakers in some settlements contribute to the maintenance of the language, which formally has the status of a foreign one. Young generations are growing up bilingual, and Estonian immersion programs rank among the best in the world. The development of the school system still allows mother-tongue based bilingual education with a gradual transition to Estonian-oriented curriculum for the speakers of Russian (Golubeva, 2018). One of the main concerns of the Russian-speaking educators in Estonia is about the uncertainty of the growing multicultural and multilingual identity of the students who receive a strong input from the surroundings through the Estonian language and culture (Burdakova, 2018, Moissejenko et al., 2019). Local authorities make a lot of efforts for the residents of such settlements to form a new and positive self-image. This sizeable Russian-speaking minority and its interests are represented in parliament. Institutions such as publishing houses, newspapers, TV channels and theaters ensure a vibrant cultural life in Russian. Russian is still widely used in the streets and ethnic Estonians can speak it; moreover, many want to study it to improve their proficiency.

One of the winners of the international students' competition PISA, Estonia is highly computerized and advanced in e-learning, including hybrid teaching materials. It has developed several generations of schoolbooks for teaching Russian as L1 and as a foreign language. The underlying principle of these resources is to teach Russian as a local language

with the use of Estonian and Russian proper and geographic names and stories about Russian-speaking people who lived in Estonia in the past. The schoolbooks include jokes playing with misuse of words and comparative explanations of the linguistic phenomena focusing on the specific difficulties for Estonian-Russian bilinguals and thus helping students avoid mistakes. Russian culture features in Estonian folkloric collections, documenting both old and contemporary rituals, traditions and verbal lore.

Finland. The Russian-speaking minority in Finland numbers about 82,000 people out of the total of 5,5 million (statfin_vaerak_ pxt_11rl.px). The two neighboring countries have exchanged their population for centuries. These processes intensified when Finland was a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire (1809–1917), after the October Revolution (1917–1920s), during WWII and in the last three decades. The ethnic composition of the Russian speaking community is heterogeneous and consists of descendants of the indigenous Russian population, repatriates with Finnish roots, spouses, businesspeople, and students (Viimaranta, 2020). Finnish TV broadcasts news in Russian daily, and at least one Russian-language newspaper comes out monthly. The support of Russian in public settings is mainly due to the influx of tourists coming from St. Petersburg, the Leningrad region and the Russian part of Karelia. A lot of websites, advertisements, signs and information brochures have Russian translations.

The history of teaching Russian in Finland is long, starting in the first half of the 19th century. From the beginning, textbooks were created in Finland and abounded in local realities, and this trend continues. In addition, textbooks written for Berlitz schools and by Swedish educators, as well as authentic Russian schoolbooks were also used. Under the Russian Empire, teaching of Russian was regulated by special documents. Independent Finland reduced its teaching to just a few schools for Russian speakers. After World War II, remaining Russian educational institutions formed a new Russian-Finnish school in 1955. It was run by the state since 1977 and trained workforce for the Finnish-Soviet trade (Mustajoki et al., 2010, Yurkov et al., 2012). Nowadays, Russian is taught as a foreign language in all programs from primary to high school education. There are various institutions specializing in the Russian language teaching: private day care centers, schools and classes. A variety of inhouse schoolbooks are provided for all classes starting from the first grade. An increasing number of teaching materials are written for online learning. There are also programs for children from Russian-speaking homes, with two classes per week. They cater to the students aged 6 to 18, with the option of the final state exam. In addition, private hobby

groups add to the language and culture maintenance (Viimaranta et al., 2018). Despite educators' and publishers' efforts to stick to the norm and transmit it to the young generation, few bilinguals are able to speak and write without violating grammar rules or inserting Finnish words and calques into their oral and written speech. In-house teaching materials for bilinguals are available in the e-format only.

Education is a commodity sold worldwide officially by the Ministry of Education. The Russian language teaching is also organized mostly by the state or municipalities. Still, there are some organizations filling the gaps in the official immigrants' language policy (Viimaranta *et al.*, 2017). We interviewed many directors, among them Suvi Nyström, the head of the center of the child culture Muzykanty (musikantit.fi). She is a Finnish repatriate from Uzbekistan, educated as a musician in Finland, she organized her center in 2004 with the goal to maintain the Russian language and culture (about 80% of activities), but some are in Finnish, Swedish, and English (e.g., language courses). About 800 children are involved into different activities. Parents are also interested to participate. Educators try to create family-like atmosphere, propose all the time new circles, organize projects, shows, concerts, take part in the Finnish and international festivals and holyday camps. They also collaborate with the school whose students' composition is international. Sometimes Finnish children come to study music and afterwards get involved into the Russian language learning.

Germany. The total population of Germany is 83 million, and about 4,5 million speak Russian at home. Many children in these families receive formal or semi-formal education in Russian. German scholars and educators investigate various aspects of Russian language teaching and learning in Germany (see, e.g., Bergmann, 2014, Witzlack-Makarevich, Wulff, 2017, Mehlhorn, Bremer, 2018, Hamann et al., 2020).

Teaching Russian as a foreign language started in schools mostly after World War II, differing significantly in West and East Germany. While in the West Russian was an elective and schoolbooks were anti-Soviet, in the East, Russian was a mandatory school subject, and teaching materials were saturated with pro-Soviet ideology. Today, Russian does not rank among the most popular foreign languages, yet more than a hundred thousand pupils learn it as a 2nd, 3rd, 4th or even 5th foreign language. At two universities, in Berlin and Leipzig, there are professorships in the methods of Russian language teaching, and the academic staff have published a solid body of research. In recent years, dozens of private day-care centers, afternoon- and weekend-schools have launched programs for studying Russian as a mother tongue. Some target fully bilingual

education. This turn is due to the immigration of millions of Russian Germans, Jews and Russian speakers belonging to various other ethnicities. Many newcomers wish to transmit their native language to the next generations and educate their children in a way similar to their own upbringing, following traditions of the past. Moreover, several government-run schools in different states provide instruction for heritage speakers of Russian. There are many domestically produced textbooks for teaching Russian as a foreign language. Although interesting for the local students, they contain some deviations from the Russian norm, e.g. *die Tastatur* 'keyboard', *klaviatura* in Russian, is called *tastatura* – a hybrid word, combining both languages. The noun 'monkey' obtains a masculine form *obez'jan* instead of the feminine *obez'jan**a*** in the normative Russian. The plural form of 'animals' *zh**y**votnye* appears with an ***y***, instead of ***i*** as prescribed by the norm. When introduced into schoolbooks, these and other deviations are no longer seen as violations of the established rules but are treated as normative. These forms will be consolidated by future native and heritage speakers.

Analyzing the influence of the RF on the Russian schools in Germany, Guzhelja (2018) writes that only the school at the embassy in Berlin and the school at the consulate in Bonn could be considered as corresponding to the concept of the Russian school abroad. It means that it failed in the country where it had the best chances to succeed without substantial financial and legal support. Instead, there are different bilingual kindergartens, schools and classes both on the Federal, Province and private basis, as well as numerous organizations working at weekends and in the after-school hours. There are a few schoolbooks written by the German Russian-speaking specialists for teaching Russian as a "background language" (*Herkunftsspache*, heritage language) concentrating on difficulties confronting bilingual students and offering contrastive exercises aimed at preventing interlanguage interference.

Israel. The total population of Israel is 9,152,100 people (cbs.gov.il/he/Pages/default.aspx). Hebrew and Arabic are official languages, and about 35 languages are spoken informally (Lewis et al. 2016). According to the report released by the Central Bureau of Statistics to the media in 2014, it is the third most spoken language after Hebrew and Arabic (jewish.ru/news/israel/2014/02/news994323074.php), with 15% of the population using it in daily life. Russian has no formal status in Israel, but it is widely used in the public sphere, and is less of a stigma for its speakers than in the 1990s (cf. Otwinowska et al., 2019).

Since revival of Hebrew was the cornerstone of Zionist ideology, Russian was abandoned by the first immigration waves and

almost completely disappeared from communication. It made the first comeback in the 1970s when 165,000 Soviet Jews settled in Israel (Toltz, 2012). Then the 1990s brought "the great immigration wave" of 835,410 people from FSU (moia.gov.il).

Russian-speaking immigrants launched numerous cultural institutions, such as libraries, publishing houses, theaters, book clubs, travel agencies, translation bureaus, mass media, and others. These institutions heavily depend on the language use, and although some of them offer services in Hebrew, their main language is still Russian. Commercial enterprises were the first to realize the benefits of providing information for their new customers in their own language, and although hesitantly, government agencies followed. So today, most of the municipalities and ministries have websites with information pages in Russian. In addition, translation services are offered free of charge in hospitals and courts (Yelenevskaya, 2015).

Russian entered mainstream school curricula only in the 1990s. Today, it is taught as a second foreign language, although most of the students are heritage speakers. About 6,000 pupils attend Russian classes in the 7^{th}–12^{th} grades, learning from schoolbooks written by Russian-speaking Israeli educators and meeting the needs of Israeli students (Muchnik et al., 2016: 66–70). The Israeli and Russian cultures are interwoven, and the schoolbooks take this into account, trying to develop functional bilingualism and biculturalism. The Russian literature abounds in the authors of the Jewish origin, and to study their work in Russian is only natural in this situation. These books conceived in Israel have also become very popular all over the world. At the tertiary level, Russian courses are offered at four out of seven universities as an elective. Since relatively few young people from Russian-speaking families study the language formally, their oral proficiency is much higher than written, and some remain illiterate and unaware of Russian cultural and pragmalinguistic conventions (Niznik, 2011). Russian-language teachers who failed to find jobs in the state-run educational system founded kindergartens and afternoon schools.

The Russian language in Israel has absorbed numerous Hebraisms. Most of the fieldwork done so far shows that in the absence of codification, deviations from the language of the metropolis are unstable. They are few on the syntactic level and are most noticeable on the lexical and morphological levels, as well as in the prosody (for detailed analysis see Naiditch, 2004, 2008; Perelmutter, 2018). Like other bi- and multilinguals, Russian-speaking Israelis often insert names of administrative bodies, foods, holidays, rituals, professions, and others that do not exist in Russian. Experiments investigating mental lexicons of Russian-Hebrew bilinguals reveal big deviations in their verbal associations from those demonstrated in

the metropolis. This suggests that a new image of the world is developing in bilinguals thanks to the use of Russian as a tool of informal communication in the Middle Eastern country with its political, economic and religious peculiarities (Yelenevskaya, Ovchinnikova, 2015; Ovchinnikova, Yelenevskaya, 2019).

***Kazakhstan*.** In Kazakhstan with its population of 18,5 million, Kazakh (the ethnic language for more than 65% of the population) is the official state language, and Russian is co-official, spoken mostly by the ethnically non-Russian population and having many peculiarities differing it from the Russia's norm (Smagulova, 2017; Shaibakova, 2020). The Kazakhization of the Russian language is one of the most advanced cases of hybridity, considering that it started later and on a different basis than Russian contacts with Byelorusian and Ukrainian (both Slavic languages). Although in Kazakhstan itself, voices for codification of the regional variant of Russian are still weak, the reality of the language use gives numerous examples of corrosion of the norm which appear in schoolbooks, newsletters, slogans, and other types of texts found all over the country. In the countryside, Russian was primarily learned as L2 from the teachers for whom it was also a second language, so the deterioration of the quality accumulated (Alisharieva et al., 2017). The motivation to study Russian is high because of the opportunities offered by the close inter-cultural ties, instrumental, emotional and rational factors, historical memories, although the role of Russia is not unanimously evaluated as positive (Kosmarskaya, 2020). A massive influx of the Kazakh-dominant speakers to the cities and emigration of those who spoke Russian as a dominant language that occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the scene. The introduction of the state language, Kazakh, into all spheres of life reduced the need and opportunity to use Russian, although in towns it is still spoken widely. Because of the influence of the Russian TV, Internet and other mass media, comprehension of Russian remains high. Moreover, Kazakhstan positions itself as a Russian-speaking country for those who fear to study or cannot study it in Russia itself, and many American and German students come there for a training period in Russian. Yet, the introduction of the official trilingualism (including English) and transition from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet for the Kazakh language diminish the prospects for Russian to survive and thrive.

In the case of ***Norway***, we conducted interviews with the principal, teachers and parents in one Oslo Russian school, opened in 2003 (Reiersen, 2013). Today, Norway is one of the richest countries of the world, and the influx of immigrants was a new phenomenon

that happened in all layers of society. Russian is taught in the afternoons or on weekends, and different activities happen in this language. The school started due to the Old Russians (who were few) and Norwegians interested in Russian. It operates on weekends and rarely teaches Russian to children elder than 12-14. Children are grouped according to their age; different subjects and activities are offered. According to the law, such institutions should only be non-political and non-religious. Most of the activists are women, but without their husbands' help, many problems can be solved.

According to parents, communication in Russian is the main goal of the immigrant communities. They have subdivisions aiming to meet interests of various age groups. They confirm that in their former life in Russia, they were not eager to be active in the organized social life, but in the small organizations, representing expats working abroad and immigrants, it has a very different sense. On the other hand, when the leaders are nice and welcoming and offer an interesting program, it is very similar to other language-based communities abroad.

The situation in ***Slovakia*** is special because Russian is an official minority language, although no more than 20,000 inhabitants of this multilingual country with the total population of four million speak Russian at home. Nonetheless, from 7 to 17 per cent of the population are proficient in Russian. Among them are descendants of the "White Emigration". In addition, members of another minority, Rusyns, are traditionally proficient in Russian, so are some members of the older generation Slovaks, who had to learn Russian at school in the socialist period or studied for a degree in the Soviet Union. More than 10 Slavic journals regularly publish articles on the Russian language and literature. Few pupils start learning Russian as a foreign language in the first grade, but many choose it as a second foreign language in the 7th grade. Some schools have bilingual programs, and there is a private Slovak-Russian bilingual school. Interest in acquisition of Russian is highest in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country (Korenkova et al., 2019).

In Slovakia, we studied situation in the Slovak-Russian Elementary and Secondary School (till the 9th grade), directed by Josef Bača. Children come from the Slovak-speaking, Russian-speaking and bilingual homes. His idea is to develop parallel competencies in both languages and educational systems, dividing education to the weekdays, combining this conception with early English as a foreign language teaching. Students must go through state examinations in the Slovak language after the 5th and 9th class. In the future, they may be will be able to pass through the Russian state exam as well. The maximum bilingualism is the goal, but the

Oxford test in English will be available. Without enthusiasm, nothing is possible. Teachers adapt schoolbooks, buy, invent and prepare their own materials, organize circles (choir, drama, music, arts, chess), stay with the children during extended days. Both Slovak and Russian traditions are celebrated. Families like the warm atmosphere.

Conclusion

Despite differences in the history of language contacts and sociolinguistic situations in different countries discussed in this article, they have an important similarity: the Russian language and culture proved to be the chief element of self-identification and community building among ex-Soviets residing outside the nation. Moreover, in the diaspora Russian serves as a lingua franca for ex-Soviets and their children irrespective of their ethnicity. Among the cultural institutions created by Russian speakers outside Russia, mass media and educational institutions are the most important ones. Electronic media replaced conventional press. *Runet* has evolved into a place of transnational communicative space, enabling diasporans to do business together, keep friendships and find entertainment. They also motivate Russian-language maintenance.

Russian-speaking parents in all the five countries are generally in favor of their children maintaining Russian as they see it as an important element of one's social capital. Where bilingual education is not provided by the state, day care centers and afternoon schools teaching Russian and in Russian are opened by émigré teachers. They often start as Russian only, but gradually shift to a bilingual model. Educated in the USSR or post-Soviet times, immigrant teachers advocate education guided by the Soviet pedagogical theories. The goal of the schools is to bring up bilingual personalities equally comfortable with Russian and the language and culture of their host countries. Diasporic communities have a dilemma: should they initiate teaching themselves? If they do, at whose expense, and to what extent? Should opportunities for learning be available only for children or also for adults? Should the learning goals be limited to oral communication or include writing? Should students study literature and culture in Russian or in the language of their environment? Confronted with these questions, teaching methodologists are investigating how to modernize the field of Russian studies by incorporating state-of-the-art techniques and training teachers to face the challenge.

Young diasporans evolve a concept of Russian and Russianness markedly different from that in the metropolis, and they have little respect for the Moscow language norm. If parents and teachers attempt to improve their language by imposing the norm, the students' motivation drops, and they may refuse to read or write in Russian. The texts of Russian

classics, which still form the basis of school reading, contain numerous words unknown to young immigrants and even to their peers in Russia. Many of these have become archaisms and they express unfamiliar and at times alien phenomena that may be difficult to comprehend. Such texts are unlikely to be enjoyed or motivate students to learn. Research conducted in the diaspora shows that this task is significantly harder in the diaspora due to the interference with the host language/s and culture/s (Miukaylova, 2018; Niznik, Yelenevskaya, 2019; Zbenovich, 2016). It is important for language teachers to help learners acquire metalinguistic knowledge which can make speakers more sensitive to differences between socio- and idiolects, and at the same time make them more tolerant of other people's speech varieties.

The history and nature of the pedagogies practiced in the educational institutions created by Russian speaking immigrants is yet to be documented, systematized and written. Immigrants' networks and organizations that have emerged in host countries, as well as scholarly publications reflect the intersection of various tendencies: Soviet, post-Soviet, Western and neighbors' education systems are used as sources of "homemade" instructional methods which evolve to meet specific needs of the students. Further research and case studies are needed to understand how parents, teachers and society at large collaborate to achieve the ambitious targets of bilingual instruction.

Teachers and parents do their everyday work in the best way they can, and methodologists of various levels summarize their experience, whereas the ideological centers in Moscow and St. Petersburg try to proclaim the dominance of the "correct" norm in Russian over the multilingual life. The linguistic and cultural repertoires must not be restricted to one theoretical language but enriched through creative hybridization, combining centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. In our further research projects we are going to explore approaches to teaching pluricentric languages, involvement of the old and new regions of Russian use in pedagogical work and interaction between them, and the role of commodification of Russian abroad in the life of diasporans.

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