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Language as a Tool of Social Interaction: Analysis of the Role of the Russian Language in Intercultural Communication in the Arctic

Olga A. Popova¹✉, Cand. Sci. (Hist.), Associate Professor

Olga E. Yatsevich², Cand. Sci. (Philos.), Associate Professor

¹Tyumen State University, ul. Volodarskogo, 6, Tyumen, Russia

²Industrial University of Tyumen, ul. Volodarskogo, 38, Tyumen, Russia

¹popovauni@rambler.ru ✉, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2501-763X>

²maru-safronova@rambler.ru, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7971-6826>

Abstract. The article explores the role of the Russian language as a tool for social interaction in the Arctic regions of Russia, where migration and communication between different ethnic groups are taking place. In the context of the multinational society characteristic of this region, the Russian language acquires special significance, being a link between the indigenous peoples of the North (IPNS). The author's study emphasizes that language serves not only as a means of communication, but also helps to form social identity, increasing the level of social integration. Language becomes a platform for cultural exchange, promoting mutual understanding and maintaining friendly relations between different groups of the population. For migrants, the Russian language provides opportunities for access to educational and social services, and for indigenous peoples, it "opens the door" to various resources and information necessary for their life. When writing the material, the main method chosen was content analysis of scientific literature and publicly available studies in the field of Russian language as a means of intercultural communication. Particular attention is paid to the possibilities of mutual enrichment of languages and cultures through bilingual education, translation of folklore and creation of multimedia projects, which allows not only to preserve the identity of the Arctic peoples, but also to strengthen the Russian language as the basis for interethnic communication. The authors are well aware that the study has a number of limitations based on an abstract representation of the culture and language of the northern peoples, as well as the fact that most native speakers do not actively use their native language and often hide their knowledge of it, preferring to use the official language, Russian, in everyday communication. The article analyzes the contribution of Russian and foreign scholars to research on the stated topic, as well as specific measures and strategies for improving language as a tool for interaction.


Keywords: *Russian language, intercultural communication, Arctic, bilingualism, indigenous peoples of the North, education, culture, cultural and social identity*

Introduction

In the context of globalization and migration processes, language is becoming an essential means of intercultural communication. With its long history in the Arctic, the Russian language plays a significant role in social interactions with the indigenous peoples of the North. This article provides an overview that examines how Russian is used in everyday life, education, and public life, as well as its influence on intercultural communication. The role of the Russian language in various spheres of public life, science, education, and culture in Russia and other neighboring

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countries is currently extremely significant, and the issue of its preservation is relevant. The aim of the study is to identify how the Russian language contributes to the establishment of intercultural relations, the formation of identity and the overcoming of language barriers, as well as to examine the difficulties and opportunities that arise in the process of communication with the indigenous peoples of the North. This formulation clearly defines the framework of the study and emphasizes the importance of the Russian language in the context of intercultural communication. The theoretical framework of the study forms its practical foundation, based on the promotion of knowledge of the native language and culture, which is reflected in regional projects implemented in the Arctic.

On the relevance of the Russian language, its preservation, development, and significance in the international environment and the maintenance of cultural identity

President Vladimir Putin frequently raises issues that highlight the development and study of the Russian language, which strengthens and affirms its leading role in the world as a means of adaptation, cooperation, and cultural identity. Vladimir Putin's speech at the opening ceremony of the World Russian People's Council, as well as the reading of the document "On the Approval of the Concept of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation", touched upon a number of issues related to language policy and preservation of the Russian language as an important cultural element.

Another important document is the materials of the meetings of the Council on the Russian Language (November 2024), where the current state of the Russian language was discussed and measures for its support and development were outlined. At the conference, many speakers expressed their support for the preservation and development of the languages of all peoples of Russia, provided that the state language is mandatory. "Despite the unique ethno-cultural and religious diversity of our country, it is the Russian language that largely shapes our spiritual and national identity. General education programs in subjects such as "Russian Language" and "The Language of the People, the State Language of the Republic of the Russian Federation" should be built on this foundation¹. National languages help ethnic groups to preserve themselves, while the Russian language unites ethnic groups into a single nation, diverse in blood, but indivisible in spirit."²

Content analysis of research on the Russian language in Russian and foreign publications

Due to the relevance of the above-mentioned topic, contemporary scientific literature was analyzed. In addition to the main research method — content analysis — the following general scientific methods were used: *dialectical method*, which made it possible to trace the development of ideas about the role of the Russian language among the Arctic peoples in dynamic connections; *analysis*, which allows researchers to decompose the Russian language into units of

¹ Official website of the President of Russia. URL: <https://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75495> (accessed 01 December 2024).

² Ibid.

functioning in northern territories; and *synthesis*, which continues the analysis with further generalization of intermediate or final conclusions.

The inductive method made it possible to draw conclusions and identify key themes based on individual studies:

Language as a factor of cultural and social identity: a number of works are devoted to the correlation between language, cultural identity, and social functions in the context of migration and globalization. The authors listed below consider Russian as a means of integrating migrants and preserving the identity of indigenous peoples [1; 2; 3; 4].

Language policy and multilingualism: studies [5; 6; 7; 8] cover issues of language policy, preserving diversity and maintaining multilingualism, especially in Russia and the Arctic region.

Cross-cultural communication and inter-cultural interaction: there is significant interest in cross-cultural communication, where language is viewed as a tool for successful interaction between different cultures and nations [9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14].

Linguistic diversity in the context of globalization: the impact of globalization on languages and cultural processes is also an important topic. Authors explore the impact of global processes on the Russian language and its future [15; 16; 17].

The following studies are based on the deductive method and allow for general conclusions based on the key idea that the Russian language contributes to the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the peoples of the Arctic.

For example, researcher Anna Kuznetsova (Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don) considers the role of the Russian language in intercultural communication as a means of overcoming social barriers in Russia and other multinational states. The author is concerned with the strategic importance of language for ensuring national security and the unity of the country [18]. To address this issue, measures are needed to support and develop the language in the international arena, as well as within Russia, in order to overcome the trend of its weakening.

The works of A.F. Kolyaseva [19, pp. 82–97] and O.E. Pekelis [20, pp. 66–101] address issues of declining speech culture and literacy. A.F. Kolyaseva places particular emphasis on the fact that language is becoming simplified and impoverished as a result of the decline in live communication and the use of various social networks and applications, where communication is often based on emoticons and images downloaded from the Internet or built into applications. O.E. Pekelis uses the concept of “linguistic economy” in his work, emphasizing the global trend of transforming meaningful phrases into their equivalents, which leads to misunderstanding of the meaning of the statement and emotional stress.

Modern people live in an era of global change and constant multitasking. However, humans have adapted to these conditions and adapted language to these goals. Whether this is good or bad is a matter of endless debate, since in an era of change there are both opponents and defenders of the use of gadgets, which cause a lot of controversy. On the one hand, we should not deny the distorting processes in communication that reduce the overall level of literacy among the

population. On the other hand, there are many opportunities for self-development and self-realization when, with the help of applications, one can learn the rules of native language, learn the basics of a foreign language and visit remote corners of the planet using websites equipped with 3D viewing capabilities or VR glasses.

The Russian language is becoming an important tool that will help to establish further international contacts and to build educational initiatives that strengthen the role of Russian as an integral instrument of unity, strength, and national security. Representatives of scientific communities are making considerable efforts to achieve the goals set by the state, developing new methods and approaches capable of popularizing the language.

The Russian language as a systematizing factor in the preservation of cultural identity

Language is not just a means of communication, but also a reflection of cultural identities. Many linguists and philosophers (Ferdinand de Saussure, Émile Durkheim, Roman Jakobson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Austin and John Searle, L. S. Vygotskiy, M. M. Bakhtin, T. A. Zinatullina, I. E. Bobrenev, T. N. Krylova, and others) have spoken about language as a social phenomenon. These researchers have made a significant contribution to the understanding of language as a phenomenon that exists exclusively in the context of social life and interaction. The contribution of our Russian scientist Lev Semenovich Vygotskiy (1896–1934) to the understanding of how language, thinking and the social environment influence the development of human consciousness is invaluable. In his book “Thinking and Speech”, he argues that language evolves in a social context and serves as a means of communication that promotes the development of thinking, and that the internal and external functions of language are interrelated, and language becomes an instrument of thinking through interaction with other people [21].

The Russian language occupies a central place in the formation and preservation of cultural identity for both Russian-speaking peoples and the ethnic communities under its influence. Let us consider several key aspects demonstrating the role of language as a systematizing factor in cultural identity.

1. *Language as a carrier of cultural heritage*: Language is not only a means of communication, but also an important repository of a people's historical, cultural and social artefacts. It serves as a channel for the transmission of traditions, customs and values, which in turn contributes to the formation of a unique cultural identity. The Russian language, with its rich vocabulary and diverse phraseology, contains many elements related to national culture (folklore, literature, musical works, proverbs, etc.).

2. *National cultural and emotional framework of literary and artistic works*: Significant works of Russian literature by such venerable authors as Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, not only enrich the language with lexical units, but also play a significant role in shaping national identity. Literature conveys complex ideas about life, experiences, values and images that are unique to the Russian people, thereby integrating them into the general cultural

context. Through literary works, individuals have the opportunity to discover common roots and connections that effectively strengthen their sense of belonging to a particular cultural tradition.

3. *Language as a link between generations:* The connection between generations is achieved through language, where the younger generation acquires the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities that help them not only to communicate, but also to survive in times of existential uncertainty and instability in the world.

4. *Language policy and social aspects:* As the state language, Russian can play an instrumental role in shaping national identity. Social institutions and the media promote the importance of language in a multicultural space, where integration and cultural interaction are particularly important.

Constructive dialogue – a guarantee for preserving the culture of indigenous peoples: regional aspect

Constructive dialogue in sustainable regional development implies active and productive interaction between various parties, such as indigenous peoples, government agencies, businesses, and public organizations. This dialogue is necessary to take into account the interests and knowledge of the local population when making decisions regarding the use of natural resources, ecology and social issues. The main goal of this approach is to create harmony between economic growth and the preservation of the region's cultural and natural heritage. Involving all stakeholders in discussions and planning contributes to more sustainable and equitable development that takes into account the unique needs and values of local communities.

Indigenous peoples of the North (Nenets, Sami, and Inuit) have a deep connection with nature, which has a thousand-year history and is reflected in their way of life, understanding of the laws of nature and desire to live in harmony with them. In this context, the works of E.V. Kudryashova [22] and the authors' collective of M.V. Nenasheva, A.M. Maksimov, S.Yu. Kuznetsova, M.Yu. Zadorin [23] and E.F. Gladun [24] deserve special attention as they have developed platforms that ensure constructive dialogue between government structures and indigenous peoples, allowing the opinions of local residents to be taken into account on issues related to social security, environmental policy and the development of natural resources. The authors emphasize that without the active involvement of indigenous peoples in decision-making processes related to their cultural and social life, it is impossible to achieve sustainable development in the region. It is important to note that many of these communities have unique traditions, culture, and knowledge of nature that can make a significant contribution to the region's ecosystem and its preservation.

The educational system also plays a significant role in this process. It is essential to integrate the study of the culture and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples into educational programs for both the local population and the general public. This will help to raise awareness of the realities and challenges faced by indigenous peoples.

From the perspective of international cooperation, it is necessary to intensify the activities of organizations such as the Arctic Council, which work on issues of sustainable development and the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. Strengthening the position of indigenous peoples on the international stage will help to draw attention to their needs and rights and may also contribute to the development of a more responsible approach to natural resource management.

Consequently, we believe that effective legal regulation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region can only be achieved if indigenous peoples are included in the decision-making process. Their experience, knowledge and traditions should form an important basis for the development of sustainable policies that contribute to the preservation of the region's unique cultural and natural heritage. The creation of joint initiatives based on cooperation between different levels of government, the scientific community and local communities will be a step towards improving the quality of life of indigenous peoples and ensuring the sustainable development of the entire Arctic.

A unique project aimed at preserving the culture and language of the indigenous peoples of the North is being implemented at the Northern (Arctic) Federal University in synergy with other institutions. This is a current research trend, as the Nenets language and culture, i.e., its ethno-cultural environment, are at risk of extinction, as this language belongs to languages with a low level of vitality [25, pp. 246–269].

The project was officially presented in March 2022 at an international seminar in St. Petersburg with the participation of representatives from nine constituent entities of the Russian Federation, including teachers, lecturers, and IT project developers. The project is scheduled to be implemented over a period of five years, until the end of December 2026, and consists of five consecutive stages reflecting the political and social development strategies of the country and its regions. The project is based on monitoring studies, presenting research results at scientific events, and working closely with the authorities of the Nenets and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs. The interdisciplinary nature of the experimental initiative should be emphasized, as in addition to monitoring the status of indigenous languages, linguistic, pedagogical and cultural studies are also being conducted.

In the autumn of 2022, under the direct supervision of researchers A.M. Polikarpov, M.V. Druzhinina, E.V. Polikarpova and O.E. Latysheva, an expedition to the Nenets Autonomous Okrug was carried out, in which representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North took part. Monitoring of the linguistic and cultural environment, studying the educational environment, and communicating with teachers and residents made it possible to make constructive proposals for improving the linguistic situation, which were clearly demonstrated in the final presentation. This made it possible to sign long-term agreements to implement the initiative between the following institutions: the Ethno-cultural Center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Northern (Arctic) Federal University (NArFU) — the Nenets Regional Center for Education Development, which approved the roadmap for the project.

The contribution of the above-mentioned researchers is invaluable, consisting of documenting Nenets folklore texts (fairy tales) and translating them into Russian in order to convey the linguistic worldview of the Nenets, reflecting their close connection with nature, and their character, rooted in kindness, mutual assistance, maternal instincts, and the rejection of negative character traits.

Thus, there is ongoing work aimed at supporting, developing and preserving the language and culture of indigenous peoples of the North, which requires multilateral cooperation and support at both the global and local levels. “In modern conditions, it is educational institutions that fulfill the function of ethno-cultural consolidation of society and ensure its sustainability [26]”. Tyumen universities have a strong teaching staff working on the design and implementation of integrated courses that fully take into account the ethno-cultural characteristics of students, since the primary tutoring is provided by representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North.

In December 2024, Bauman Moscow State Technical University traditionally held the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Current Issues in Linguistics and Professional Linguodidactics: Trends and Prospects”, which addressed topical issues such as the changing ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic situation; the migration linguistics: cultural and linguistic adaptation of migrants; and the bilingual personality: formation and characteristics. The year 2024 was no exception, and on December 12–13, 2024, the authors of the article attended a section, where leading Russian and foreign scholars gave presentations that resonated with the audience and participants.

Historical context, territorial division, legal regulation, and socio-economic development of the Arctic

The migration of Russian-speaking people to the Arctic began in the 17th century, when Russia was actively developing its northern territories. Russian explorers and traders brought with them the language, which, according to researchers studying the North, became a source of borrowings. Thematic lexical units have been well studied by linguists and confirm the widespread use of Russian in the everyday lives of migrants and indigenous peoples. It is used for communication in families, markets, shops and other social contexts. In her linguistic research, Bagdaryyn Nyurgun Syulbe Uola finds numerous Russianisms in fishing vocabulary [27].

In 2024, T.P. Golovatskaya published a scientific article describing the most common areas of use of Russian words in the speech of indigenous northern peoples, where the gradation of vocabulary use primarily covers society and shows the assimilation of political words, names of professions, government institutions, household items, etc. This emphasizes the ability of peoples to coexist in the same spatial area and mutually enrich their existence [28].

In Russia, the indigenous peoples of the North (IPN) traditionally inhabit vast territories stretching from the Kola Peninsula in the west to the Bering Strait in the east, covering about two-thirds of Russia’s territory. Researcher E.F. Gladun sees the future of these regions in their potential to become “outposts” of the Russian Arctic and drivers of the country’s economic growth, with

significant financial support provided through state target programs. Each region has a specific economic basis and different development goals. The scholar focuses on the justification of the legal implications of sustainable development in the Russian Arctic and provides examples of barriers to this path, assessing the relevant legal documents (the Fundamentals of the Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic until 2020 and the Arctic Strategy) [29]. The results of her study include the identification of achievements and shortcomings in the rule of law related to the sustainable development of the Russian Arctic, as well as policy recommendations for government agencies in the form of a roadmap. A very important step is to supplement national laws with effective legal instruments establishing a sustainable approach to the Russian Arctic. One of the important points of the roadmap recommendations is the involvement of indigenous peoples of the North in the process of policymaking and decision-making concerning their territories and resources. To ensure their participation in the development of the Arctic in accordance with their traditional values and knowledge in the future, Russia needs to implement the regulatory mechanisms that existed prior to 2004. In particular, the representation of indigenous peoples in political, legislative and executive systems; the right to express their opinions and give their free and informed consent to approve projects affecting their territories should be guaranteed by federal laws and implemented through effective action programs in the Arctic regions [30; 31].

Other Russian scientists, K.S. Zaikov, A.M. Tamitskiy, and M.Yu. Zadorin, also propose a number of measures for implementing the new strategy in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, including:

- the need to create a conceptual framework that would be understandable to all users (the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, such as the Nenets, Yakuts, Chukchi and Khanty, speak different languages, so Russian is intended to be a universal means of communication between them and Russian-speaking migrants, allowing them to exchange experience and knowledge);
- the development of educational programs for indigenous peoples aimed at teaching children the vital skills necessary for survival in a challenging environment and a successful existence in modern realities;
- the provision of the necessary equipment for distance learning;
- the creation of programs focused on the rational use of natural resources.

Russia's cultural foundations serve as the official basis for the country's cultural policy and cover many aspects:

- preserving and developing Russia's "cultural identity";
- considering and supporting the role of "traditional" religions in the country;
- recognizing the phenomenon of "social atomization", that is, the destruction of social ties (friends, family, neighbors), as one of the most serious problems in Russian culture;
- restoring the importance of "family upbringing" as a key element of quality education;

- dissemination and in-depth explanation of “traditional family values through mass media aimed at the general public” [32], etc.

Research conducted by scientists in these regions shows that indigenous peoples, their communities, and associations constitute a significant part of Arctic society and the social structure of the Russian part of the BEAR. The main issues discussed at the intergovernmental, national, and regional levels include cultural and ethnic diversity, peace and security, general education and traditional education of indigenous peoples, sustainable environmental management, and the participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making. As a BEAR member state, the Russian Federation responds to all these issues by adopting relevant strategies, federal laws and regulations, and regional legislation. However, the primary focus is on cultural issues, which are a priority in regional socio-cultural policy. Overall, Russia’s recognition of the importance and value of socio-cultural development within the framework of international cooperation is expressed in a number of political and strategic documents, as well as laws and regulations.

The Russian language as a means of socio-cultural communication

Professor I.S. Alexeeva and her colleagues from the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (St. Petersburg) emphasized the importance of the Russian language as a cultural mediator in their research article entitled “A Multitude of Languages — and One Country: Building up Communication among the Peoples of Russia through Translation” [33]. They focused on developing practical, specific theories of translation, creating models for restoring lost textual heritage, and strategies for translating works by indigenous peoples. One of the proposed models is a system of interactive support for translation from the languages of the peoples of Russia into Russian, presented in variants A and B and called the “Roots Strengthen the Crown” model. They also proposed an “Interlinguacultural Model” that covers the foreign-language description of the cultures of the peoples of Russia, in two variants: A (internal) and B (external). During their work, the researchers identified a number of pressing future tasks, including:

- researching the collected archival texts of the peoples of Russia and translating them into Russian;
- initiating a large-scale analysis of literary derivatives, including interlinear translations with subsequent processing;
- researching literary tri-lingualism, focusing on the translation of world masterpieces into the languages of the peoples of Russia using Russian as a medium, and its influence on the development of national literatures;
- organizing the exchange of experience gained in national translation schools, such as in Yakutia;
- analyzing the specifics of translation.

Conclusion

Language as a means of cultural exchange is not just a way of conveying information; it promotes deeper mutual understanding and cultural exchange between different ethnic groups. The study found that the use of Russian in social interactions forms dynamic layers and connections that arise as a result of living together and active interaction. The Russian language is becoming an important component in the process of forming a common social identity. Indigenous small peoples who speak Russian are actively participating in the common cultural space, creating new forms of identity and interacting more and more with the outside world. The Russian language allows the indigenous small peoples of the North to adapt to transformational processes, to take part in state governance and to represent their interests at the global level, without losing the deep connections that have developed in their unique traditions. The Russian language is not a replacement for the native language, but a means of preserving and transmitting the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the North living in the Arctic.

Therefore, Russian scientists are conducting serious research, proposing specific measures and strategies to improve the language as a tool for interaction. These include the introduction of Russian language programs for both migrants and indigenous peoples, as well as the development of educational initiatives aimed at increasing bilingualism and cultural literacy.

Preserving the culture, language, and traditions of indigenous peoples through symbiosis with the Russian language can be considered a special tool for strengthening the identity of these peoples and transmitting their traditions to future generations. The Russian language, as an important means of communication and a bridge between peoples, can serve as a vehicle for promoting the unique heritage of these peoples. It is important to create a two-way exchange process whereby the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North can be reflected in literature, music, art, and educational materials through Russian, making them accessible to a wider audience. At the same time, translating and studying the oral traditions, songs, legends, and tales of these peoples into Russian will preserve them for future generations. It is also important to teach Russian in combination with their native language, which promotes integration without depriving children of the indigenous peoples of their national identity. The introduction of bilingual education into school curricula will help to strengthen both languages: Russian will become a universal means of communication, and the native language will preserve the connection with the roots. Holding festivals, publishing books and creating multimedia projects in Russian with elements of Arctic peoples' cultures helps to popularize their heritage and at the same time strengthens the Russian language as a tool for interethnic dialogue.

Thus, the Russian language is capable not of displacing, but of preserving and supporting the cultural wealth of the peoples of the Arctic. It remains their ally in preserving their identity, serving as both a conductor and a tool for uniting people of different cultures and facilitating their interaction in the context of globalization and migration, as emphasized by this study, which is an important milestone not only in understanding social processes in the Arctic, but also for the fur-

ther development of theories of intercultural communication and research into language practices in multinational societies.

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