

## Education in Udmurt and Chuvash as minority languages of Russia

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### Introduction

Addressing the issue of bi- and multilingual education in today's Russia, the goal of the article is to demonstrate what has changed in education for minority language speakers during more than twenty years of post-socialist development. Russia has signed, but not ratified, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. As Russia or the Russian Federation (RF) is a multilingual country, the authorities have promised to develop all indigenous languages of the RF and follow the legislation created for linguistically diverse regions of the world. But in reality, minority languages are considered a danger to the native speakers of these languages and as a possible threat to Russian language competencies (Leksin 2014).

Our aim is to give an overview of Russian language policy in education, to demonstrate current tendencies in the attitudes of Russian authorities toward minority language teaching, and to compare them with the attitudes of the ordinary people involved in the educational system as its agents or clients. At the same time, in the two case studies we present, we claim that some measures are being undertaken to help teach languages to pre-school (in Udmurtia) and school age (in Chuvashia) children. The article introduces, summarizes and discusses the situation of Udmurt and Chuvash in education on the basis of legal texts, statistical data, interviews with teachers and school officials, and polls of parents and schoolchildren.

The Volga region was chosen for of its longstanding multilingualism. Speakers of the Finno-Ugric, Turkic, and Slavic languages have been liv-

ing in immediate neighborhood for centuries and their languages have long undergone mutual influences (Nuorluoto 2007). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these contacts intensified, the Russian language became more or less the donor, and other languages turned into recipients (Taagepera 1999); the influences of local languages on Russian, besides exoticisms, remain almost unstudied. The Volga Federal District comprises 14 of Russia's »federal subjects« (constituent entities), including six republics—three with Finno-Ugric »state languages,« and three with Turkic languages (in all cases alongside Russian, which dominates in administration, media, and public life).

In spite of many similarities, the six republics of the Volga Federal District are quite different in terms of geography, ethnic constitution, economic strength, and other respects. Udmurtia and Chuvashia have important differences which made them attractive case studies for the region. Udmurtia has some 1.5 million inhabitants. 28% are ethnic Udmurts and 62% ethnic Russians. Chuvashia has 1.2 million inhabitants, 68% ethnic Chuvashes and 27% ethnic Russian. Udmurtia has the smallest share of a »titular« nationality among the Volga District republics; Chuvashia, the highest. Accordingly, ethnic Russians have the highest share of the population among the District Republics in Udmurtia, and the smallest in Chuvashia. The numerical dominance of the titular ethnic group makes language revival policies much simpler (Gorenburg 1999). On the other hand, Udmurtia is a highly industrialized republic, while Chuvashia is a primarily agricultural republic, and one of the economically weakest, with the largest rural population in the district. Chuvashia's dependence on subsidies from the federal government makes it less likely to try to implement policies which Moscow might consider inconsistent with federal policies; for example, the use of Chuvash in education. Among the 162 languages spoken by Russia's population of nearly 144 million, 131 are considered by UNESCO to be endangered. The Udmurt language, which belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family, has the status of »definitely endangered.« It has 324,338 speakers according to the 2010 census (there are 552,299 ethnic Udmurts in Russia) and is spoken not only in the Udmurt Republic, but in parts of

Tatarstan, Mari El, Bashkortostan, and Kirov and Perm provinces (Census 2010, UNESCO 2012). Chuvash is a Turkic language considered to be »vulnerable.« It has 1,042,989 speakers (three times more than Udmurt) according to the 2010 census (there are 1,435,872 ethnic Chuvashes in Russia), and is spoken in the Chuvash Republic itself as well as in parts of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the Ulyanovsk, Samara, and Tyumen provinces (Census 2010, UNESCO 2012).

### **Modern Russian education for multilingualism**

Russian scientists responsible for monitoring the educational situation in different bilingual settings claim that Russia's roots are polycultural, multilingual, and polycivilized, which is why the heterogeneity of Russian society has to be taken into account when creating educational modules; in order to satisfy the various linguistic and cultural needs of the population and to ensure the unity of education and the integrity of the state school system (Artjomenko 2008). According to Artjomenko (2008), in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 18.5% of all children were non-Russian, and only 9% of all children were attending schools that operated in the native language or taught the native language. Of the 44 native languages taught, 21 were languages of general education, in 14 cases only for two-, three-, or four-year-olds. Tuvans and Kazakhs had native language education for seven years, Yakuts for nine years, and Tatars, Bashkirs, Armenians, and Georgians for 10 years. Other languages were taught as subjects from the first grade on, and »native« literature was taught from the fifth grade on. After the end of the Soviet Union, legislation in the RF was not as favorable toward the maintenance and learning of languages as in the national republics of the USSR. In the first years of national mobilization after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, 31 languages were proposed as languages of general education and the number of the languages taught as subjects grew to 68; 13.5% of all educational institutions had some teaching of native languages. There are 89 languages taught; in average, about 56% of all educational institutions in the republics have some teaching of native languages, and new languages are being introduced (such as Rutul, Agul, and Cakhur in Dage-

stan). There are 39 languages taught in primary education (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grades), 17 languages taught in basic general education (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades), and 14 languages taught in high school (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades). Fifty languages are taught as subjects (Artjomenko 2008). In the Komi Republic, all of kindergarten and schoolchildren are in some kind of titular language program (Ostapova 2012). In Sakha, Yakutia, more than 40% of the schools teach in the native languages, as opposed to 45% in Bashkortostan, 59% in Tatarstan, and 80% in Tyva (Artjomenko 2010). However, as Zamyatin (2012a, 22) points out, these are mainly rural schools, much smaller than those in urban areas, and the actual numbers of schoolchildren learning in their native languages may be lower than official statistics suggest. Official statistics announce only the number of schools, not the actual percentage of schoolchildren. One should be aware that although a language is publicized as being taught at a certain level, only a handful of students may actually receive this instruction. For instance, Chuvash is considered to be one of Russia's languages of basic general education, but less than 1% of schoolchildren attending grade 5 to 9 in Chuvashia learn in Chuvash (Alòs i Font 2014, 72).

In the Soviet era, the peoples of the north were meant to skip the capitalist stage and move from feudalism directly to socialism, giving up their traditional way of life, which was considered backwards and self-contained. Their languages were given new functions, e.g. orthographies were developed and textbooks printed, but they could no longer be used in the larger world. Minority peoples had to learn Russian as the language of international communication. The spread of education in Russian, migration to the cities, and involvement in new occupations were all processes that curbed the use of minority languages and reduced the number of speakers of those languages (Gurvich 1987, 136–51). As a countermeasure, in order to preserve the traditional way of life, in the 1990s new nomadic schools were introduced for the peoples of the north (Arefev 2014; Gorodenko 2010; Shusharina 2013). Our visits to the region observed increasing self-esteem and interest in their national heritages (including language) among autochthonous peoples, but a lack of means to transfer knowledge from the old to the young. Evidently,

these languages will only be used in traditional areas of life and will not develop the whole spectrum of modern uses. Even the names of animals such as elephants will remain absent in those languages.

The *Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* (OSCE 1996) state that it is crucial for the identity of national minorities to have the possibility to learn their mother tongue during the educational process and recommend that part of the education of these peoples should be provided in their mother tongue. In parallel, representatives of national minorities should have the opportunity to learn the state language properly in order to ensure integration into the broader society.

Likewise, authors on bilingual education have emphasized the importance of instruction *in* minority languages for subjects other than the languages themselves (Baker 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Baker (2011, 206–52; see also Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 579–622), in his influential typology of bilingual education, distinguishes between »monolingual forms of education for bilinguals«, »weak forms of bilingual education« and »strong forms of bilingual education for bilingualism and biliteracy.« The first type can be exemplified by the use of the dominant language (e.g. Russian) for minority-language students (e.g. Udmurts or Chuvashes) (so-called *mainstream* or *submersion* programmes). Among the second type, one can find the *transitional* programmes, which differ from the previous ones in that »language minority students are temporarily allowed to use their home language. Such students are taught briefly though their home language until they are thought to be proficient enough in the majority language to cope in mainstream education« (215). And he clarifies: »the basic aim of *weak* forms of bilingual education is assimilation of language minorities rather than maintenance of their home languages and cultural pluralism« (219). Cases of *strong* bilingual education include *maintenance* or *heritage language* programmes for language minorities, where both majority and minority languages are used in the classroom with emphasis on the mother tongue, and *immersion* programs aimed at majority-language speakers, where both languages are also used

but with an initial emphasis on the non-native language. Even more factors should be taken into account when teaching in extremely diverse classrooms today (García and Li Wei 2014), yet the general idea of multilingualism retains a reputation as dangerous and strange in modern Russia.

More deeply conducted investigations of multilingualism are disheartening and show that despite generally favorable conditions, in practice a high degree of knowledge of both languages is not achieved (Chevalier 2012, 2013; Khruslov and Kroon 2002; Protassova 2010; Protassova and Rodina 2014). In many cases, it may be too late to save the minority language despite all revitalization measures (Perekhval'skaja 2013). As Fomin and Fjodorov (2010, 101–10) reveal, knowledge about bi- and multilingualism is not widespread enough in Sakha, Yakutia: in bilingual families, parents are afraid to use their own language because they fear their children will not learn Russian properly. About 60% of the bilingual families are Yakut-dominant and switch between languages. Young people coming from the *uluses* (villages) to the towns abandon their mother tongue at home and speak it only a quarter of the time they previously did; only 1/3 of all families read in Yakut to their children.

In the new Law on Education (LE 2012), education in Russian as the state language is guaranteed, while teaching in other languages is provided if possible (Art. 14:1). The default language of education is Russian (Art. 14:2). In the territories of the republics (however not all languages can be divided by republics, many are divided along other administrative lines), teaching and studying of other state languages of the republics of the RF must follow the legislation of the respective republics within the framework of federally approved programs and educational standards and must be provided without harming the teaching and studying of Russian (Art. 14:3). Citizens of the RF have the right to pre-school, primary, and basic general education in the languages of the RF as well as the right to study their native language (*rodnoj jazyk*) as a language of the RF according to the legislation of the RF. The necessary educational organizations, classes, groups, and circumstances must be provided (Art.

14:4) and the educational organizations may themselves decide upon the languages of their educational activity (Art. 14:6; Art. 29). The state organizes production of the necessary textbooks and involves local experts into this process (Art. 18). Theoretically, parents choose the language of education (Art. 44). Pedagogical staff is not allowed incite racial or national tensions, also in the case of somebody speaking a different language (Art. 48). The state final examination may be provided in one of the official native languages of the RF (Art. 59:2). The main goal of general education is, among other things, to promote interpersonal and interethnic communication, including acquisition of the state language of the RF (Art. 66). »Russian« is not named, rather it is called *the state language of the RF*; while other ethnic or national languages (the former terminology) are called the *native languages*.

»Harming the teaching and studying of the state language of the RF,« which is Russian, is understood by the local authorities as the prohibition to teach only in the national language on the pre-school level, as we observed in the republics whenever teachers tried to organize »language nests« or immersion programs (although language nests were obstructed not only by local, but also by federal authorities; see Russia's Third Report to the ACFC 2010, 102).

In the USSR, teaching Russian and the development of bilingualism among the members of ethnic minorities was a great concern of the federal Soviet republics and did not raise so much attention inside the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (Kreindler 1989). The development of multilingualism was formally assured by the Constitution and measures were undertaken to write schoolbooks in the national languages of the peoples of Russia. Inside the RF, on the pre-school level there were quite a few teaching materials in the minority languages, and a handful of general children's literature. In reality, the languages of education were contingent upon the situation. Sometimes, when a kindergarten group or school class was not Russian-speaking and the teacher could speak the autochthon language, she translated everything into the language of the children; sometimes, the educational process

was conducted in Russian, but all everyday activities were in the local language. When the teacher did not master the language of her pupils, she spoke in Russian and the children had to learn it.

Nevertheless, the Russian educational system includes almost only submersion or transitional programs. University education is almost fully in Russian, and in most of the republics, school education in minority languages is only provided in primary schools in villages. Udmurtia does not offer general school instruction in Udmurt, and Chuvashia in Chuvash only until 5<sup>th</sup> grade (Zamyatin 2012a). According to Zamyatin's (2012b, 251) analysis of language policies in education in Russia's Finno-Ugric republics, »policymakers considered the compulsory teaching of languages to be the most important tool of language revival.« This reflects the situation in Chuvashia, where the Chuvash language was made a compulsory subject for all schoolchildren from the first to the last grades of schools in the early 1990s, but not for Udmurtia, where Udmurt is non-compulsory and, according to Zamyatin's calculations (2012b: 245), only 44.8% of ethnic Udmurt schoolchildren learned it at school in the 2008/9 school year.

### **The case of Udmurtia**

The identity of the Udmurt people is connected with their homeland, with the Udmurt diaspora, with traditional culture, with today's achievements, and with the language. First, we would like to look at the history of language teaching, which influences educational results, then we shall summarize legislative and educational prerequisites for language teaching. After that, we briefly present the results of our studies in Udmurtia.

The Udmurt Republic is a sovereign republic within the RF (the previous ethnonym of Udmurts is *votjaki*). The history of the Udmurt clans and language is the subject of an intensive scientific discussion (see Churakov 2005). The 18<sup>th</sup> century efforts to make Udmurts Christians were conducted in their own language; this led to alphabetization and the formation of a national elite (before that time, the Udmurts lived in extended families of up to 50–70 people). Those who learned to speak



Russian ceased to be Udmurt and became Russian; this tradition persists to this day (Ponomarjov 2001; Semjonova 1996; Shkljaev 1998a,b; Vasiljeva 1999). The historical memory of Udmurts includes the legend that Udmurts received money for accepting Russian names and the Russian language. Udmurts today are finding their roots, practicing their national religion in the sacred woods, worshipping, poetizing nature, singing songs, and organizing ethnographic expeditions. In national kindergartens and schools, children study Udmurt folklore and reinterpret the role of the gods in their everyday lives. They create crafts connected to their culture, learn how to cook special foods, make baskets, weave, and make traditional wood decorations. Every educational institution has a corner or a so-called museum where national symbols are exhibited and the national cultural heritage, historical everyday utensils, clothes, and crafts are collected and explained. Some programs are based upon mythology and legends. Students are taught to play traditional music instruments. The state television company *Udmurtia*, museums, professional theaters, the Academic Choir, folklore song and dance groups such as *Italmas*, *Tanok*, *Aikai*, *Chipchirgan*, *Ehton Korka*, and the Eurovision 2012 contestants *Buranovo Grandmothers* represent ethnic culture. At the same time, there is a Russian part of Udmurtia: Votkinsk is known as the birth place of Tchaikovsky; the strategic rockets Topol' and Bulava are produced there; and it is also the home country of Kalashnikov, both the man and the gun. Udmurtia also has oil; KIA-Motors and some pharmaceutical firms are investors in the area.

The share of ethnic Udmurts in the population of Udmurtia is gradually decreasing. In 1939, Udmurts made up about 36%, in 1989 they were a minority of 31%, and in 2011 just 28% of the state population. There is a ministry of nationality affairs, many ethno-cultural organizations, and a »house of friendship between nationalities.« In 1926, 99% of Udmurts could speak Udmurt; in 1959, only 89%, and in 1979 their number had decreased to 77%. In the census of 1989, about 70% of the Udmurtian population still maintained the Udmurt language. Today, this number is closer to 59%. In mixed-ethnicity families, Russian-sounding names and the Russian nationality are preferred for children.

The artificial restriction of the functional sphere of the native language to the teaching and educational process, as well as a simplified understanding of the role that the native language and traditional culture play in the formation of a national consciousness, led to, by the 1970s, the complete loss of all traditions implanted in the 1920–1930s in Udmurt schools by the educators I.S. Mikheyev, I.J. Jakovlev, K. Gerd and others. By the 1970s, the basic measurement of a school's success became the pupils' level of knowledge, first of all in the Russian language. The transition to Russian and the reduction of hours of instruction in the mother tongue were the reason for the loss of scientific, mathematical, and other Udmurt terms in school education; they were replaced by Russian concepts. Thus, the Udmurt child left a national primary school, came to Russian middle and high schools, and had no recourse to either the Udmurt or the Russian language. Being tongue-tied, these children became shy and timid. Unable to communicate and express themselves sufficiently, they became psychologically discomforted and deprived and unable to make decisions. Together with democratization, decentralization, and the differentiation of education in 1990s, reorganization has begun and the attitude towards teaching Udmurt has changed. Acquaintance with culture was constructed concentrically and gradually: from the home village or town (the immediate environment, its geography and history) toward the ethnic philosophy and traditions, native language and culture, Russian language and culture, world culture. Udmurt schools were also founded outside the republic (Vershinin 1998).

Native schools are situated predominantly in rural areas. Udmurt is spoken mostly in the villages, and urban migration is considered to be a threat to the maintenance of its use, because the trans-generational transmission is endangered and the Udmurt language is underrepresented in the cities. As Protassova and Bulatova (2010) have shown, elder speakers use Udmurt in everyday situations and use the local mass-media, while the younger Udmurts who live in the towns prefer to switch into Russian when they speak in public. The language shift was undertaken mostly by the generation who is in the early 2010s is around

age 40–60. There are quite a few Udmurts who, according to their own assessment, are competent speakers of the language (and who spoke Udmurt only before going to school), but do not speak it to their children. Their written skills fall behind considerably, and the younger generation has better standard language skills. The differences in the languages they use (dialects, degree of acquisition, competence in the Russian language, etc.) influence their attitudes and behavior in conversation and affects their self-appraisal (see Jedygarova 2013). Salánki (2007) has shown that Udmurts fear to expose their children to disadvantages at school. The lower social acceptance of the Udmurt language and their own insufficient competencies make Udmurt-speaking parents use Russian in family communication. She comes to the conclusion that the language must become more prestigious.

The Law of the Udmurt Republic *About the state languages of the Udmurt Republic and the other languages of the peoples of the Udmurt Republic* (2002) considers this indigenous language to be endangered despite the number of persons speaking it, because less and less Udmurts report it as their mother tongue. Since then, the administration has made some progress in introducing Udmurt in public places and documents, extending terminology, publishing new Udmurt-Russian and Russian-Udmurt dictionaries, and supporting computerization.

The *Conception of National Education in the Udmurt Republic* (Conception 2007) speaks about the mental consolidation of the polyethnic society. Meeting the ethno-cultural and linguistic demands of the RF's peoples while maintaining the unity of the federal cultural, educational, and spiritual space by securing the inner stability of the ethnically diverse society, are stated as priorities. The *Conception* reports that the quality of Udmurt language teaching has increased by 60%, while the quality of Tatar language teaching increased by 58%, but how this was measured and why it does not work remains unstated. New tendencies can be seen in the creation of textbooks for Udmurt as a second language for adults and in the preparation of many new schoolbooks about the Udmurt language and culture in Udmurt and in Russian.

The Vice-Minister of Education of the Udmurt Republic, Igor Belozjorov (2013), stated that the number of schools where minority languages are taught is decreasing due to the following reasons: teaching of the language became optional; parents changed their mind; there was no competent teacher; the school could not operate further because, for example, there were not enough children; or educational institutions merged. Special attention was given to not lessening the number of children who are studying Udmurt, and in some places, the language was introduced for the first time. The Kuzebaj Gerd Gymnasium in Izhar/Izhevsk is the national center of language resources and testing. There is a lively discussion about the role of the language in the republic. The newest statistics show that the number of schools in which the Udmurt language is taught decreased from 332 in 2003 to 242 in 2013/14, and that only 16,000 schoolchildren now study Udmurt (10% of all students; UP 2014).

Nowadays, there are five universities in Udmurtia that offer higher education for almost 25,000 students. Everything besides special subjects such as language, literature, and culture is taught in Russian. Educational conferences cover subjects such as pedagogical traditions of the Udmurt and other peoples living in Udmurtia, and intercultural dialogue as a means of patriotic and moral education. Recently, the pedagogical elite has turned to reforming language-teaching methods.

We repeatedly interviewed Udmurt-speaking Udmurt teachers from 2004 on (about 80 altogether) on their linguistic biographies and their attitudes toward the perspectives of Udmurt language teaching. There are different attitudes toward language use, as the two following excerpts show:

Now in the family we speak in the Udmurt language, with my spouse and with the children. But, unfortunately, with my mum, who is a thoroughbred Udmurt, who has a superb knowledge of the Udmurt language, we continue to communicate in Russian only. What does it prove? That she grew up, was brought up, and worked in the days of [...] well, the Soviet Union, so we see the change of times. And in no way can we ever persuade her to return

to her native language. Well, anyway. Language becomes native only in the case when you can both speak and think in it. (LK, 40)

In 1996, experts of the Ministry of National Education of our republic took out groups of children, senior pupils—winners of Udmurt Language Olympics—to Helsinki. The children adapted perfectly to the conditions. They spoke, excuse me, only in their native Udmurt language. This is something that we, unfortunately, did not observe in Udmurtia and, in particular, in Saint Petersburg. In Saint Petersburg they spoke only in Russian, and we have been pleasantly surprised, simply struck with how they excellently they felt in Helsinki as they referred with love to their native Udmurt language [...] nobody could stop them. Nobody will forbid them to speak their native language [...] They are free! [...] And after returning to their native city, to Udmurtia, their own republic—they all spoke in Russian again. (AG, 54)

Recapitulating the data, we conclude that the status of the language inside the republic is not high enough and is not supported by those in power, who are afraid of not being able to understand what is going on when the Udmurt language is spoken. The attitude of Udmurts to their own language combines traditions, legends, and stereotypes with a sense of the unconditional advantage of linguistic mastery. Those who speak the Udmurt language were born in more or less mono-ethnic villages and started to learn Russian by the age of 7 or 8; at home, they still speak and think in Udmurt. *The new terminology does not correspond to native speakers' linguistic habits; many think that it is too late for a language revival. When many languages are studied at the same time, the Udmurt language is not prioritized, Finnish or English are sometimes preferred. A certain number of speakers are aware of the need to improve their Udmurt language skills, to speak it with their children and grandchildren, and to preserve ties with their native villages, although this is difficult, because it seems artificial. They listen to Udmurt music and sing Udmurt songs from time to time, which makes them feel happy. Orthodoxy and Paganism are interwoven, languages are mixed, and cultures are combined. Some Udmurts repeatedly*

underlined that they are not nationalists, that they support other languages, that they are not backward pagans. Schoolbooks in the Udmurt language are lacking everywhere, even when the schools report that they teach the language. There are some prejudices about bilingualism: in the cities, nobody needs to speak Udmurt; only some enthusiastic folklorists seek out tradition-bearers to document the old culture and religion and they teach and pass these on to others; there is no need to speak Udmurt if you are fluent in Russian; those who speak only Russian cannot be real Udmurts; children can learn the language without being spoken to in it; it is not crucial to study your own language during childhood. Udmurt parents may send their children to Russian pre-schools and schools and accept the fact that their children will not develop fluency in their mother tongue, yet they consider knowledge of the native language important and are, to a certain degree, ashamed not to know their native language better. Sometimes they place their hopes on holidays with grandmothers.

In late 2013, we surveyed 109 parents of children who attend bilingual preschool groups in five daycare centers in Izhar/Izhevsk about what they think about bilingual education. We used questionnaires adapted from Moin et al. (2013). Only one-third of respondents agreed that children must know the Udmurt language first, although only 18% had some doubts about the usefulness of bilingual education. There was no special understanding of the role of literacy in the Udmurt language (only about 70% supported, at least partly, the idea of literacy in Udmurt), neither was there any clear conception of how bilingualism can be formed and developed and how two languages function. Parents appreciate the Udmurt culture, but do not put it first. Neither is the Russian culture the main goal of education for the parents. Even if the families are Russian-speaking, they think that the Russian language has to be supported by the daycare center. Ten percent think that English is the most important language for a career in the modern world. In answer to the question about the use of the Udmurt language in the family, they said that they use it in the village or at grandma's, or when speaking to Udmurts. Parents who speak in Udmurt in everyday situations with children report that Russian is used to explain things, to address the child when in the

presence of other children, when using public transportation, or when admonishing. When evaluating bilingual education, everybody supported the idea of knowing the Udmurt language, but did not see the importance of advanced learning; the acquisition of some words, phrases, songs and poems was deemed sufficient. Some were afraid that bilingual children may be teased.

Udmurt speakers share a common Udmurt ethnolinguistic memory; the interviews and questionnaires reveal that the education system is administered by non-Udmurt people who are not within a like-minded community. It seems that the young generation puts Russian first, followed by English and other world languages, but the Udmurt language is a mark of their local identity. There are no social campaigns to implement bilingual programs widely. Even the Ministry of Education only addresses ethnic Udmurts with the programs that do exist, because they are afraid to be treated as nationalists foisting their own culture on others. Russian parents could profit by such opportunities, but they are not instructed about the benefits of multilingualism, which is still not discussed positively in modern Russian society.

### **The educational situation in the Chuvash Republic**

Chuvashia presents a somewhat different situation. According to the 2010 census, Chuvash is spoken by 55% of Chuvashia's population. Chuvash has been taught in all schools for the past 20 years, and education in Chuvash has been well established for more than one century. In principle, these figures and the official status of the language point to the language's relatively safe status. In reality, the situation is quite different, as shown by the fact that Chuvash lost 14% of its speakers in Chuvashia between 2002 and 2010, according to Russian censuses.

Census data show a clear distinction in the knowledge of Chuvash by nationalities. Chuvash is seldom spoken by people other than Chuvashes (the exception being, to some extent, Tatar village dwellers, who share a Turkic language with Chuvashes, albeit distantly related). In particular,

only 4% of ethnic Russians declared that they know Chuvash. This shows that Chuvash is used almost exclusively between Chuvashes.

A second major difference is between urban and rural populations. According to census data, in villages, 96% of Chuvash people know Chuvash, but only 63% in the cities. Language shift in cities were noticed long ago. Andreev (1970, 4) noted that »in the second generation, [urban Chuvashes] usually fully shift to Russian.« Baskakov and Nasyrova (2000, 76) reported that, according to the 1989 census, only 30% of urban Chuvashes under the age of seven were reporting as having Chuvash as their mother tongue, the lowest percentage of the 12 most-spoken Turkic languages of the Russian Federation analyzed (only urban Dolgans shared a figure below 50%). Ignat'eva et al. (2009, 42) show that there are very few schoolchildren in Chuvashia's capital city, Shupashkar/Cheboksary, who speak only Chuvash at home (2%), and only 23% speak Russian and Chuvash with their parents, although Chuvashes make up 63% of the city's inhabitants.

This language frontier between cities and villages is reflected in the school system. Schools in Chuvashia, as elsewhere in Russia's republics, are divided into »national schools«, and »schools with a multinational student composition« (also called »Russian schools«). In principle, the former are oriented towards native speakers and the medium of education in the first grades is Chuvash (or Tatar), while in the latter Russian is the language of education throughout. According to Russian terminology, Chuvash (or Tatar) are taught as »native languages« in the former, and as a »state language« in the latter by means different teaching methods and goals. In »multinational« schools, instruction is oriented »mainly [towards] oral communication,« at the expense of reading and writing (Andreev and Chernova 1998, 93). National schools have a few hours more devoted to Chuvash (or Tatar) than »multinational« schools, but the number of hours for Russian language instruction for both should be the same from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, in accordance to the Basic Syllabus defined by the Chuvash Ministry of Education, following the Federal regulation. In reality, Russian language and literature is given



two times as many hours per week than Chuvash in basic general education in the »multinational« schools, and one third more in the national schools.

Education in Chuvash exists only in villages. In cities, Russian is the only language of education and Chuvash is taught as a »state language«. In principle, rural schools teach in Chuvash until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and switch fully to Russian in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This schema was introduced at the beginning of the 1960s, when education in Chuvash was obliterated in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and above. Although a timid attempt was made to reinstate Chuvash in higher grades in the early 1990s, the situation virtually has not changed. Nevertheless, since the early 1990s, Chuvash has been compulsory for all schoolchildren, irrespectively of their nationality, from the first to the last grade of school. Ignat'eva et al. (2010, 49) found that »a certain proportion of the schoolchildren [...] do not progress in the Chuvash language classes at all«. In Shupashkar/Cheboksary they found that »11% of the schoolchildren do not know Chuvash at all« and that »this percentage is almost the same in all grades from the 5<sup>th</sup>« (Ignat'eva et al. 2009, 42). This kind of language teaching, where pupils can pass without significantly improving their knowledge of the Chuvash language, and where there is not even one nursery or school with some instruction in Chuvash in an urban center, although half of all ethnic Chuvashes live in cities, shows a poor commitment to the Chuvash language on the side of the authorities. Not surprisingly, Chuvashia's language policy has been called »largely symbolic« and »in comparison to struggles regarding language policy in Tatarstan [...] minimal« (Marquardt 2012, 141–42).

In order to understand the extent of the language shift in Chuvashia we undertook a survey of around 2,900 upper-grade schoolchildren from September 2012 until October 2013 in 82 schools in 48 towns.<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted in three waves. From September until December

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1 The survey was done with the help of the Chuvash Ministry of Education, to which we are much obliged. We are also indebted to the schools that made this survey possible.

2012, urban children were pooled. From February until May 2013 all the schools in the district centers and villages with above 3,000 inhabitants were visited. Finally, in September and October 2013 small village schools in two districts completed the sample. In every rural school (50) an interview was carried out with a school representative, usually the director or vice-director, about the use of languages in the school. These data were supplemented by observations on the ground and governmental statistics.

The effectiveness of language teaching is strongly influenced by the environment in which it takes place. Virtually everything in Chuvashia's schools is written only in Russian (the exception being the popular use of Chuvash in welcome signs over the front door, above all in rural schools). In urban and district-center schools, Chuvash is mainly used for festivals or activities related to Chuvash traditions, folklore, and culture. In these schools, Chuvash-speaking students and teachers often address one another only in Russian. Although often most of the school staff speaks Chuvash, their linguistic capabilities are not used to promote schoolchildren's practice of the language. The scarce use of Chuvash by schoolchildren with the school directors is striking. In the district centers, for instance, only 2% of our respondents said they use Chuvash with directors (in comparison, 11% speak Chuvash with teachers and 37% with parents). It should be noted that, as told by the interviewees, at parent meetings school representatives tend to use only Russian: when they report to parents at the beginning of meetings as a rule, and often also in the following discussions. This occurs even in small villages where almost all parents and teachers speak Chuvash in informal conversations. All this shows that school managers and teachers seldom overcome the deep-rooted habits that secure the very unequal position of the two official languages in society. As a result, the school, instead of gradually helping to solve this problem, is strengthening the use of Russian for formal and written communication and the relegation of Chuvash to casual conversations with acquaintances.

What is more, according to our survey, instruction in Russian strengthens the shift to Russian in the families during childhood. We were interested in knowing whether children reduced their use of Chuvash with relatives during childhood and youth and why, so we asked whether they noticed any changes from early childhood on in the language(s) they use at home. As verification, we added several questions about early use of languages. From the answers a picture emerged showing that some 12–14% of respondents of Chuvash nationality enlarged or lessened the use of Chuvash with their parents in the three types of settlements analyzed (cities, district centers and villages). In the cities, as almost always in the district centers, only an increase of Russian was found, but in the villages, a shift occurred in both directions (a bit more in favor of Russian). Interestingly enough, the shift coincided with the spread of instruction in Russian and Chuvash in primary school. As a matter of fact, more than a half of the Chuvash respondents who noticed an increase in their use of Russian at home, related it to the beginning of kindergarten or school. It must be emphasized that, as a result of the different degrees of language transmission in cities, district centers, and villages, those 12–14% in fact represent some 30–40% of urban Chuvash respondents, who originally spoke Chuvash with their parents and then increased their use of Russian with them (eventually fully shifting to Russian), as opposed to 15–22% in the district centers and around 7% in the villages.

Concentrating on the actual situation in schools, statistical data from the Chuvash Ministry of Education show the distribution of languages of instruction. As instruction in Chuvash exists only in rural primary school education, 9% of schoolchildren learned Chuvash in the 2012/13 school year.<sup>2</sup> As the rural population is quickly diminishing, if education in Chu-

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2 According to the »Forma FSN No. D-7« ([www.miccedu.ru/stat/stat\\_forms.php](http://www.miccedu.ru/stat/stat_forms.php)) for the 2012/13 school year kindly provided by the Chuvash Ministry of Education, with a few author's corrections from the »Forma gosudarstvennoj statisticheskoy otchetnosti OSh-1, RIK-76« (since the former is based on the latter), consulted in the Ministry archive. Observations on the ground show that these figures for educa-

vash does not expand to the cities and/or secondary schools, its importance will steadily decrease. Additionally, the comparison of the statistical data from the last 6 school years shows that the proportion of rural primary school students who enjoy education in Chuvash is declining every year: from 70.1% of rural primary school students in the 2008/9 school year to 61.5% in 2013/14. We were interested in knowing why this is happening in the villages.

Of particular interest are rural district centers because they stand between the Russified cities and the Chuvash-speaking villages. According to our fieldwork, in the 2012/13 school year, Chuvash was the medium of instruction only in a few of the less populated district centers, comprising 8% of primary school pupils in the rural district centers. Several schools have discontinued instruction in Chuvash in the last decade. According to our observations, 23% of primary school pupils in the rural district centers were taught Chuvash as their native language in the 2012/13 school year, while virtually all others learned it as »state language.« It is worth noting that this percentage increases throughout schooling: to 28% at secondary school and 33% at upper-level school. This shows the advance of Russian taught as a state language over the years.

Instruction in Russian with Chuvash taught as a state language has been the usual form of instruction in the district centers for many years, but in the 2000s, as a result of the introduction of the Unified State Exam, this situation was reinforced. This exam was gradually launched in the 2000s as a test for a high-school degree, enabling the entry to a university or professional college. Currently, it only has two compulsory subjects, Russian and mathematics, from 2020 English will be added. Other subjects may be required for certain faculties or studies. This structure has been interpreted by parents and teachers as a reassertion of the importance of the Russian language in education, at the same time it does not give any

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tion in Chuvash are somewhat overestimated, even if we consider bilingual Chuvash-Russian education to be education in Chuvash.

significance to minority languages. Unsurprisingly, the need to devote more hours to Russian (and English) in order that students pass the State Exam was mentioned by many interviewees. Since shifting to a »multinational« school syllabus reduces the number of hours devoted to the Chuvash language and facilitates an increase of the hours devoted to Russian, many of the school officers we interviewed considered this shift very helpful for passing the exam, and often reported that most parents also felt the same.

In order to understand the situation of village schools outside the district centers we visited, among other schools, 2/3 of the schools of the Murkash/Morgaushi district, a district near the capital city. The population is 96% Chuvash and 89% of our respondents speak Chuvash fluently.

According to the Ministry of Education, there are two schools in the district in which all instruction is in Russian (in the two major population centers, the only towns in the district with more than 1,000 inhabitants). All other schools teach in Chuvash from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. In reality, we found a very different situation. Half of all schools use mainly Russian in primary education and even more use mostly Russian for teaching mathematics and science. According to our interviewees, schools mostly shifted to Russian in the past 10 years, especially in the past 5. This shift took place mainly in the northern part of the district (closer to Shupashkar/Cheboksary), where Chuvash is receding in family use (85% of the respondents speak Chuvash with their parents, but 33% use mainly Russian with them). It should be remarked that Chuvash is also losing ground as the language of instruction in the central part of the district, although it remains the main language of the vast majority of families (92% of the respondents speak Chuvash with their parents and 16% use mainly Russian). In the southern part of the district, where Russian is the

main language of communication with parents for a mere 3.5% of the respondents, Russian is substantially less used in the primary school.<sup>3</sup>

Interviewees gave different reasons in explaining the shift to education in Russian. Above all, the will of the parents was invoked. As this does not explain the basis on which this will appears, other causes were proposed, such a slight shift to the use of Russian in families or individual cases of newcomers, from the city or from outside the republic, who do not understand Chuvash. There were complaints about the lack of new textbooks or workbooks in Chuvash, which should be published because of new federal educational standards, but most of respondents denied this caused a real problem. More importantly, interviewees considered it unpromising to teach in Chuvash, especially mathematical and scientific terminology, as it will not be used afterwards in secondary education. Furthermore, many complained about new terms in Chuvash, such as »triangle« and »point«, which they considered difficult to understand for pupils, parents, and even teachers (previously, Chuvash terminology, as a rule, borrowed words from Russian without any changes, not even orthographic changes, while currently, for instance, »triangle« is constructed, as in Russian, by compounding the words »three« and »angle« from the Chuvash words).

In our opinion, the shift to instruction in Russian has varying grounds: the ongoing concentration of schoolchildren in larger schools, which increases the importance of schools that teach in Russian in the regional centers and major villages, and the lack of Chuvash schools in cities, especially in the capital. Their absence calls into question whether Chuvash-language schooling is compatible with modern urban high-level education. The idea that minority-language education is only or mostly a

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3 Respondents in the north: 134; in the center: 243; in the south: 267. It should be noticed that we pooled schoolchildren from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and above where changes occur in the last years of primary school. A certain number of interviewees reported a small increase of children who do not speak Chuvash in primary schools in the past few years, but played this down.

transitional state, necessary because village children have a poor command of the dominant language and that (standard) Chuvash has no instrumental value for getting a job or a promotion and does not need to be learned and used as a fully functional language, is deeply rooted in the minds of the majority of parents, teachers, school officials, and Ministry clerks.

With regard to the authorities' attitudes towards the Chuvash language, it is worth examining the »Strategy for the development of education in the Chuvash Republic until 2040« (Chuvash Republic 2008). The document gives little attention to Chuvash, in contrast to foreign languages, for example. It admits that there has been »ineffective work to enhance the prestige and social significance of the study of the Chuvash language« (Chuvash Republic 2008, 65), but does not find room in its more than 90 pages to analyze the causes of this ineffectiveness or ways to resolve this problem. Moreover, the document does not consider Chuvash part of the Republic's linguistic capital, and does not speak of it in the development of »polylinguism« (Chuvash Republic 2008, 61). The journal of the Ministry of Education, for its part, merely states about the teaching of Chuvash in its presentation of the Strategy that »the practical significance and the results of the study of Chuvash must be shown« (Jaroslavskij 2008, 9). It should be noted that almost at the same time, Chuvash-language specialization for preschool education was ceased in Shupashkar/Cheboksary, allegedly due to insufficient enrollment.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

After the demolition of Soviet structures, there was a tendency to transfer the idea of the USSR as a federal country to the RF, so that the federal national republics inside Russia could copy the model of the former Soviet republics. This idea helped to mobilize ethnicities, but failed as the central authorities became worried that the new federal organization could dissolve in the same way as the former Soviet Union. The fear of autonomization dates from the pre-socialist era; it characterized the Russian Empire and decreased after the October revolution under Lenin, but emerged again under Stalin (Alpatov 1997; Pavlenko 2008). Laws al-

low for the normal functioning of minority education, but official documents underline the preferable dominance of the state language. For minority language speakers, this means that they are often afraid of being stigmatized as nationalists, chauvinists, traitors to their motherland, pagans, or uneducated bumpkins when speaking their languages. In spite of improvements in language education, many parents in Russia's regions are afraid that their children will be damaged if they acquire two languages in parallel; the ethnic, family, or heritage language and the state Russian language. The advantages of being bilingual are not promoted or explained. Despite all evidence of the dominance of the Russian language and continuing Russification, the general opinion remains that bilingualism may be dangerous for children and that deep knowledge of a minority language is not necessary.

The protection of the large spectrum of Russia's autochthon languages depends not only upon measures to transfer the languages from one generation to another. An atmosphere that promotes bilingualism should be created. People should not be ashamed when speaking a language that does not fulfill all the main social functions or «uneducated» minority languages. Although bilingualism is quite common among members of national minorities, it has hardly been studied. Evidence-based data on the monolingual minority and on bilingual language acquisition is needed. Modern textbooks and teaching materials must motivate speakers to implement their language competence in the educational process; they should be interesting and affordable, specific, rich in language, full of examples of natural communication, support different types of scaffolding, etc. Languages have to be more equal in education; their functions should be balanced in order to use the minority languages of the RF more effectively. Language policy must be an integral part of administrative measures on all levels. The final examination should support and appreciate the linguistic capital of the peoples of the RF and integrate the positive experience of multilingualism.

In Udmurtia, the situation of native language teaching was worse than in Chuvashia (as measured by minority children who learn their native lan-



guage and learn by means of it), which is logical because of the lower percentage of Udmurts (the fact that Udmurtia's education system is administered by non-Udmurt people who are not within a like-minded community is revealing). However, it seems that in Udmurtia some bottom-up action has begun, as some teachers have understood that action depends on them. This kind of reaction has not yet been seen in Chuvashia, since Chuvash administrators and teachers seem quite confident of their demographic importance. Yet the positive discourse on (real) bilingualism that seems to be emerging in Udmurtia is practically nonexistent in Chuvashia.

Only rarely are languages represented as a state treasure of the Russian Federation, in contrast to the cultures of the many people of the RF, which are underlined as part of the nation's wealth (Strategy 2012). As in other domains of state politics, majority rights in educational policy are placed above minority rights. In many cases, belonging to the majority is considered to be an absolute gain and desirable by all without challenge. This gives law-makers the putative right to underline the integration of minorities into the majority rather than the maintenance and promotion of minority languages in education. Russian is considered the language of competitiveness and mobility, providing solidarity among citizens.

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