

# MY MOTHER TONGUE ALMANAC 2022

Preservation of Indigenous Languages in Russia



INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO  
Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation  
UNESCO / UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP)  
Russian IFAP Committee  
Interregional Library Cooperation Centre

# **My Mother Tongue**

## **Almanac 2022**

Preservation of Indigenous Languages in Russia

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This book presents a collection of analytical materials on the state-of-the-art and experience in the sphere of preserving indigenous and minority languages in Russia – one of the world's most multilingual countries. The materials for the almanac were collected within the framework of the implementation in Russia of the UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP) and the My Mother Tongue Programme developed in 2019 by the Russian IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre. The outline of the Programme is applicable for endorsing similar programmes in other countries, and in particular for conducting further comparative studies on the preservation and development of indigenous languages.

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of facts and for the opinions expressed, which are not necessarily those of the compilers.

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## FOREWORD BY IGOR BARINOV, HEAD, FEDERAL AGENCY FOR ETHNIC AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



This year the world has ushered in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. It will be a great and responsible journey for all humanity. It is up to all of us to determine what exciting events and meaningful initiatives it will bring to different countries and regions, what conclusions will be drawn from it at the international and national levels, what measures will be outlined and proposed to national governments, businesses and civil society, which new institutions and communities will emerge and what kind of cooperation will be established between them in order to improve the protection, preservation, promotion, and revitalization of indigenous languages.

Languages are unique repositories of knowledge, as well as invaluable historical and cultural experience. They play a key role in perceiving, understanding, analyzing, and describing the way we see the world. A decline and extinction of languages, even the smallest ones, lead to unification and impoverishment of the world culture.

The Russian Federation is a multiethnic and multilingual country that greatly values and takes pride in the diversity of its peoples' languages and cultures. It is our cultural heritage and well-recognized wealth. Over the course of our history, we have done our best to support it through crucial social institutions, including education, culture, science, the mass media, book publishing. This is enshrined in our Constitution and elaborated in numerous laws and regulations at the federal and regional levels. However, above all, it is deeply rooted in the mentality of the Russian nation, which consists of about 200 ethnic groups. Cultural life in Russia is based not just on tolerance, but on equality, fraternity, and friendship among all peoples, which sets a high moral imperative.

The events in support of indigenous languages that will take place all over the world in the coming decade should draw everyone's attention to the future of all languages, including major European, Asian, and African ones, which have been producing great literary works for many hundreds or thousands of years.

The recently launched International Decade of Indigenous Languages should develop recommendations for shaping and implementing efficient national policies to support these languages. It will allow governments in different countries to study the experience of other states, identify the best ideas and practices, and possibly revise both the structure and the content of their own policies. However, before that, it is necessary to develop tools to analyze language policy, to define all of its possible directions, parameters, and evaluation criteria.

Multiethnic and multilingual Russia is taking steps in all areas of public life both to preserve the languages and cultures of all its indigenous and minority peoples to the maximum extent possible and to make a worthy contribution to their global preservation. Russian Government has established a National Organizing Committee for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. It comprises heads of specialized federal government bodies, constituent entities of the Russian Federation, all-Russian associations of indigenous peoples, prominent scientists, public figures, and entrepreneurs. A Plan for holding the largest and most important nationwide events has been approved which provides for organizing a biennial high-level international conference in Russia so that prominent international experts from all continents can meet and discuss the most important issues.

The “My Mother Tongue” Almanac, drafted by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre with the support of the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation and UNESCO, also represents our joint contribution to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The materials published here will be of interest and use to all those involved in preserving languages and developing linguistic diversity in cyberspace.

## FOREWORD BY DOROTHY GORDON, CHAIR, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL OF THE UNESCO INFORMATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME



This is quite simply an inspirational book. The quality and depth of scholarship is enhanced by the accessibility of the presentation and design. Many people will enjoy it for many different reasons.

As the Chair of UNESCO's Information for All Programme, I am delighted that this important work on language policy in action is published at the start of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL). The almanac provides valuable policy insights from a group of experts who also represent the language and culture of the communities that readers are invited to discover. The authors have adopted a holistic and trans-disciplinary approach reflecting the diversity of their academic and working experience. They have been frank in their assessment of what has worked and what has not, basing their findings on multi-stakeholder engagement and in many cases longitudinal research. These in-depth analyses of the interactions between people and policy stand to guide those who are committed to making the IDIL work for the benefit of indigenous people and for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) is dedicated to building inclusive and equitable knowledge societies. Anchored on the pillars of the knowledge society, our work is organised around six interlinked focus areas: Information Access, Information Literacy, Information Ethics, Information Preservation, Information Development and Multilingualism. This almanac is the culmination of over a decade of IFAP's work around language issues in the digital age. Experts from more than a hundred countries have actively participated in a series of global meetings resulting in major policy recommendations. Notably, the Yakutsk Declaration on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace (2014) stands out as a key reference document.

Evgeny Kuzmin, both through his tenure as IFAP Chair and his current position as IFAP Vice-Chair responsible for the IFAP working group on multilingualism has worked tirelessly to build a diverse and representative network of experts. His scholarship, convening power and dedication to sharing knowledge are exceptional and without him we would not have this almanac. He has been a driver in the transition in thinking that now places language policy at the centre of development efforts and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In fact, the My Mother Tongue programme on which the almanac is based is his brainchild. The languages featured include some with more than a million speakers and one with just 10 speakers. It examines the situation in terms of use in schools, libraries, media and other spheres.

Within the My Mother Tongue programme, inspired by and originated with IFAP, experts from different fields and different language communities were able to analyse current policy, and exchange their experiences across languages and cultures. The

result is a useful guide which, without being prescriptive, identifies a number of possible approaches to solving language policy challenges. While I personally found the checklist of questions most useful, perhaps the most important message of the almanac is the need to mobilise language communities to be fully involved in the future of their languages. Language policy development and implementation must be both inter-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder. Language policy needs not be directed solely by government institutions.

The socio-cultural, multi-dimensional and multi-level nature of challenges in the field of language policy can be appreciated by the continued debate on the use of mother tongue within schools and particularly for the foundation years. There is a huge body of research that explains not only the psycho-social implications but also the positive impact on cognitive development that makes the use of mother-tongue important. Discoveries in the field of cognitive neuroscience have also given us far more information on how we acquire and retain language and what this means for brain development. Multilingualism is immensely beneficial. Still, many parents with limited competence in the dominant language of their geography persist in enrolling their children in schools that operate in that language and in some cases do not speak to their children at all in the language of their heritage.

The situation is further complicated by the volume of time many young people spend on the Internet. The almanac explores the diverse and unpredictable ways in which Internet-enabled content and digital technologies such as artificial intelligence impact human language. We now know that languages, even major ones spoken by millions of people, can rapidly move to the ‘endangered’ list. Any language without an online presence could be at risk. Yet, as the world works to put the next billions online, relatively little attention has been given to training these language communities in Internet safety, media information literacy, content creation and curation.

At the same time digital offers many opportunities for exchange and knowledge sharing. The field of language technology, for example, allows us to rapidly translate between languages using both text and voice. Despite a focus on ‘major’ languages due to commercial interests a number of ‘minority’ languages have taken on the challenge to use these technologies for their own benefit outside of the major global platforms. It is too early to assess the impact of these initiatives. Fortunately, the outcome document of the International Year on Indigenous Languages recognises the importance of digital in moving its agenda forward. We can anticipate further exploration of these opportunities during the IDIL.

The usefulness of this almanac is that it gives us valuable information that inspires further reflection. This is the reason that its launch at the start of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages is so essential. By placing language communities at the heart of evidence-based policy, it reminds us of the contribution that language can make to good governance, peace and understanding between peoples. It invites us to enjoy the many delightful aspects of understanding the culture and intricacy of language in the digital age.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Evgeny Kuzmin and the many contributors to the almanac for providing us with inspiring content. I look forward to many emulating the approach they have used and thereby further enriching our humanity.

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We would like to express our appreciation to the following people for their contributions to the implementation of regional events within the My Mother Tongue Programme and for the preparation of this almanac:

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## ORGANISATIONS AND EVENTS

### UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP)

IFAP was established in 2001 as a flagship intergovernmental UNESCO programme. It is one of UNESCO's two major programmes in the field of communication and information. IFAP is aimed at assisting Member States in formulating and implementing balanced national policies of building inclusive knowledge societies. The programme is based on inter-disciplinary and integrated approaches. IFAP priorities are information accessibility, information preservation, information literacy, information ethics, information for development and multilingualism (preservation of languages and promotion of linguistic diversity in cyberspace).

<https://en.unesco.org/programme/ifap>

### Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme

Russian IFAP Committee was established in 2001 under the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation. It is the Programme's first national committee ever.

Russian IFAP Committee members represent government agencies, educational, research, cultural and communication establishments, non-governmental organizations and private sector. The Committee provides assistance in setting and implementing the Programme's ideas, goals, concepts and priority lines of actions at both national and international levels. It also contributes to the advancement of national and international policies and legislation in the fields of culture, education, communication and information for the purpose of building inclusive information society/knowledge societies, to the elaboration of scientific, theoretical, and methodological guidelines, to the establishment of best practice centres and to the improvement of activities of various institutions within its competence.

Since the very beginning of its work, the Committee has been organizing major international conferences on all IFAP priorities.

[www.ifapcom.ru](http://www.ifapcom.ru)

### Interregional Library Cooperation Centre (ILCC)

Moscow based NGO Interregional Library Cooperation Centre (ILCC), established in 1995, is the working body of the Russian IFAP Committee. In addition to contributing to the IFAP implementation worldwide, ILCC is active at the national arena to participate in (a) drafting and implementing in Russia the governmental library policies and national programmes aimed to preserve library collections and digital cultural and scientific heritage; (b) developing an All-Russian network of public centres for access to legal and other socially meaningful information; (c) reading promotion; (d) advancing professional library training, and (e) preserving languages and developing multilingualism in cyberspace. On a regular basis, ILCC also organises international and national events on the above themes; drafts, publishes and disseminates information as well as analytical and methodological materials on the development of librarianship, culture and information policies.

[www.mcbs.ru](http://www.mcbs.ru)

# MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EVENTS ON MULTILINGUALISM ISSUES BY THE RUSSIAN IFAP COMMITTEE AND ILCC



Yakutsk, Russia

International Conference  
“Linguistic and Cultural  
Diversity in Cyberspace”

2008

Yakutsk, Russia

II International Conference  
“Linguistic and Cultural  
Diversity in Cyberspace”

2011



Yakutsk, Russia

III International Conference  
“Linguistic and Cultural  
Diversity in Cyberspace”

2014



UNESCO Headquarters  
in Paris

International Expert Meeting on  
Improving Access to Multilingual  
Cyberspace

2014



Eight major international events on multilingualism issues have been organized and held by the Russian IFAP Committee and the ILCC since 2008 with support of the Government of the Russian Federation, Government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and Government of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Ugra in collaboration with Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk and the UNESCO IFAP Intergovernmental Council



## Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia

Ugra Global Expert Meeting  
on Multilingualism in  
Cyberspace

2015

## Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia

World Expert Meeting on  
Multilingualism in Cyberspace  
for Inclusive Sustainable  
Development

2017



## Yakutsk, Russia

International Conference “Preservation  
of Languages and Development of  
Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace:  
Context, Policies, Practices”

2019

UNESCO  
Headquarters in Paris  
International Conference “Language  
Technologies for All (LT4All):  
Enabling Linguistic Diversity and  
Multilingualism Worldwide”

2019



# MY MOTHER TONGUE PROGRAMME. EVENTS 2020

- Interregional Conference “Revitalising Indigenous Languages of the Republic of Karelia” (Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia)
- Interregional Conference “Advanced Linguistic Computer Technologies as Part of Preserving and Reviving Minority Languages of Sakhalin” (Nogliki, Sakhalin Oblast)
- Interregional Conference “Mother Tongues in the Multicultural Environment of the Region: Preservation, Use, Promotion” (Yoshkar-Ola, Republic of Mari El)
- Interregional Conference “The Role of the State and Civil Society Institutions in Preserving the Chuvash Language” (Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic)
- Round Table “Prospects for Preserving and Promoting Indigenous Languages of the North of Sakhalin” (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Sakhalin Oblast)
- Round Table “Problems and Prospects for Preserving and Promoting the Languages of the Republic of Mari El” (Yoshkar-Ola)
- Round Table “Mother Tongue as a Means of Preserving and Transmitting the Chuvash Culture, History, and Traditions” (Cheboksary)
- All-Russian Conference “Problems of Increasing the Efficiency of Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of Russia”(Moscow)
- Round Table “The Use of ICTs in Preserving and Promoting the Languages of Russia’s Indigenous Peoples” (Moscow)



# MY MOTHER TONGUE PROGRAMME. EVENTS 2021

- Interregional Conference “Mother Tongue as a Factor of Cultural Identity” (Izhevsk, Republic of Udmurtia)
- Interregional Conference “The Altai Language in the XXI Century: Preservation and Promotion” (Gorno-Altaysk, Altai Republic)
- Interregional Conference “Topical Problems of Preserving Mother Tongues and Regional Language Policies” (Magas – Sunzha – Nazran, Republic of Ingushetia)
- Interregional Conference “The Ossetian Language in the Context of Contemporary Globalization Processes: Preservation and Promotion Issues” (Vladikavkaz, Republic of North Ossetia–Alania)
- Interregional Conference “Preserving and Promoting Mother Tongues in a Multiethnic State: Language Policy, Problems, and Prospects” (Grozny, Chechen Republic)
- II All-Russian Conference “Problems of Increasing the Efficiency of Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of Russia”(Moscow)



# MY MOTHER TONGUE PROGRAMME IN THE CONTEXT OF PRESERVING THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES



**Evgeny KUZMIN**

Chair, Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee;  
Vice-Chair, IFAP Intergovernmental Council;  
Chair, IFAP Working Group on Multilingualism in Cyberspace;  
President, Interregional Library Cooperation Centre;  
Member, Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO

## Introduction

The materials published in this collection have been produced under the My Mother Tongue Programme implemented in Russia in 2020–2021. It had been developed in 2019 by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP) and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre (the Committee's working body). The programme relies on the achievements and findings of IFAP, one of UNESCO's two main programmes in the field of communication and information.

Prominent experts representing Russia's indigenous peoples have studied eleven out of more than 100 indigenous languages of Russia, with the number of speakers ranging from 1.3 million

(Chechen, ranked third in the prevalence of indigenous languages in Russia) to only 295 (Uilta, ranked 108<sup>th</sup> in the list). In their articles, written exclusively for this collection, these experts analyse the current state, problems, and prospects of preserving their ethnic languages; the development and implementation of Russia's national and regional policies aimed at revitalising and promoting these languages; the achievements and shortcomings of such policies; and the role of the federal government, regional governments, cultural, scientific, educational, and civil society institutions, mass media, publishing houses, the private sector, and language communities.

The contributors to this collection are convinced that information about the

Red  
Square,  
Moscow



state of indigenous languages and policies of the Russian Federation to support these languages is of great interest to governments of multilingual countries and international experts who work to preserve indigenous cultures, languages, and cultural diversity and seek to harmonize interethnic relations.

By producing and publishing this collection in Russian and English, the Russian Federation (represented by the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs), the Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre, and UNESCO Information for All Programme make their contribution to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and to UNESCO's work.

Contents of the My Mother Tongue Programme and the results it has achieved so far can be used to plan activities and set up projects in other multilingual regions of Russia, develop similar programmes in other countries, conduct comparative studies on preserving and promoting indigenous languages in various countries, work out parameters and criteria to evaluate relevant national policies, and develop guidelines for effective implementation of national and international policies.

## Multilingualism in multiethnic Russia as part of the context for implementing the My Mother Tongue Programme

Russia is one of the most multiethnic and multilingual countries in the world. Throughout its rich and instructive history, it has accumulated a wealth of experience in preserving its peoples' cultures and languages, and we stand ready to share this knowledge with all of humanity in the framework of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.



Altai in spring



Vovnushki Tower Complex, Ingushetia

Russia's tremendous linguistic diversity is evidenced by the fact that people in Russia speak 265 languages and dialects, including over 100 indigenous languages. Within this article, indigenous peoples are defined as peoples that either originated in what is now Russia or have been living there in compact groups for centuries and have no significant areas of settlement or statehood outside Russia. A telling fact about the world's colossal linguistic diversity and our country's vast territory: indigenous languages of Russia belong to *eight* different language families, namely Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic, North Caucasian, Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Yukaghir, Eskimo-Aleut, and Yeniseian.

10-volume  
Chechen  
language  
dictionary  
and its  
creators



Anthology  
of Children's  
Literature of  
the Peoples  
of Russia



Unlike in many other major multilingual countries, in Russia it is possible to receive at least primary education in most of its indigenous languages, even the smallest ones. Almost all of them have a writing system. One can study *seventy-four* indigenous languages of Russia in preschool and at school. Twenty-three languages are used as languages of instruction, not only in primary and secondary schools, but also in universities. Students majoring in history and philology are taught in many of these languages. Moreover, Tatar (the largest minority language in Russia) is also used as the language of instruction in natural sciences at the university level. The larger the ethnic group and the greater the number of speakers of its ethnic language are, the more opportunities the educational

system offers and the broader the use of the language is in all other spheres of its existence. Russian universities educate teachers and researchers of virtually all indigenous languages. Almost all these languages are documented, and nearly all of them are used (to varying degrees) for TV and radio broadcasts, in publishing (including that of textbooks and dictionaries), magazines, and newspapers as well as on the Internet, which has been actively developing.

A striking illustration of the above is the existence of the State Programme for the Support and Promotion of Indigenous Literatures in Russia. Under this programme, works by national authors of Russia are translated from indigenous languages into Russian and published, thus becoming part of the national heritage. Over the past three years, unique editions have come out under the programme, namely *The Anthology of Contemporary Poetry of the Peoples of Russia* in 57 languages and *The Anthology of Children's Literature of the Peoples of Russia* in 55 languages. These editions feature works by writers and poets representing **ethnic groups with a total population of less than 1,500**. Uilta fairy tales (this language is now spoken by no more than 10 out of the 495 Uilta people) are published in the Uilta language with parallel translations into Russian and English.

The diversity of languages spoken by Russia's peoples contributes greatly to the wealth of knowledge that our country possesses. Languages are of great value not only to those who speak them, but also to those who no longer do but still feel strongly connected to their ancestors who created these languages. For them, the language is the reference point in tracing their identity. The language is a unique tool for understanding, analysing, and describing reality, shaping the worldview, and reflecting people's historical experience. Russia's abundant linguistic diversity enables us to see the world around us from many angles and perspectives, in all of its tremendous diversity. This is why it is essential to preserve, revitalise, and promote Russia's indigenous languages, not only for the regions where these peoples live in compact groups, but also for our entire multiethnic and multilingual country. Linguistic diversity, like cultural and intellectual diversity, is an important asset and a competitive advantage of Russia, although, in our opinion, it is not sufficiently recognized as such in Russia itself.

Russia's policies on the preservation of languages and respect for indigenous cultures can be described as exemplary in comparison to those of a number of other major multilingual countries. Nevertheless, objective data show that the number

of active speakers of minority languages in Russia is declining, like elsewhere in the world, which, in turn, indicates that all the measures taken in our country are apparently insufficient. One can offer a variety of explanations for this, one of them being that in Russia (unlike in many other multilingual countries) almost the entire multiethnic population is perfectly fluent in Russian, which is the state language and language of interethnic communication, while the vast majority of ethnic non-Russians are bilingual almost from birth. In this context, many people find it challenging to understand why it is important to preserve minority languages, especially those of small indigenous peoples, when Russian is in fact the only language in which one can fully



Chuvash greeting ritual

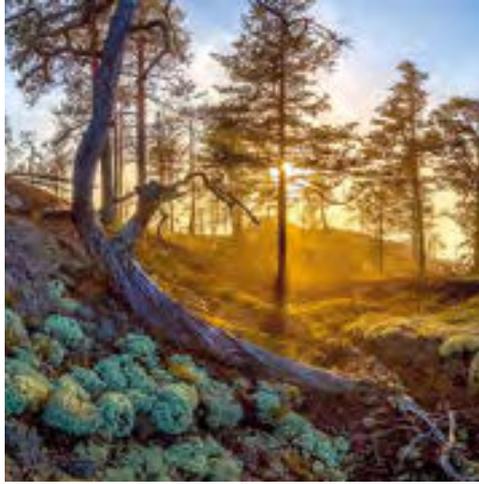


Altai national festival of El Oiyn



Udmurt national costume

Karelian forest



Cape Giant, Sakhalin



perform in any profession, at any level, and throughout the country, while proficiency in one's ethnic language is not necessary or obligatory for this purpose.

In addition to objective reasons (e.g., urbanization, migration, globalization, mixed marriages, industrial development of territories traditionally inhabited by indigenous peoples), there are also subjective reasons for the decline of small languages around the world, including the following:

- native speakers' passivity and lack of motivation to preserve their language, as it is a laborious, intellectually and temporally demanding, costly, and often thankless endeavor;
- absence of the necessary self-organization within language communities;



Argun State Museum-Reserve, Chechen Republic

- inability to see prospects for one's ethnic language, e.g., illusions, misconceptions, prejudices;
- inertness of the educational and scientific environment;
- poorly developed informational, awareness-raising, organizational, and institutional infrastructures.

The first step toward improving the situation is to raise specialists and language activists' awareness of the current state, problems, best practices as well as innovative measures for supporting and preserving minority languages undertaken in various Russian regions and other multilingual countries at the political, organizational, scientific, educational, and technological levels, including the use of advanced linguistic computer technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

In order to be able to properly understand, analyse, and comprehensively assess the problems of indigenous language preservation and find the correct and feasible ways to solve them, these problems cannot be viewed in isolation, as purely linguistic and local issues. They must be approached as systemic, interdisciplinary, multilevel, and multidimensional problems. While examining them, one must also consider the existing national and global histo-

rical, sociocultural, political, economic, philosophical, civilisational, and even geographic context.

To date, traditional measures, primarily undertaken by the authorities, have largely been the core of support for indigenous languages in Russia and around the world, with relatively little involvement from civil society, language activists, enthusiasts, and high-tech companies.

The Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre have been working internationally since 2006 to support multilingualism and foster linguistic diversity in cyberspace in order to preserve and promote indigenous languages. As part of these efforts, we propose developing new fields and activities, using new social, educational, linguistic, and other computer technologies, including artificial intelligence technologies, engaging active and educated indigenous persons, motivating them, enhancing their skills, incentivizing and encouraging them, inspiring them to be more optimistic as well as helping them mobilize and expand their horizons.

We firmly believe that the current situation can be improved and that we have already taken some new and important steps within the framework of the My Mother Tongue Programme.

## Programme implementation regions

In 2020, the My Mother Tongue Programme provided for activities in four regions of Russia (the Chuvash Republic, the Republic of Mari El, the Republic of Karelia, Sakhalin Oblast), where six indigenous peoples live in compact groups. Concluding events were held in Moscow.

In 2021, activities were held in five regions of the Russian Federation (the Altai Republic, the Republic of Ingushe-

tia, the Udmurt Republic, the Chechen Republic, and the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania). The results were once again summarized in Moscow.

## Objectives of the My Mother Tongue Programme

- Improving social effectiveness of federal and regional language policies and expanding efforts to preserve indigenous languages of Russia by promoting best practices and applying modern linguistic computer, educational, and social technologies, including artificial intelligence, implementing promising foreign and Russian practices, and informing professionals and the general public about the ongoing processes and problems existing in the world of languages, the search for solutions to them, and about both Russian and international language policies
- Mobilising language communities and engaging language and other public activists in activities aimed at preserving indigenous languages and ethnocultural and linguistic diversity
- Developing international, interethnic, and interregional cooperation (the last one referring to engagement between the regions of the Russian Federation that are the most advanced in preserving minority languages and those that are less advanced)
- Establishing new areas, forms, and methods of cooperation, including networking
- Harmonising interethnic relations

## Indigenous languages of Russia in the My Mother Tongue Programme

Events under the My Mother Tongue Programme enjoyed the support of the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of the Russian Federation. In 2020–2021, they focused on eleven indigenous languages of Russia, which belong to different language families and groups: Chechen, Chuvash, Ossetian, Mari, Udmurt, Ingush, Altaian, Karelian, Veps, Nivkh, and Uilta.

People	Language	Language family/ group	Size of ethnic group in Russia <sup>1</sup>	Number of ethnic language speakers in Russia <sup>2</sup>
The Chuvash	Chuvash	Altaic/Turkic	1.435 million	Approx. 1 million
The Chechens	Chechen	Caucasian/Nakh-Dagestanian	1.431 million	Approx. 1.3 million
The Udmurts	Udmurt	Uralic/Finno-Ugric	552,200	Approx. 324,000.
The Mari	Meadow Mari and Hill Mari	Uralic/Finno-Ugric	547,600	Meadow Mari: approx. 330,000; Hill Mari: approx. 30,000
The Ossetians	Ossetian	Indo-European/Iranian	528,500	Approx. 450,000
The Ingush	Ingush	Caucasian/Nakh-Dagestanian	444,800	Approx. 305,000
The Altaians	Altai	Altaic/Turkic	67,200	Approx. 40,000.
The Karelians	Karelian proper; Livvi-Karelian; Ludik Karelian	Uralic/Finno-Ugric	60,800	Karelian proper: approx. 11,000; Livvi-Karelian: approx. 11,000; Ludik Karelian: approx. 300
The Vepsians	Veps	Uralic/Finno-Ugric	5,900	3,600
The Nivkh	Nivkh	Language isolate	4,400	Approx. 50
The Uilta (Oroks)	Uilta (Orok)	Tunguso-Manchurian/Nanaic	295	Approx. 10

All these languages vary greatly in the number of active speakers. Their status in the lives of the peoples who produced them varies, as do their degree of vulnerability and scope of use in education and other spheres. The amount of knowledge available on these languages and the tools they are equipped with are far from identical. Therefore, they

have different prospects for preservation and further promotion.

The peoples who have produced these languages are also very different not only in terms of population. They have different history, geography, sociocultural environment, and the capacity to determine and shape their own future and that of their languages.

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2010 Census.

<sup>2</sup> According to <https://родныеязыки.рф>.

Accordingly, the preservation and promotion of these languages necessitate both general approaches and methods developed at the international and national (federal) level, as well as differentiated, customized approaches that take into account regional, local, and linguistic particularities.

Moreover, all of the abovementioned peoples differ in:

- their status, political, and cultural influence in those entities of the Russian Federation where their places of compact residence are located;
- the nature and dynamic of sociocultural, sociopolitical, and economic processes unfolding within and around them;
- how much they are influenced by their sociocultural and natural environment;
- their remoteness or, alternatively, their proximity to major Russian cultural, scientific, and educational centres.

The Chuvash, Mari, and Udmurts live in the centre of European Russia; Chechens, Ossetians, and the Ingush live in the North and Central Caucasus; and Altaians live in the south of the Asian part of the country. They all have their own autonomous administrative-territorial entities, namely republics within the Russian Federation.

Of the 85 entities that make up the Russian Federation, only 20 are ethnic republics. Typically, each of these republics has a very mixed ethnic structure but the titular ethnic group plays the most prominent role despite the fact that it may be outnumbered even in “its own” republic.

**The Chuvash Republic** is home to 106 ethnic groups, and the Chuvash people make up **the majority of its population (67.9%)**. 26.9% are Russians, 2.8% are Tatars, and 1.1% are Mordvins. Population of the other 102 peoples account for 1.3%.

## Contents of the events under the Programme

In each of the abovementioned regions of the Russian Federation, these events included:

- online, offline, and hybrid interregional interdisciplinary scientific methodological and practical conferences and seminars;
- round tables, discussions;
- public lectures;
- presentations of computer and educational linguistic technologies;
- exhibitions of relevant subject-specific publications issued within the implementation of IFAP by the Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre and reflecting the current international and Russian views on the language situation, existing problems and solutions to them;
- exhibitions of printed publications in ethnic languages produced by the largest regional co-organizing libraries;
- consultations among experts from various Russian regions;
- experts’ collective visits to regional centres for preserving and supporting minority and indigenous cultures in Russia (e.g., museums, theatres, monuments, memorial sites, research institutes);
- assessment of minority languages’ viability and prospects for their revitalisation and digitalisation;
- assessment of language activists’ ability and readiness to use contemporary linguistic computer technologies based on the analysis of statistical data and scientific publications, a survey of project participants in each region, and expert interviews with leading regional specialists;
- drafting analytical reports on the results of the project;
- meetings with elders and cultural figures;
- concerts;
- public lectures and workshops;
- ethnographic lectures.

**The Republic of Mari El**, bordering the Chuvash Republic, is less multiethnic. It is inhabited by over 50 ethnic groups, with the predominance of Russians (45.1%) and the Mari (41.8%). The Republic has places of compact residence of three other indigenous peoples of Russia: Tatars (5.5% of the total population), the Chuvash (0.9%) and Udmurts (0.3%). About half of Russia's Mari people live in the Republic of Mari El.

There are more than 60 ethnic groups living in **the Udmurt Republic**, including Russians (62.2%), Udmurts (28%), and Tatars (6.7%).

After the collapse of the USSR and the hostilities in the Caucasus, **the Chechen Republic** and **the Republic of Ingushetia** became virtually monoethnic.

In the Republic of Ingushetia, the main ethnic group is the Ingush; in 2010, they accounted for 93.7% of the population. There are also Chechens (4.6%), Russians (0.8%), and other peoples (e.g., Turks, Kumyks, Kists, Avars, Georgians; collectively they account for less than 1%). Ingushetia has the smallest share of the Russian population in the Russian Federation.

The ethnic structure of the Chechen Republic is as follows: 95% of the population are Chechens, 2% are Russians, and the other ethnic groups make up the remaining 3%.

Ethnic composition of **the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania**: Ossetians – 66.5%, Russians – 20.6%, the Ingush – 4.0%, Kumyks – 3.7%, and others.

**The Republic of Altai** is less populous than these six republics, but it is one of the most multiethnic regions of Russia as it is home to more than 90 ethnic groups. The majority of the population are Russians (55.7%) and Altaians (33.9%). There are also Telengits, Tubalars, Teleuts, Chelkans, Kumandins, and Shors; they are included in the Uniform List of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation and speak dialects of the Altai language.

The republican authorities in Chuvashia, Mari El, Udmurtia, Ingushetia, the Chechen Republic, North Ossetia–Alania, and the Altai Republic shape and pursue their own regional language policies.

For obvious reasons, such political opportunities and advantages cannot be available to small-numbered indigenous peoples, who constitute distinct minorities in regions of their compact settlement. In this case, it applies to Karelians, Vepsians, the Nivkh, and the Uilta.

Most Karelians and Vepsians compactly reside in Northwest Russia: in the **Republic of Karelia** and in five other

Yoshkar-Ola,  
Republic of  
Mari El



Yuzhno-  
Sakhalinsk,  
Sakhalin  
Oblast



Cheboksary,  
Chuvashia



Vladikavkaz,  
North  
Ossetia–  
Alania



The use of the Nivkh language is extremely limited despite the fact that Vladimir Sanghi, a famous Nivkh writer, has created works of fiction that have been translated into 80 world languages. On the other hand, the Veps language spoken by a small ethnic group (Vepsians) is used in almost all spheres even though it cannot boast such accomplishments. The Veps language is persistently and purposefully promoted in the Republic of Karelia, while the Nivkh language is losing its positions on Sakhalin with each passing year. The reason behind it is that in contrast to Sakhalin, Karelia has prominent Russian universities and rather large publishing houses, a close-knit group of language activists, including linguists teaching at universities. They work as a team comprising not only Veps speakers but also speakers of Karelian and Finnish, related to Veps. This team enjoys support by the Karelian republican and Russian federal authorities and foundations, the governments of Finland and Estonia. The Nivkh, who live in a harsh climate far away from the centres of modern civilisation, in scattered, remote fishing villages on the Pacific coast, do not have comparable sociocultural environment and support.

regions of the Russian Federation. Karelians account for 3% of the total population of Karelia, and Vepsians make up merely 0.5%.

The Nivkh live in the easternmost part of Russia, in the **Sakhalin Oblast** (0.4% of the Oblast's total population) and in the Khabarovsk Krai (0.1% of the Krai's population). The Uilta (Oroks), also living in Sakhalin Oblast, make up 0.06% of the region's population.

There is a dramatic difference in the use, preservation, and promotion of their respective languages by peoples whose numbers are roughly the same. An example of this is Veps, on the one hand, and Nivkh, on the other.

For these and a number of other reasons, there is a difference in:

- objective and subjective capabilities for preserving, revitalising, and promoting the aforementioned languages;
- the content, coherence, methods, and tools of federal and regional policies to support these languages;
- the institutions involved in shaping and implementing these policies;
- the level of willingness, motivation, capability, and readiness of members of different ethnic groups to preserve and promote their ethnic languages.

My Mother Tongue Programme's experts at the National Library of the Republic of Altai



Participants of the round table "The Use of ICTs in Preserving and Promoting the Languages of Russia's Indigenous Peoples" (Moscow, 2020)

Participants of the II All-Russian conference "Problems of Increasing the Efficiency of Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of Russia" (Moscow, 2021)



## Participants of the My Mother Tongue Programme

Those most concerned about the problems, forms, and methods of preserving Russia's indigenous languages were invited to participate in regional events of the My Mother Tongue Programme (up to 200 people in each region), namely:

- native-speaking activists who speak languages of Russia's indigenous peoples living in compact groups in that particular region;
- other highly educated persons belonging to minority ethnic groups, for whom preserving their native

language (ancestral language) is a way of self-assertion and/or search for their own identity, maintaining self-esteem, national pride, honor, duty, and an indication of loyalty to their lineage;

- specialists in the field of teaching indigenous languages and teaching various academic disciplines in these languages. They are not satisfied with the number of teaching hours, the decrease in the number of students, the lack of motivation among learners and their parents, and the insufficient prestige of their work (admittedly, other teachers, including Russian language teachers, feel the same way);
- scientists: ethnolinguists, ethnographers, and ethnosociologists;
- authors and journalists who write in ethnic languages and want to expand their readership;
- organizers and educational methodologists (educational authorities, educational development institutions), including those who specialize in bilingual education, from the leading Russian scientific and educational centres;
- specialists in the field of computer linguistics;
- preschool and school teachers, including Russian language teachers;

- university professors who educate future professionals for national schools;
- research institutes staff who study linguistics problems and conduct linguistic research;
- managers;
- members of regional legislative bodies;
- specialists in the field of interethnic relations;
- undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students;
- and others.

Leading Russian specialists from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, as well as the most advanced regions in terms of ethnic language preservation policy, and the co-organizing regions engaged in studying, teaching, and preserving indigenous languages as well as experts in international and Russian language policies were invited to act as keynote speakers, lecturers, and moderators of seminars, round tables, business games, and presentations.

In all regions, heads of almost all regional executive and legislative authorities, leading governmental and non-governmental organizations in charge of supporting and promoting culture, literature, folk art, indigenous languages, education at all levels, and improving interethnic relations, as well as prominent public and religious figures and business representatives took an active part in the events.

Mutual consultations between participating specialists from Moscow, St. Petersburg, the Republic of Tatarstan, Komi, Chuvashia, Mari El, Karelia, Sakha (Yakutia), the Sakhalin Oblast, Altai, Ingushetia, Udmurtia, Chechnya, and North Ossetia–Alania gave them a chance to have in-person and online conversations with colleagues from other regions. A survey was conducted among local participants of the events and exhibitions of current publications on language policy and preserving minority languages.

More than 6,000 people took part in the events (both in person and online), that enjoyed wide coverage in the federal and regional media and on the Internet. Regional authorities offered strong support to make these events a success.

These events have shown that there is a great capacity to develop the My Mother Tongue Programme and expand its audience both in the regions that have already hosted its activities and in other regions of Russia. It can be done through engaging young people with computer skills and willing to master modern linguistic computer technologies. The recent Russian and foreign practice has shown that mastering such technologies and being involved in preserving indigenous languages give young people an opportunity to ultimately boost their social status and advance their careers both in Russia and abroad.

## Results of the My Mother Tongue Programme in 2020–2021

In 2020–2021, the My Mother Tongue Programme:

- drew public attention to the problem of preserving indigenous languages;
- analysed linguistic processes in nine regions of Russia, looking at the example of eleven languages that differ in many ways;
- identified and discussed problems, achievements, and promising areas for future work in the field of language support related to social engineering and the use of educational and linguistic technologies, including artificial intelligence;
- developed recommendations for structures involved in shaping and implementing federal and regional policies seeking to preserve the languages of Russia's indigenous peoples;
- drafted analytical papers;
- created and expanded a team of like-minded experts, who are ready to participate in the Programme in the future.

State  
Opera  
and Ballet  
Theatre  
of the  
Udmurt  
Republic



Sapaev  
Mari State  
Academic  
Opera  
and Ballet  
Theatre



## Assessing prospects for minority languages revitalisation

In every region, the My Mother Tongue Programme sought to answer the following questions:

- Is there a sufficient number of people belonging to a minority ethnic group (and what is their share in the total ethnic group population) who are really motivated and willing to commit to preserving and revitalising their native language, e.g., in education, culture, science, mass media, public policy, social life, in particular through using modern linguistic technologies?
- If this number is low, can it be increased? If their motivation is low, can it be strengthened?
- What needs to be done to this end and how? What resources (human, financial, other) are required? Who can do it and when?
- Are there any objective and subjective preconditions or capacity and readiness to (possibly) tap it in order to revitalise minority languages standing at different development levels, with a varying number of persons belonging to an ethnic group,

and a varying number of native speaking individuals in that ethnic group that have different levels of language proficiency? Can this capacity be used to develop linguistic computer technologies, such as text understanding, machine translation, information search, full-text search, language recognition, speech recognition, speech synthesis, voice search, audio and video data search, answering questions, word separation, thesaurus, diacritical signs, spell checkers, and others?

- Is it possible to assess this capacity?

When assessing prospects for each language's revitalisation, one should also study and analyse statistical trends, scientific publications, carry out surveys of specialists and analyse their responses, and conduct and analyse expert interviews.

The study of statistics, especially statistical trends, as well as scientific publications can provide objective answers to the following questions:

- How many people study their native languages in preschools, schools, and higher education institutions?
- How many preschools, schools, tertiary institutions teach native languages?



Books in the Nivkh and Uilta languages

- What is the scope of knowledge given to students learning native languages? How many academic hours are dedicated to teaching native languages? In what grades (to what age groups) are they taught?
- How many native language teachers are there?
- How many universities and institutes educate professional native language teachers?
- How many professors/teachers at these universities educate future native language teachers and researchers?
- How many of these teachers graduate each year from universities (teachers for grades 5 to 11) and colleges (teachers for grades 1 to 4)?
- Do schools teach other subjects in native languages, and, if so, in what grades? How many such schools are there?
- Are there textbooks necessary for the learning process? Who evaluates their quality and how? Is it satisfactory? Do educational institutions have enough textbooks in native languages?
- What is the share of people who want their children to study their native language in preschools, schools, and higher education institutions?
- What is the share of people who want their children to be taught in their native language and through what grade?
- Are parents and students sufficiently motivated?
- What is the share of people who do not have the opportunity to learn their native language? What obstacles are in their way?
- Are the most educated persons belonging to an ethnic group satisfied with the level of language teaching?
- Are the most educated persons belonging to an ethnic group satisfied with the level of teaching of other subjects in their native language?
- Are there enough specialists capable of developing school textbooks in native languages? Are they qualified enough for this task?
- How many persons belonging to a minority ethnic group (and what is their share) are truly (not just in words) interested in preserving their native languages, do not regard this activity as pointless, and are ready to invest their time, effort,

Surveys and expert interviews should find out, analyse, and summarise answers to the following questions:

Presentation of publications by the Nogliki District Central Library



Natalia Antonova, Head of the House of the Karelian Language, with a pupil



and energy into the preservation of their languages (teaching it in preschools and schools, teaching all school and university disciplines in native languages). Such people are referred to as language activists.

- How many people are willing to become their native language teachers? Is there enough of them?
- If the situation is deemed unsatisfactory, what are the ways to improve it?

The expert interviewing should also reveal whether language technologies are in demand and used at all. In particular, it should give answers to the following questions:

- What is being done to preserve languages in cyberspace (machine-readable text corpora, speech synthesis, machine translation, etc.)?
- What structures are involved in the process of language “digitalisation”?
- In what digital formats does a particular language exist? (pdf, txt, mp3, etc.)?
- What digital services feature a particular language (e.g., online publications, YouTube)?

With regard to small indigenous peoples (in Russia, these are defined as groups of less than 50,000 members), it is also important to answer the following additional questions:

- What is the level of proficiency in Russian among adults belonging to ethnic minorities?
- Is their Russian different from that spoken by the local Russian-speaking population?
- What is the share of adults who speak their ancestors’ languages among themselves?
- What is the share of persons belonging to a minority ethnic group who speak Russian as their first (native) language (in the generations of children, parents, and grandparents)?
- What is the share of people who speak their ancestral language as first (native) language (in the generations of children, parents, grandparents)?
- How proficient in Russian are children belonging to a minority ethnic group entering the first grade? Is their level of proficiency equal to that of children from Russian-speaking families or lower? Do they understand teachers who use Russian as language of instruction, and to what extent? Is there a need to teach such children in the first grade (in

elementary school) in the language of their ancestors?

- Do educators who teach a minority language have a good command of it themselves? Do they speak this language at home?
- How proficient are teachers who teach non-Russian speaking children in Russian? Do teachers belonging to a minority ethnic group speak Russian at home?
- Are there any teachers belonging to minority ethnic groups who teach in Russian?
- Do schools and preschools have special classes/groups for children who do not speak Russian?
- How many people belonging to a minority ethnic group are currently enrolled in teachers' colleges and universities? What subjects do they want to teach in the future?
- Do indigenous peoples' living standards differ from those of Russian speakers? Do indigenous peoples enjoy the blessings of civilisation to the same extent as the Russian-speaking population?
- What kind of future do minority ethnic groups envisage for their children? Do they want them to stay in their traditional places of residence and learn traditional trades or rather move to a big city?
- Where can one taste traditional cuisine of a given ethnic group? Is this cuisine promoted or is it in decline?
- Are traditional lifestyles and traditional clothing being promoted? Or it is only folklore, folk arts, and crafts that enjoy support?



Tatiana Ishmatova, Head, All-Udmurt Association "Udmurt Kenesh"



Svetlana Starikova, Director, National Library of the Republic of Chuvashia (2002–2020)

## Conclusions

### *Major problems*

The federal government as well as regional authorities of every entity of the Russian Federation that has hosted events under the My Mother Tongue Programme actively work to preserve the indigenous identity, culture, and languages. Russia's policies towards language preservation and respect for the cultures of their indigenous peoples can be called exemplary in comparison with those of a number of other large multilingual countries. We came to this conclusion by analysing international documents containing various kinds of recommendations as well as foreign experts' reports at major international language preservation conferences that the Russian IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre have been

organising for 14 years with the support of the Russian Government, the Government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Government of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area (Ugra), the CIS Interstate Humanitarian Cooperation Fund in partnership with UNESCO. In Russia, recommendations in the vein of “people must not be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, their traditional way of life and customs must receive support, and the like” sound naive and irrelevant.

At the same time, data indicate that the number of active speakers of minority languages in Russia is falling, as is the case all over the world. This, in turn, indicates that either the whole set of measures taken in our country seems insufficient or many languages have no

capacities to become more popular in the future. Meanwhile, the language situation in Russian regions varies depending on historical and demographic characteristics, administrative and legal status of a constituent entity, traditions, effectiveness of legal regulations and law enforcement practices, and the efforts of language communities and activists.

Efforts to preserve and promote indigenous languages in Russia, primarily made at the regional level, are not always consistent, deliberate, science-based, interconnected, coordinated, and organised. Among language activists representing various indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation, this sometimes gives rise to quiet (and occasionally not so quiet) discontent with the federal government rather than with regional authorities, which is difficult to justify, but easy to explain. It is safer to blame central authorities located far away than local ones operating nearby.

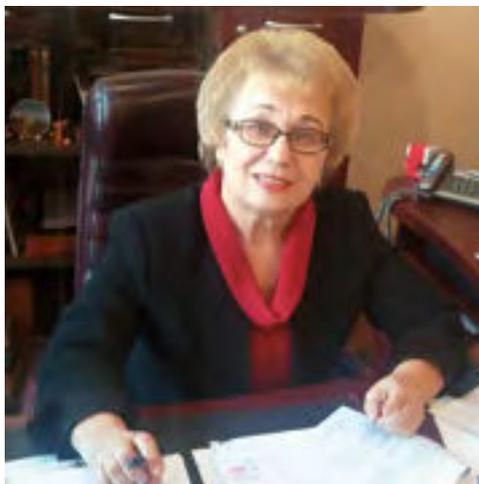
At the same time, even regional specialists, let alone language activists, are insufficiently informed about:

- the historical processes that have almost a decisive impact on specific languages and the global linguistic landscape;
- the current language situation in Russia and other countries, especially multilingual ones;

Feodosia Gabysheva, Chair, Committee on Science, Education, Mass Media and Public Organizations Affairs of the State Assembly of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (Il Tumen)



Valentina Malysheva, Director, Sakhalin Regional Science Library



Satsita Israilova, Director, National Library of the Chechen Republic, and Radima Gazdieva, Director, Yandiev National Library of the Republic of Ingushetia



- prospects for, problems of, and best practices of supporting and preserving minority languages in other Russian regions and in the world;
- political, organizational, scientific, educational, and technological measures and innovations introduced in various countries to preserve minority languages, including the use of advanced linguistic computer technologies;
- the results of applying these measures in different countries with regard to different languages.

On the one hand, this lack of information in certain regions and areas of compact settlement of Russian indigenous peoples generates decadence and pessimism with regard to their languages. On the other hand, it results in inflated but groundless expectations for the future of ethnic languages, illusions, demands for the federal government to raise the status of a minority language by giving it a state or official language status, political speculations and provocations. This provides grounds and even conditions for interethnic tensions and strife, which are often artificially fuelled by individuals who oppose the government and by foreign actors.

### Recommendations

The world is preparing to celebrate the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, which will focus on language planning, developing immersion and revitalization techniques, and strengthening the socio-economic role and prestige

Financial, informational, methodological, and psychological support of language activists is essential to having a successful and effective language policy. It is critical to make language activists a part of discussions and decision-making processes at all stages, provided they are well-educated, well-informed, professionally knowledgeable, and civically responsible.



Aisa Khalidov, Professor, Chechen State Pedagogical University, and Elizaveta Khamraeva, Department Chair, Moscow Pedagogical State University

of indigenous languages. However, there is a profound lack of specialists in these very areas of expertise. It is therefore necessary to intensify efforts aimed at systematically educating professionals in shaping and implementing language policies both at the federal and regional levels. It is equally important to organize regular professional development courses, seminars, and workshops for specialists and language activists in order to boost their awareness and skills.

Research is needed to explore the feasibility of promoting genuine bilingualism in the educational system, which most parents still consider to be the most important element in learning ethnic indigenous languages when a family, for a number of historical reasons, is unable to pass on the language to a new generation. It is also important to understand what a “true bilingualism” really means in Russia today.

High-quality sociological research, monitoring, and scientific expert assessments are required as their results can significantly improve the language policy. These studies should focus on establishing the degree of active and educated indigenous persons’ involvement in preserving and promoting their languages.

While promoting bilingualism and multilingualism in Russia and preserving minority and indigenous languages (an important element of Russia's language policy), we must each time stress the obvious: the priority, mandatory use and true, historical dominance of Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation, one of the major world languages, which has produced a great world-class culture, literature, science, and education. It is a language of interethnic communication used in international organizations.

It is necessary to explain how the status of indigenous peoples in Russia differs from that in other countries. In Russia, all indigenous peoples enjoy exactly the same rights as other ethnic groups, dominant both nationwide (pure ethnic

Russians or those who consider themselves Russians) and in certain regions of the Russian Federation. Sometimes small indigenous peoples have even more privileges in comparison with dominant ethnic groups.

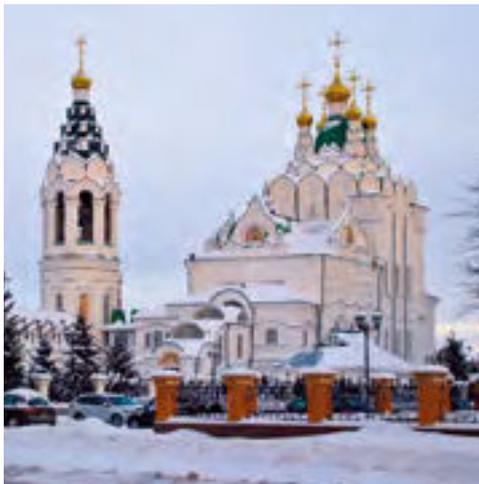
Systematic efforts are needed to preserve and revitalise languages in Russia's regions with the help of appropriate methodological recommendations developed at the federal level. Particular attention should be paid to engaging active and educated indigenous persons themselves, including the youth.

In addition to objective reasons, the decline of small languages in Russia and around the world has a number of subjective reasons, namely native speakers' passivity and lack of motivation to preserve their language.

In 2020, the My Mother Tongue Programme clearly demonstrated that different ethnic groups have significantly different levels of willingness and preparedness as well as different numbers of opportunities to preserve and promote their ethnic languages not in word but in deed.

Thus, the support that external actors, such as the federal government, regional authorities, and various foundations, must and can provide to local language activists, should vary accordingly. This

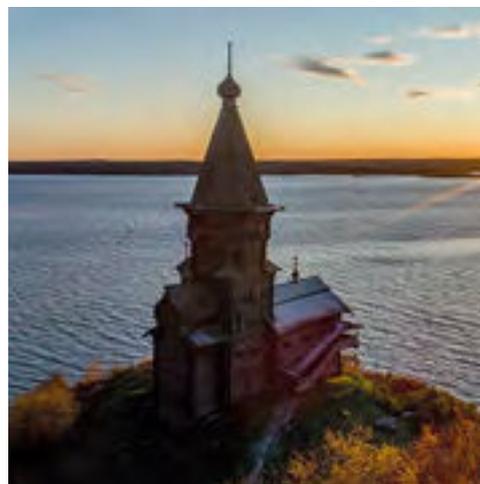
Trinity Church, Yoshkar-Ola



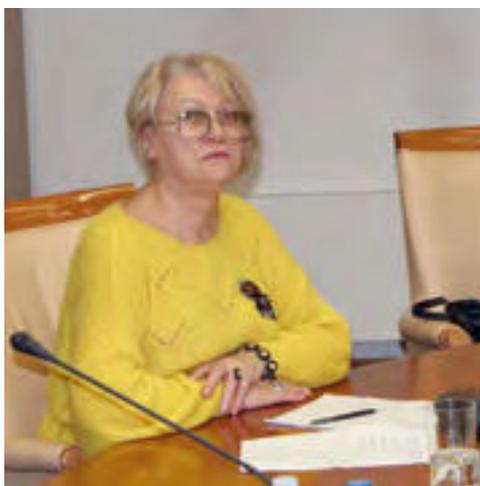
Sunni Mosque, Vladikavkaz



Dormition Church, Kondopoga, Republic of Karelia



Olga  
Artemenko,  
Director,  
Research  
Centre for  
National  
Problems of  
Education,  
Russian  
Presidential  
Academy  
of National  
Economy  
and Public  
Administration



support should be differentiated and scientifically grounded.

In order to act professionally and firmly and support minority and indigenous languages with their eyes open, external actors must develop differentiated approaches in helping various peoples preserve their languages (through family, education, and other social institutions). It is necessary to raise, and find clear answers to, the following questions:

- Is there a necessary and adequate number of people belonging to a minority ethnic group who are sufficiently motivated and willing to invest their energy into preserving and revitalising their native language in the areas of education, culture, science, mass media, and public life, including through the use of modern linguistic technologies? Do they have the capacity to start (or continue) to perform these activities on their own (without assistance)? If they lack this capacity, what should be done to increase it? What resources (human, financial, other) are needed? Who can do it, when, and how?
- Are there any objective and subjective preconditions (capacity) and readiness to use modern language computer technologies in order to revitalise a given language? Is it possible to assess such capacity?



Varvara  
Belolyubskaya,  
Even poet,  
Member,  
Council for  
Language  
Preservation of  
the Republic  
of Sakha  
(Yakutia), Senior  
Lecturer, North-  
Eastern Federal  
University

The action programme of the Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre calls for developing new tracks and formats in this area as part of the efforts to support minority and indigenous languages, multilingualism, and to promote linguistic diversity in cyberspace. It also proposes to make greater use of new linguistic and other computer technologies, including artificial intelligence as well as to engage active and educated indigenous persons themselves, motivate them, improve their skills, stimulate and encourage them, help them mobilise, see new horizons, and inspire optimism.

Over the past decade, keyboard layouts, fonts available to all users, spell checkers, electronic dictionaries, machine translation systems, and search engines have been considered the basic tools necessary to ensure that a minority language is fully functional in the electronic information space. Nowadays, speech synthesizers, speech recognition systems, and elements of artificial intelligence should be added to this list.

It is essential to raise the awareness of specialists and language activists of the current language situation, problems, prospects, and best practices in supporting and preserving minority languages, as well as of innovative measures to preserve these languages, including the

use of advanced linguistic computer technologies. Particular attention should be paid to engaging active and educated indigenous persons themselves.

In order to systematically preserve indigenous languages, raise awareness, and improve experts' skills, it is essential for them to travel to different Russian regions, get to know each other personally, have informal conversations, and hold mutual consultations. Experts from regions of Russia who were involved in the My Mother Tongue Programme in 2020 and 2021 have expressed their sincere gratitude for the opportunity to travel around the country, communicate with native speakers of different languages, experience different language situations firsthand, and hold discussions with their colleagues on the spot. The Programme has created a team of experts, and in the future we can count on their support and

assistance in implementing other projects.

The leadership of Russian regions provide great support to the Programme, encouraging all interested public institutions and organisations to take part in its events. When planning regional events, such support should be secured in advance.

On the one hand, the My Mother Tongue Programme has engaged local communities of native speakers by taking interest in their language and culture and expressing solidarity with them in their concern for the current state and future of their languages and cultures. On the other hand, it has helped to draw the attention of regional authorities to the problem of preserving and promoting indigenous languages and cultures in a given territory.

The Programme gave way to an exchange of important experience between regions and resulted in establishing direct links for future cooperation. Leading scientific centres in India, Brazil, South Africa, France, the UNESCO Secretariat, and the UNESCO IFAP Intergovernmental Council showed interest in the results of the Programme.

All this proves that the My Mother Tongue Programme should be extended to include other Russian regions and provide further analytical overview of the current language situation in different regions.

Political support from the regional leadership of the Russian Federation played a major role in the Programme's success. The solidarity and active support from our main co-organizing partners (leading regional scientific libraries) was another key factor in its successful implementation. It was those libraries that managed to bring together interested specialists and institutions involved in preserving indigenous languages and cultures.

Publications on linguistic and cultural diversity issues by the Russian IFAP Committee and ILCC



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Sergey Chumarev,  
Deputy Director  
of Department,  
Russian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



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Evgeny Kuzmin,  
Deputy Chair,  
State Assembly  
of the Republic of  
Mari El



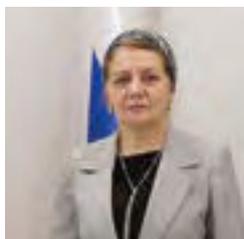
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Dinara  
Kultueva,  
Deputy Chair  
of the Altai  
Government



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Mariam Amrieva,  
Deputy Chair of  
the Government  
of the Republic of  
Ingushetia



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Timur  
Tsybikov,  
Head of  
Division,  
Federal  
Agency  
for Ethnic  
Affairs



## Altai Republic



Interregional scientific and practical conference

### **The Altai Language in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Preservation and Promotion**

(September 2–3, 2021, Gorno-Altaiisk, Altai Republic)

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Ministry of Culture of the Altai Republic
- Chevalkov National Library of the Altai Republic

## PAST AND CURRENT STATE OF THE ALTAI LANGUAGE



**Natalia YEKEEVA**

Chair, Committee of the State Assembly – El Kurultai of the Altai Republic for National Policy, Education, Culture, Public Associations and the Media

### Introduction

The Altai language is part of the Turkic language group that belongs to the Altaic language family. According to researchers, it can be considered the basis of all other Turkic languages. Today, the Altai language is the mother tongue of the Altai people, natives of the Altai Republic. The republic is a subject of the Russian Federation, situated in the south of Western Siberia in the very centre of Asia. It occupies the area of 92,600 square km and has a population of 221,000 (as of 2021), 65,000 of which live in its capital city of Gorno-Altai. This is one of the most multinational regions of Russia, being home to more than 90 nations, mostly Russians (55.7%) and Altaians (33.9%). The republic is also home to Telengits, Tubalars, Teleuts, Chelkans, Kumandins and Shors, who are included in the List of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation and who speak various dialects of the Altai language.

### History of the Altai language

The current state of the Altai language, its preservation and promotion are inextricably linked with the centuries-old history of the Altai people as well as their distinctive and unique culture. The Altai language is one of the oldest written languages and is deeply rooted in history. The Altai region is one of the most ancient hearth of civilization, dating back to 800,000 to 1 million years ago. The first written artefacts in the Turkic languages go back to the ancient Turkic era. The inaccessibility of the Altai Mountains prevented cultural layers from being “washed away” by the “waves” of migrating peoples, as it happened in the plains. Instead, they were preserved in mountain valleys and gorges, ensuring stability of ethno-cultural traditions that reflect centuries-old worldviews. Therefore, the cultural heritage in Altai is not about “artefacts” and “antiquities” but it is a living and integral part of peoples’ activities. It also provides



Altai  
landscape

Song  
of the  
stream



the basis for preserving and promoting the Altai language, which constantly attracts researchers as the Altaians have preserved the ancient features of their language.

## Origins of the literary Altai language

Before the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution, the Altaians were one of the few Siberian peoples who had their own writing system and grammar. The latter two had been created on the basis of Cyrillic script by the Altai Spiritual Mission of the

Russian Orthodox Church, that was founded in Western Siberia in 1828. Its members worked primarily in Altai, mostly populated by Altaic pagans. The mission opened schools for them and produced the first textbooks in the Altai language.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a number of major events in the history of Russia and its peoples, including the Altai people. In 1922, Gorny Altai was given the status of a separate administrative-territorial unit – Oirod Autonomous Oblast (in 1948, it became Gorno-Altai Autonomous Oblast), which determined the future of the Altaians as well as their cultural and linguistic development path. In the Soviet period, illiteracy among the Altai people was eradicated. In 1920, literate adult Altaians (able to read and sign their name) made up merely 6% of the population, while in 1939, 73.6% of Altaians were fully literate. The Altai language's social role significantly increased. People started to use it in their everyday communication. It also became part of future generations' education and upbringing in schools and other spheres of life. Local mass media outlets in the Altai language appeared for the first time in history. Literature started to be published along with textbooks and teaching aids. The literary Altai language, which was constantly enriched by folk speech, continued to form and develop on the basis of works by Altai writers, poets and playwrights, as well as storytellers' epos and other forms of folklore that had been published.

## Teaching the Altai language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw rapid establishment and development of the Altai national school, which was built on the principle of school education in the native language. In these schools, upbringing and teaching methods were based on national peculiarities linked with regional conditions and the lifestyle of indigenous people, their language, culture and worldview. In 1949, a regional national secondary school was established for Altaian children from remote villages of the region. The Teachers' Institute opened its doors the same year to help train future teachers of the Altai language and literature; it was later transformed into Gorno-Altai State Pedagogical Institute. In 1952, Gorno-Altai Research Institute of History, Language and Literature was established

with a view to address a wide range of scientific and practical issues related to the promotion of the Altai language.

The 1960s and 1970s in the USSR were marked by a rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization, tremendous advances in science, culture, healthcare, industry, space exploration, and the development of education, especially higher education. At that time, the Russian language was actively promoted as the language of interethnic communication for peoples living in the USSR, including in Russia, and as the language of higher education, which was one of the world's best. It led to a decline in the use of indigenous languages. In Altai, the network of Altai national schools was rapidly shut down. Hereinafter Altai children were taught in their native language only in elementary school. As people from small Altai villages moved to larger settlements and cities, elementary and small eight-year schools, where teaching was generally done in the Altai language, got closed. In addition, the number of preschool institutions, where the main language of communication with children was Altai, decreased. As a result, the Altai language became less widely used, and the number of Altai young people with no or poor command of their native language increased.

In this period, the use of the Altai language as a language of instruction started to drop. Teaching of natural and exact sciences was switched to Russian because the Altai language ceased to be used in higher education and in working environment. There was a lack of Altai-language educational and specialized literature. The number of hours devoted to learning the Altai language, history, and culture was shrinking. The Altai language was gradually becoming an object of study rather than a means of instruction.

At the same time, it is important to note that traditional culture, which is key to preserving and developing a native language, never completely disappeared from everyday life in Altai, especially in rural areas. The Altai population was not massively urbanized. The majority (more than 80%) still lived in the countryside and preserved traditional agricultural practices and lifestyle. Agriculture was the main activity of the indigenous population of Gorny Altai. It remained the key sector for the region's socio-economic development. This tradition survived along with its practitioners. So did the Altai language. According to the 1989 All-Union census, 89.6% of the Altai population listed Altaian as their native language.



Oirot children



Promoting children literacy

## The Altai language at the turn of the century

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the Altai people entered a new stage of its development due to social, political, and economic transformations in our country that had an impact on the Altai language. In 1991, the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Oblast was transformed into the Altai Republic, an independent subject of the Russian Federation. For the first time, the Altai language was granted the status of the Republic's state language. Within 30 years (a short period by history's standards), a legal framework of the state language policy was defined, first of all in the Constitution of the Altai Republic and the *Law On Languages of Peoples Living on the Territory of the Altai Republic*. Two state languages were officially recognized: Altaian and Russian. Both languages were used in publishing the republic's laws, performing the anthem, the republic's record keeping, and local governmental, corporate, business, institutional paperwork, naming awards, settlements, etc.

At that time, social democratization resulted in rising ethnic self-consciousness of the Altai people. It also contributed to a movement for the revival of national culture based on preserved traditions and for the protection of the Altai language. In particular, the regional public organization Ene Til (*Native Language*) gained wide support. There were still three main spheres of social life – education, culture, and mass media – that required comprehensive development of the Altai language and provided real opportunities for it.

## Current state of the Altai language in education

First of all, the regional education system was tasked with building a system of teaching the Altai language at all levels: preschool, primary, high school, and tertiary. Such foundational legal acts as the *Law on Education in the Altai Republic* (1999) and the *Concept of National Schools of the Altai Republic* (1992) defined the main milestones and priorities of regional educational development. The models of the Altai national school as a system of education and upbringing of children and youth in their native language were introduced, including the model of a rural compound “preschool – school – grammar school” on the basis of the Altai language.

In 1992, the regional national school was transformed into the Republican National Grammar School, an innovative educational institution with an extensive and advanced programme of ethno-cultural education, primarily language study. For the first time the city of Gorno-Altai, the capital of the region, opened the Altai National School and the Altai National Kindergarten. Teaching aids, fiction books and scientific literature have been published in the Altai language. Since 2014, 136 course books and study guides have been issued for republican educational institutions. Today schools have everything they need to teach the Altai language and literature, history and culture of the Altai Republic. They also have assessment materials for the Altai language and Altai literature disciplines as well as relevant electronic educational resources. An electronic corpus of the Altai language and its dialects is being created; an iOS-based (Apple) application providing a character set in the Altai language is being developed. An integrated educational environment for learning the Altai language at all levels has been created.

In order to popularize the Altai language and to provide incentive for students to learn their mother tongue, there have been an increasing number of regional events, such as Academic Olympiads, contests, readings, and conferences uniting schools, libraries

and museums. The *Amadu (Dream)* gatherings of young poets, the *Tiingesh (Little Squirrel)* intellectual game contest and other similar events have become very popular.

The republic is home to an active association of teachers of the Altai language and literature and annually hosts the national contest *Best Teacher of the Altai Language and Literature*. In 2019, Vera Karmakova, a teacher of the Altai language and literature, became a winner in the nomination *Best regional practice* of the All-Russian contest *Languages and Culture of the Peoples of Russia: Preservation and Promotion* which attracted 266 participants from 51 subjects of the Russian Federation. Since 2019, there have been successful interregional seminars – *Best Pedagogical Techniques of Teaching Native Languages of Peoples of Russia* and *Languages of Peoples of Russia – involving ethno-cultural textbooks authors, material developers, and scientists from the republics of Khakassia, Sakha (Yakutia), and Tyva.*

The system of personnel training has enabled regional educational institutions to find teachers of the Altai language and literature. The Gorno-Altai Pedagogical College has a department offering courses for *Elementary school teachers with the right to teach the Altai language*. The Department of Altaic and Turkic Studies was established at Gorno-Altai State University in 2013, offering programmes in *Native language and foreign language (English), Native language and Chinese language, Native language and preschool education, Native language and ethno-cultural education*. Master's students major in *Literature of the peoples of Russia (Altai literature)*. The university offers postgraduate programmes in *Folklore Studies* and *Languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation (Altai language)*.

The Republic's educational system has all the necessary conditions for teaching the Altai language. There is ongoing work to improve the conditions and tools for learning the Altai language, to teach professionals, and to increase children's and parents' motivation for and interest in learning the language.



Plakas  
Republican  
Gymnasium,  
Gorno-  
Altai



Young  
participants  
of the Altai  
Language  
Day



Gorno-  
Altai  
State  
University

Of course, language development is impossible without science. The Surazakov Research Institute of Altaic Studies focuses on the origins, current state, and further development of the Altai language. For the last five years alone, the institute has published over 50 scientific books on the Altai language, folklore, literature, history, and culture, namely *Altaian-Russian Dictionary*, *Russian-Altaian Dictionary in 2 volumes*, *Spelling of the Altai language*, *Grammar of Modern Altai Language. Morphology*, the 16<sup>th</sup> volume of the collection *Altai Baatyrlar (Altai Bogatyrs)*, the collection *Artefacts of Altai Epic Heritage* in two languages (Altaian and Russian), etc.

## Altaian literature

The Institute of Altaic Studies pays significant attention to the Altai epic heritage, which also attracts international scientific interest. The epic tradition has been preserved in Altai, and it has retained its original form. The Altai heroic legends – the most important component of the Altaians’ spiritual heritage – are part of national cultural treasury owing to their vast repertoire (more than 250 legends and their variations have been recorded), the immensity of their texts (many of them have as many as 8 thousand verses in each legend), and

their remarkable epic and linguistic diversity. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the epos is one of the most important historical and cultural elements that helped the Altai people to preserve their ethnic identity, original culture and native language. That is the reason why the annual International Kurultai of Storytellers is one of the Republic’s most striking events, which helps to preserve and promote the rich Altai language and the unique art of traditional folk culture – the Altai throat singing and storytelling art.

International Kurultai of Storytellers



Publications on the history of the Altai language



The rich spiritual and cultural heritage of the Altai people manifests itself in the works of local poets, writers, journalists, and novelists. In 2008, the Altyn Tuu publishing house was established to encourage the study of national languages and the publishing of any kind of printed products (books, magazines, newspapers). As early as in 1990, *Solony (Rainbow)*, the republic’s first children’s Altai-language magazine was published. This colorful and informative periodical guides its young readers through folk tales, riddles, and other genres of Altai folk art.

## Cultural institutions' support for and promotion of the Altai language

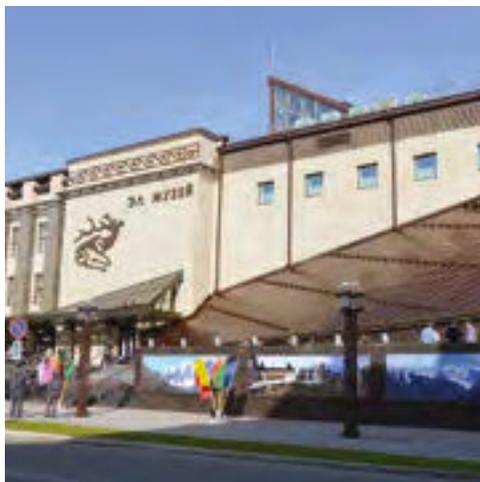
No language can develop outside the culture of the people that created it and keep using it. Culture provides the environment for language development, while language is a means of its expression and promotion. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore, cultural institutions of the Altai Republic prioritize efforts to promote and popularize the Altai language, to expand its usage and to strengthen its public role.

The Anokhin National Museum has done a lot to promote and protect linguistic and cultural identity of the Altai people through its exhibitions, lessons, meetings, installations, and themed tours. Its guests can listen to a full tour around the museum or use an audio guide in the Altai language (five-hours long and covering 40 rooms). The museum exhibitions reveal the history of the Altai language and literature and offer insights into the main stages of their evolution.

The exhibition *Evolution of the Altai Literature* displays written artefacts of the Turkic culture – runic writings found in the Altai Mountains. It also presents four Gospels translated into the Altai language, which are considered literary artefacts and the first literary translation into the Altai language.

The Chevalkov National Library of the Altai Republic is undoubtedly the main centre of information and storage of printed and written works in the Altai language. The most valuable publications are stored in the Rare Book Fund. The Altai Book Museum was opened in the library in 2007 to find, protect and provide access to this important part of the cultural heritage. The museum retraces the evolution of books in Altai, including publications in the Altai language. In 2020, the National Library published the anthology *Oirotia in the Literary Mirror*, which aroused a genuine interest among readers, since it contained the first texts in the Altai language based on Yañalif (Latin-based Turkic alphabet) published between 1929 and 1938, when the language had not yet fully switched to the Russian alphabet.

Every year the library holds a traditional series of events – local history readings, meetings with writers, *Let's Speak Altaian* events, etc. – to celebrate the Altai Language Day. According to the Law of the Republic of Altai, it is celebrated on October 20, birthday of the famous Altai poet and writer Lazar Kokyshev. Since



Altai  
National  
Museum



Chevalkov  
National  
Library of  
the Republic  
of Altai

2017, the national reading contest *Living classics in the Altai Language* has been held. Readers of three age categories – pupils, youth, and adults – compete in it annually. In addition, the number of books published in the Altai language increases every year.

Since 2011, the National Library has been working on the *Digital Library* project. Its primary goal is to create a single information space of the Altai Republic, focused on learning about its past as part of Russian historical and cultural heritage, local history, Altai’s traditions, customs, and language. This project is aimed at digitizing fiction, popular scientific literature, periodicals, including those in the Altai language.

For many years, the republic’s Children’s library has been part of the programme named *Keep the Fire of Your Hearth Burning*, which involves educational activities for young visitors, such as readings of Altai folklore *Giving Voice to Your Mother Tongue*, book exhibitions commemorating anniversaries of Altai writers (*Master of Altai Verse* and *Yrys Kuunzeili!*), and Altai folk tales put on the stage.

Concert institutions, namely the State Orchestra and the State Philharmonic Society of the Republic of Altai, have been carrying out creative projects that seek to carefully preserve the unique Altai music culture and add Altai-language songs to the singers’ repertoire. In 2020, the anniversary year of the Soviet Union’s

triumph against fascism in the Great Patriotic War, the State Orchestra of the Republic of Altai included the legendary *Victory Day* song performed in the Altai language into its repertoire.

Theatrical plays in the Altai language are part of the regular repertoire of the Kuchyak National Drama Theatre. It is important to note that these are not just plays based on Altai authors’ works. World-famous plays, such as *The Government Inspector* by Nicolai Gogol, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* by Jean-Baptiste Molière, *Khanuma* by Alexander Tsagareli, etc., have been

Opening ceremony of the national holiday of El Oiyin



Altai women in traditional costumes

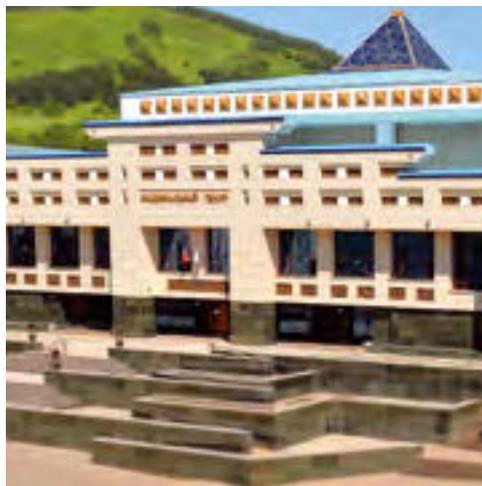


Altai State Orchestra



translated into the Altai language. Most performances are in two languages – Altaian and Russian. At present, there is a higher demand for simultaneous interpretation of plays from Altaian into Russian.

The collaboration between the El Altai State Television and Radio Company and the performers of the theatre in translating famous Soviet cartoons, such as *Mom for a Mammoth Baby*, *Swan Feather*, and *A Quartet of Friends*, into the Altai language is truly invaluable. The first cartoons based on Altai fairy tales (*Yrystu*, etc.) have been produced. The Эл Алтай Company has published an audio collection *Golden Voices of Altai Writers* and is planning to release video lessons *Altai Til (The Altai Language)*. A unique project is currently underway: theatre actors are working on an audiobook featuring Altaian novels included in the school curriculum. Early 2021 saw the release of an audiobook compiling the works of Altai writers studied in the fifth grade. A similar audiobook for the sixth grade is on the way.



Altai  
National  
Theatre

The republic annually holds a tender for non-profit organizations to support socially important projects in the field of national public policy. Thus, in 2020, the tender was awarded to the “Azhu” (*Transition*) *Ethnocultural Centre*, which held the republican festival of folk well-wishing songs, and the republican public organization *Congress of the Altai People*, which manufactured stuffed dolls speaking the Altai language.

## Current language situation

The 21<sup>st</sup> century language situation in the Republic of Altai is unique. On the one hand, the region has the necessary basis for achieving strategic goals in promoting its native language. There is a regulatory framework and an effective institutional infrastructure for the support and promotion of the Altai language. The republic’s budget has the necessary funds. There is scientific, educational, and informational expertise. A terminological commission has been established. The Council for the Altai language under the Head of the Altai Republic has been put in place. A lot of hard work has been done. On the other hand, major problems have been identified in terms of preserving and promoting the Altai language, especially in the educational process. These problems require the state to adjust its language policy to reflect present-day realities.

Today we are witnessing a decline in the functional development of the Altai language and a decrease in the number of Altaians, especially young ones, who can speak their native language. According to the 2002 and 2010 All-Russian censuses, while the Altaian population increased, the share of Altaian speakers among the republic’s population went down from 86.68% to 70.60%. A new generation of young people with different values has grown up. This generation is actively shaping a new linguistic and, more broadly, cultural reality. We see Altai’s unique identity slipping away. It is being replaced by stereotypes of mass culture, mostly Western.

The world around us is becoming more and more interconnected in terms of economy, technology, and information flows. Global processes have made our region more open. Altai has become more popular in terms of tourism and economy both nationally and globally. New information environment has an impact on behavior within already existing cultures, there is a search for balance between inside and outside forces. In this context, the space for national cultural development has been further shrinking. This mainly affects the development of a native language as the basis of any national culture, narrowing its functional scope. In a global world, it is sufficient to speak one's national language (in Russia, this is Russian, which also serves as the language of interethnic communication) and English, the world's lingua franca. Ability to speak these languages is prestigious, valuable, and very much in demand. That is why most parents try to make their children master Russian and English rather than Altaian. The mother tongue is fading away in Altaian families.

Rural areas play an important role in preserving and reproducing traditional intercultural environment by supporting and promoting national culture, education, folk rituals, customs, traditions, holidays, and, among others, language. Rural population mostly speak the Altai language which helps to protect the ethno-cultural potential of the people. However, modern socio-economic trends,

rapid growth of large agro-industrial enterprises make traditional farming methods unprofitable. Local farming products are becoming uncompetitive, rural living standards are declining, pushing people to move to cities in search of jobs and education. While rural people used to want to relocate to the capital of the republic, in recent years they have tended to move to Northern and Far Eastern regions of the Russian Federation. A decrease in rural population results in a smaller geographic distribution of the Altai language.

At present, given that Altaian has been granted the status of a state language, it has become even more relevant to develop its terminology and functional styles so as to facilitate its possible use in new areas of management, record keeping and economy. The functioning of the Altai language in science and technology, production, economy, trade, transport, information and communications, etc., has been insufficiently studied and, therefore, has been limited.

The Altaian general public was greatly disturbed by the fact that the UNESCO Atlas of the World's



Altai folk festival of Chaga Bairam



Languages in Danger changed the status of the Altai language from vulnerable to definitely endangered. This status is granted to a language when children no longer learn it as their mother tongue at home or school and when it is not passed on to the next generation.

It is clear that language preservation and promotion depend not only on government and schools, but also on native speakers' involvement and enthusiasm, first and foremost on families. Alas, the annual monitoring of the language situation in the Altai Republic shows that Altaian is rarely spoken at home. It is also clear that in this context the role of education in preserving and promoting the Altai language has increased considerably. Schools have come to play a key role here. However, the situation around teaching Altaian children their mother tongue is complicated. Despite considerable funds spent and long teaching hours, eleven years of schooling has not been enough for pupils to master Altaian. We believe the reason lies in the improper organization of the learning process and in poorly designed teaching techniques and textbooks. As before, they are tailored for children who have been exposed to their native language and have been learning it since birth. They can hardly suit children who have poor or even no command of the Altai language (this is particularly true for children who come from families where adults do not speak their mother tongue). New special techniques for teaching the Altai language are needed. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Altai Republic is working hard on this issue.

It is known that a child absorbs up to 80% of information between the ages of two and five. This is a very important factor for learning a native language, which we fail to take full advantage of in preschool. And here, too, special techniques and professionals are needed.

It remains a controversy whether native language should be taught at school voluntarily or mandatorily. The 2018 amendments to the *Federal Law On Education in the Russian Federation* allow parents to choose which language, including Russian, their children will study at school as native. Despite what many had feared, the Altai language has not disappeared from schools entirely but it has seen a steep decline.

## Prospects for preserving and promoting the Altai language

Today, modern technologies can help us preserve our native language. We live in an era of informational abundance. Since their earliest years, kids are immersed in the world of information, and the virtual space is becoming more and more comfortable and interesting for them. For this reason, one of the priorities for educational research development is to introduce modern techniques and information technologies to the Altai language teaching in comprehensive schools of the Altai Republic. We hope that this will help children get a better grasp of their native language in today's digital world.

The language situation has changed. It is now necessary to create new mechanisms for preserving and promoting the existing cultural potential, cultural continuity, and understanding that new approaches are needed to address national and cultural problems.

The scientific and practical conference “Functioning of the State Altai Language in the Altai Republic” held in March 2021 and organized by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education of the Republic considered measures to support and further promote the Altai language. The conference discussed drafting and adopting a Concept for supporting and promoting the Altai language with the aim to improve its functioning as the state language of the Republic of Altai and the mother tongue of the Altai people. It also focused on drafting a comprehensive state programme for promoting the Altai language. On November 11, 2021, the Government of the Altai Republic approved this Concept. The programme is currently underway. A position of the Altai language adviser to the Head of the Altai Republic has been established.

The interregional scientific and practical conference “The Altai Language in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Preservation and Promotion”, held in September 2021 by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, Ministry of Culture of the Altai Republic, Interregional Library Cooperation Centre, and Chevalkov Altai National Library, made an important contribution to achieving the set objectives. The conference considered specific measures to make efforts aimed at preserving the languages of the Russian peoples more effective and extensive. It also focused on promoting interethnic and interregional cooperation, fostering new forms and methods of engagement to preserve and promote the Altai language.

There is no doubt that it is impossible to rely solely on public authorities in preserving and promoting a language. The people itself plays a crucial role in reviving and promoting its native language. It is a product of a free and conscious choice, of voluntary commitments for the sake of preserving one’s family, ethnos, and language. In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to join efforts of public authorities and governments, educational and upbringing institutions, the media, civil organizations and other civil society institutions, scientists, families, and a socially active and civically mature part of the population.

Participants of the interregional conference “The Altai Language in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Preservation and Promotion



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Svetlana Shtanakova,  
Director, Chevalkov  
National Library of the  
Republic of Altai



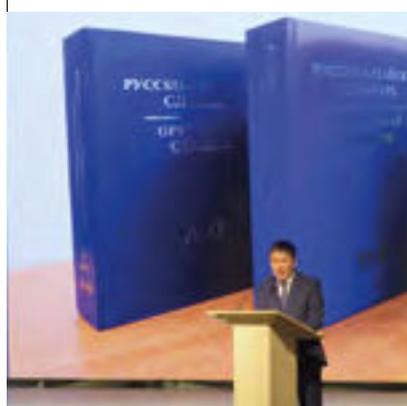
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Altai experts with  
Sergey Bakeikin,  
Deputy Chair,  
Russian UNESCO IFAP  
Committee; Executive  
Director, Interregional  
Library Cooperation  
Centre



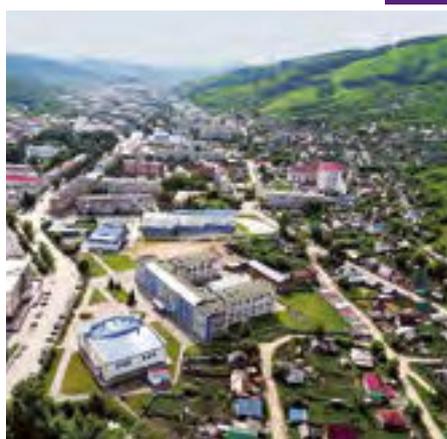
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Alexei  
Chumakayev,  
Deputy Director,  
Surazakov  
Research Institute  
of Altaic Studies,  
presenting the  
Russian-Altaic  
Dictionary

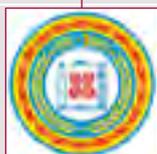


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Gorno-  
Altaisk  
cityscape



## Chechen Republic



**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

### **Preservation and Development of Native Languages in a Multiethnic State: Language Policy, Problems and Prospects**

(October 11–13, 2021, Grozny, Chechen Republic)

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Ministry of Culture of the Chechen Republic
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Aidamirov National Library of the Chechen Republic
- Kadyrov Chechen State University

# LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC



**Musa OVHADOV**

Doctor of Philology, Professor, Chair of General Linguistics, Kadyrov Chechen State University

## Introduction

The Chechen Republic is a region of the Russian Federation, historically densely populated by Chechens, one of Russia's largest minority ethnic groups.

Relations between Chechnya and Russia were established in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the first Chechen embassy led by Shikh-Murza Okotsky arrived in Moscow in 1588. Records of early contacts between the Chechen people and Russia indicate mutual interest and desire to establish a strong and loyal alliance. Relations between Russia and Chechnya have not always been stable since then, mainly because the Caucasus, including Chechnya, lied in the zone of geopolitical interests of such major powers as Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, periods of peaceful cooperation and engagement were followed by military conflicts. Chechnya finally became part of Russia at the end of the Caucasian War in 1859. The Tsarist authorities valued the Chechens for their military courage. An elite Chechen regiment distinguished itself in the First World War.

The 1920s, after the Civil War, saw a significant increase in human development in Chechnya. According to the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 0.8% of Chechens were literate in 1920, while by 1940 the figure had reached 85%.

The total number of Chechens in the USSR was rising throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1926 to 1989, it tripled from 319,000 to 958,000.

According to the 2010 census, 1.43 million Chechens lived in the Russian Federation, including 1.2 million in the Chechen Republic, 94,000 in the Republic of Dagestan, 19,000 in Ingushetia and 15,000 in Moscow.

As of 2010, Chechens also lived in Turkey (estimates range from 70,000 to 102,000), Kazakhstan (35,000), Austria (24,000), Belgium (17,000), Germany (12,000), Georgia (10,000), Iraq (10,000) and other countries.

The Chechen Republic is located in the northeastern part of the Caucasus,



Grozny-  
City

occupying the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountain range and the adjacent plain. It is part of the North Caucasus Federal District of the Russian Federation. It is bordered by Stavropol Krai in the north, the Republic of Ingushetia in the west, the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania in the northwest, and the Republic of Dagestan in the east. The southern border of the Chechen Republic with Georgia is the state border of the Russian Federation.

Like many subjects of the Russian Federation and Russia as a whole, the Chechen Republic went through several stages in its development.

In 1922, the Chechen Autonomous Oblast was established as part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the largest republic within the USSR. In 1934, Chechnya and Ingushetia, whose titular ethnic groups are related and can understand each other's languages well, were merged to form the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Oblast, which in 1936 was transformed into the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (CIASSR) within the RSFSR.

In 1944, the Chechen and Ingush peoples were completely exiled to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the CIASSR was dissolved. It was reestablished in 1957.

In November 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the CIASSR adopted the Declaration on State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, which at that time had an area of 19,300 square km.

In 1992, the Chechen-Ingush Republic was divided into two independent republics within the Russian Federation – the Chechen Republic (16,200 square km) and the Republic of Ingushetia (3,600 square km).

The declaration of sovereignty by the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and attempts to secede from the Russian Federation resulted in two wars that devastated Chechnya. The Russian army's efforts to restore constitutional order in 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 almost completely destroyed the region's infrastructure, causing a significant outflow of population, especially of non-Chechens. As a result, the republic became almost monoethnic. A large number of Chechens migrated to other regions of the Russian Federation as well as to Western Europe, Turkey and Arab countries.

According to the last USSR census of 1989, the population of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic was 1.27 million. At that time, it was inhabited by more than 60 peoples, native speakers of various languages, including 735,000 Chechens (58%), 294,000 Russians (23%), 164,000

Isaev  
Local Lore  
Museum,  
Itum-Kali



Dondi Yurt  
Ethnological  
Museum



Ingush (13%), 15,000 Armenians (1.2%), 13,000 Ukrainians (1%), and 77,000 Georgians, Laks, Lezgins, Adygeans, Abaza, Abkhazians, Avars, Dargins, Cherkess and others (3.8%).

The 2010 census showed a completely different ethnic picture of the Chechen Republic, with 1.21 million Chechens (95%), 24,400 Russians (2%), and other ethnicities (2%), including the Ingush (0.1%).

The 2000s saw the reconstruction of the republic, that had suffered greatly from the two wars. The infrastructure was rapidly modernized, seeing the construction of new state-of-the-art facilities in line with high international standards, including in the field of culture, science, school and university education. The Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic has been reestablished (only four out of 85 subjects of the Russian Federation are allowed to have their own academy of sciences). The Integrated Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences was opened in Grozny, the republic's capital with a population of 325,000. Grozny itself has once again become one of the most beautiful Russian cities.



Amani  
Kadyrova  
Mosque,  
Argun



Traditional  
Chechen  
costumes

## Language and writing

The Chechen language belongs to the Nakh (Nakh-Dagestani) group of the Caucasian (Iberian-Caucasian) language family and is closely related to Ingush. Ancient Uartian-Hurrian-Nakh linguistic kinship is more and more widely discussed in the scholarly literature. However, the present state of research into that kinship makes it impossible to assume with certainty that the Uartian cuneiform (11<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) is the ancient writing of the Nakh (that is, Chechens, the Ingush and the Batsbi), although certain prominent scholars assume that the Hurrian-Uartian language is related to the Nakh-Dagestani languages.

Written signs, ornaments and drawings on towers, tombs, etc. in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia testify to the presence of ideographic and pictographic writing in the past.

The writing of the contemporary Chechen language changed its base three times over a historically short period (slightly over a century and a half).

Arguably the first Chechen alphabet book was published in Tiflis (present-day Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia) in 1862, and had a Cyrillic alphabet base.

Delegation of  
the Russian  
UNESCO IFAP  
Committee  
at the  
monument  
to the  
Chechen  
language



The Chechen alphabet based on Arabic script was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and stayed in use until 1925. It was replaced with a Latin-based alphabet, which was mainly used until 1938, when the present day Chechen alphabet was created, again based on the Cyrillic alphabet. It has 49 letters and is fairly intricate, which complicates learning Chechen in the school system. For instance, there are 15 digraphs (rl, kl, kb, kx, xb, ab, etc.), which represent specifically Chechen sounds absent in the Russian language, while the same characters represent different sounds when used separately.

Vowel length/shortness, while being a phonematic feature of the Chechen language, is not indicated in the phonetic system. The alphabet also includes the letters *vi, φ, u, ë*, which can be found only in loanwords. There are no corresponding sounds in the Chechen language.

## Current language situation

The majority of Chechens live in rural areas (76.5% in the 1980s, 63% in 2021) and predominantly in a monolingual environment, which determines the high degree of Chechen language preservation. Almost all Chechens (over 99%, according to 1989 and 2010 censuses) consider Chechen their mother tongue and have a good command of it. A Decree by the President of the Chechen Republic established the Chechen Language Day (April 25).

At the same time, the level of fluency in Russian is high (73.4%). Like in Soviet times, interethnic communication takes place in Russian.

The Chechen Republic is currently making significant efforts to preserve and develop the Chechen language in the context of globalization on all major tracks:

- in the government policies of the Chechen Republic;
- in the education system, which addresses this goal at all levels (preschool, school, tertiary education);
- in science, which focuses on studying the Chechen language and publishing works in this area;
- in culture (theatres, libraries, museums);
- in the media.

## Legislation, administration, judicial procedures

The republic recognizes Chechen and Russian as state languages. The Russian language is functionally the first language in line with its official state status.

Laws of the Chechen Republic, decrees by the Head of the Republic, Government decrees are drafted and adopted in Russian, and then translated into Chechen. Records are kept in the Russian language, while Chechen is partly used in oral communication. Judicial proceedings are also conducted in Russian. Indictments can be translated into Chechen at the request of the parties. Interpreters can take part in the proceedings if necessary.

## The Chechen language in everyday communication

Unlike in 1980s, Chechen intellectuals today actively communicate in their mother tongue and seek to master its written form. Lack of fluency in Chechen is frowned upon.

Chechen and Arabic are used in religion, which plays a major role in Chechnya (Chechens are Muslims).

The choice of language in family relations is mostly determined by the monoethnic composition of families, partly by social and educational background. Young people communicate with adults, especially with elderly family members, in Chechen. Due to the small number of mixed marriages, there are no recorded cases of Russian being the only language of family communication.



Akhmad Kadyrov ("The Heart of Chechnya") Mosque, Grozny

However, as a result of the mass use of Russian and minimal use of Chechen in all written spheres, Chechens tend to increasingly incorporate foreign language words, mainly Russian and West-European, into their oral communication. There is a pronounced tendency to replace Chechen numerals with Russian ones. The Chechen language has a vigesimal numeral system, while the Russian has a decimal one.

## Education

There are 470 *preschools*, with more than 84,000 children in 2021. In kindergartens, Russian and Chechen languages are used in roughly equal proportions. At preschool events translation from Chechen into Russian and vice versa is provided for children. In 2021, 300 preschool teachers took Chechen language courses.

In the *school system*, there are 496 schools, with a total enrolment of 300,000 pupils in 2021/2022 academic year. Schools used to devote eight hours a week to the Chechen language and literature in the early 2000s, but later that amount was reduced to three hours. At present, the Chechen language and literature are taught for five hours a week in all grades (three hours are devoted to the language and two hours cover literature). There are no classes or schools teaching entirely in Chechen in the republic.

The Chechen language was not taught in schools in Grozny (which used to be one of the most multiethnic cities in the Soviet Union) until the late 1980s.

Kadyrov  
Chechen  
State  
University



As for **secondary vocational education**, the Chechen language is used in the Grozny and Gudermes pedagogical colleges that train future Chechen language and literature schoolteachers. There, Chechen philology (the Chechen language, literature and folklore) is taught in Chechen, while other disciplines are taught in Russian. The other 15 secondary vocational institutions offer five hours of the Chechen language a week.

As for **higher education**, there are four universities in the Chechen Republic: Kadyrov Chechen State University (CSU), Chechen State Pedagogical University (CSPU), Grozny State Oil Technical University (GSOTU) and Kunta Haji Islamic University.

The CSU and CSPU offer majors in *Chechen language and literature*. The CSU Department of Philology offers the following two programmes: *Russian language and literature*, *Chechen language and literature* and *English language, Chechen language and literature*. The Chechen philology course as part of the *Chechen language and literature* programme is taught in Chechen, while the other courses are taught in Russian. Other departments offer 108 hours of the Chechen language, including 36 hours of classwork and 72 hours of self-study.

The CSPU also offers bachelor's degrees in *Chechen language and literature*; *Chechen language and literature and Russian language*; *Chechen language and English language*. The CSPU also only offers Chechen-language courses in Chechen philology.

The Kunta Haji Islamic University teaches Chechen as a separate subject, while at the GSOTU it is an elective course.

## Science

Science has contributed much to the preservation and development of the Chechen language. The main recent scientific achievements include the following:

- creation of a Chechen Language Development Programme at the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic;
- establishment of the Chechen Language Institute under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Chechen Republic in 2021;
- issue of a new reformed *Code of Basic Spelling Rules for the Chechen Language* by the Expert Council for Chechen Language Preservation and Development. It is a partially revised and supplemented version of the Chechen spelling norms developed in 1958. The new spelling rules, approved by a decree of the Chechen President in 2020, will be gradually introduced as coursebooks and reference books are reprinted.
- preparation and publication of a *Great Spelling Dictionary of the Chechen Language* in 10 volumes (2021), featuring 140,000 words and over 1 million word forms. The dictionary's volume is over 1,000 author's sheets;

- publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> volume of a three-volume *Chechen Grammar*;
- preparation and publication of Chechen language textbooks for schools, based on the new Russian State Educational Standards (2017–2019). Chechen schools have introduced a General State Examination in the Chechen language for Chechen students graduating from the ninth grade. A Unified State Exam in Chechen language and literature is to be introduced;
- grants issued by the Chechen State University to prepare and publish Chechen language textbooks for universities (2021);
- successful introduction of the Chechen language into information technologies by the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic.

Both the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic and the Integrated Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences have departments of language and literature.

In the 2000s, more dictionaries were published than in the entire Soviet period. These include *Explanatory Dictionary of Chechen Phraseology*, *Spelling Dictionary of the Chechen Language*, *Chechen-Russian Atlas of Human Anatomy*, *Latin-Russian-Chechen Terminological Dictionary*, *Dictionary of Literary Terms of the Chechen Language*, *Etymological Dictionary of the Chechen Language*, *Dictionary of Linguistic Terms of the Chechen Language*, *Russian-Chechen Glossary of Sports Terms and Word Combinations*, *Dictionary of Anglicisms Borrowed by the Chechen Language*, *Russian-Chechen Dictionary*, *Chechen-Russian Phraseological Dictionary*, *Chechen-French-Russian Phraseological Dictionary*, *Synonymic Paradigm Dictionary of the Chechen Language*, etc.

Russian has been the main language of science in the republic. The use of the Chechen language has been limited. As of 1980, the share of Chechens and Ingush in the republic's research and design institutes and institutions of higher education was a meagre 14%. The main research institution with predominantly Chechen and Ingush staff (about 40 people) was the Chechen-Ingush Research Institute



Participants of the interregional conference "Preservation and Development of Native Languages in a Multiethnic State: Language Policy, Problems and Prospects"

of History, Sociology and Philology (formerly called the Research Institute of Language and Literature).

In the Soviet Union, all scholarly publications including Chechen linguistics and literature studies were prepared and published in Russian. Chechen language and literature textbooks for professors and students of the Chechen-Ingush Philological Faculty of the Chechen-Ingush State University majoring in *Russian language and literature*, *Chechen language and literature* were prepared in the Chechen language. The publication of this literature was limited by Soviet standards in terms of both number of editions and copies printed.

The Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic now publishes a quarterly academic journal *Tallam (Research)* in the Chechen language, with articles primarily on Chechen linguistics and history. Articles on the Chechen language and literature (in Chechen) are also published in the regular editions of the *Herald of the Chechen State University*, the *Proceedings of the Chechen State University*, and in the *Herald of the Chechen Language Institute* (1 issue a year). There are few monographic studies in the Chechen language.

More than 30 candidate theses and several doctoral theses were written on Chechen linguistics and literary studies in the 2000s. From 2005 to 2012, the Chechen State University had a dissertation council on doctoral theses upon Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation – Caucasian Languages (including Chechen). In December 2020, a doctoral dissertation council was opened at this university on Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation and Literature of the Peoples of the Russian Federation. This council is authorized to accept dissertations on Chechen linguistics and literary studies.

## Theatre

Currently there are six theatres in the Chechen Republic – the Chechen State Drama Theatre named after Hero of the Soviet Union Khanpasha Nuradilov, the Lermontov Russian Drama Theatre, the Youth Theatre, and three municipal theatres in the cities of Urus-Martan, Shali and Achkhoy-Martan.

The Chechen drama, which emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the development of national theatre made a tremendous impact on improving Chechen culture, shaping literary norms of the Chechen language, developing its literary style and preserving public interest for it.

Lermontov  
Russian  
Drama  
Theatre



Chechen-language translations of Russian and world classics and works by authors from other Soviet republics (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belorussia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, etc.) and the RSFSR autonomous republics (Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, etc.) contributed to the development of the still young written Chechen language. Plays by Lope de Vega (*The Sheep's Well*), Carlo Goldoni (*The*

*Servant of Two Masters*), Jean-Baptiste Molière (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*), Vladimir Bill-Belotserkovsky (*The Storm*), Nikolai Gogol (*The Marriage*), Friedrich Schiller (*Love and Intrigue*), Boris Gamrekeli and Georgy Nakhutsrishvili (*The Adventures of Brave Kikila*) and others were translated into Chechen in the 1930s.

Translations (mainly from Russian) increased the vocabulary of the Chechen language, prompted the development of its terminological system and literary styles, and led to the increase in loanwords from other languages. In the Soviet period, this process was marked by mutual enrichment of the languages of the Soviet Union.

The theatre's current repertoire mostly consists of Russian and world classics, along with Chechen playwrights' works. Chechen-language productions at the National Theatre include plays by William Shakespeare (*Richard III* and *Othello*), Garcia Lorca (*Blood Wedding*), Alexander Pushkin (*A Feast in Time of Plague*), Pierre Corneille (*Le Cid*), Jean-Baptiste Molière (*The Imaginary Invalid*), Carlo Goldoni (*The Innkeeper*, *The Servant of Two Masters*), Konstantin Trenev (*Ljubov Yarovaya*), Vsevolod Vishnevsky (*An Optimistic Tragedy*), Maxim Gorky (*The Lower Depths*) and other authors.

All Chechen-language plays are staged with a Russian translation, and Russian-language plays are translated into Chechen.

The Russian Drama Theatre produces plays mostly in Russian but some of its plays are in Chechen.

The Youth Theatre has both Chechen-language and Russian-language repertory company.

Municipal theatres produce up to 80% of their plays in the Chechen language.

## Mass media

In the Soviet period, the republic's newspapers were published in three languages: Russian, Chechen and Ingush.

In the 1980s, there were 4 republican and 14 district newspapers, several newspapers of large circulation, as well as two literary almanacs in Chechen and Ingush.

At that time, Chechen-language newspapers were published in 44,500 copies per issue, with an annual circulation of about 6.9 million copies and 1,560 issues per year.

The single print run of the local press in the 1980s was around 260,000 copies.

An average of 90 minutes a day was given to radio stations to broadcast in the Chechen language, while the All-Union Radio took the majority of airtime.

The Chechen-Ingush Television broadcast programmes in Chechen for 20-25 minutes a day (about 11 hours a month). The majority of airtime was devoted to the All-Union Radio and the Central Television that broadcast their programmes in Russian, language of interethnic communication.

Today, Chechen media, especially television, broadcast widely in the Chechen language: 24 programmes a week by the Chechen State Television and Grozny Radio Company, 23 by Radio Grozny, seven by the Put' Television and Radio Company named after Akhmat Kadyrov, 12 by Radio Put' named after Akhmat Kadyrov, 11 by Vainakh State Television and Radio Company and four by Radio Vainakh. Broadcasts in the Chechen language total 30 hours and 25 minutes a week.

The *Daimokhk* republican newspaper comes out twice a week with a circulation of 2,000 copies. The State Autonomous Enterprise Izdatelsky Dom publishes the *Orga* literary magazine with a quarterly circulation of 180 copies, and the children's magazine *Stelayad (Rainbow)* with the same print run. The total annual circulation of publications is 2014 copies.

## Literature and publishing

Alongside Chechen theatre, literature in the Chechen language, including poetry, prose and drama, has played an important role in the development of Chechen culture and has been a major part of the Chechen spiritual life.

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a systematic decrease in book publishing in Chechen and Ingush, which was an alarming sign of these languages' role diminishing. In 1940, 154 books and booklets with a total circulation of 673,000 copies were published in Chechen and Ingush, while the year 1980 saw merely 37 titles come out with a total circulation of 186,000.

At the initiative of the Chechen Writers' Union a number of works were published and republished in Chechen in the 2000s. The Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic published works by prominent Chechen authors and poets as part of the *Spiritual Heritage* series. The Chechen Academy of Sciences also published eight volumes of Chechen folklore in the 2000s.

The Chechen Writers' Union currently publishes works in three areas: Chechen literature classics, modern literature and children's literature. Up to 30 books come out annually, approximately 70% of them in Chechen. The average book circulation is 500–1000 copies.

## Libraries

In the 1980s, the total book stock of the republic's libraries, including technical and specialized (ministerial) libraries, amounted to more than 10 million copies of books and magazines (half of them were located in rural areas). Almost all literature was in Russian. The share of books in Chechen and Ingush was insignificant.

Almost all libraries were destroyed during the war in the 1990s, along with public and private archives. There are now 266 libraries in the republic, and their stocks are gradually being replenished, with over 2 million books now available.

The National Library of the Chechen Republic is one of the largest, most beautiful, and modern libraries in the Russian Federation. Shaped as an open book and located next to the Theatre and Concert Hall and the National Museum, the library is a veritable gem of the republic's capital.

National Library of the Chechen Republic



Evgeny Kuzmin, Chair,  
Russian UNESCO IFAP  
Committee; President,  
Interregional Library  
Cooperation Centre



Plenary session of the  
interregional conference  
“Preservation and  
Development of Native  
Languages in a Multiethnic  
State: Language Policy,  
Problems and Prospects”

Shakhrudin Gapurov,  
President, Chechen  
Academy of Sciences,  
Bekhan Khasbulatov,  
Vice-President of  
Parliament of the  
Chechen Republic,  
Musa Ovkhadov,  
Professor, Chechen  
State University



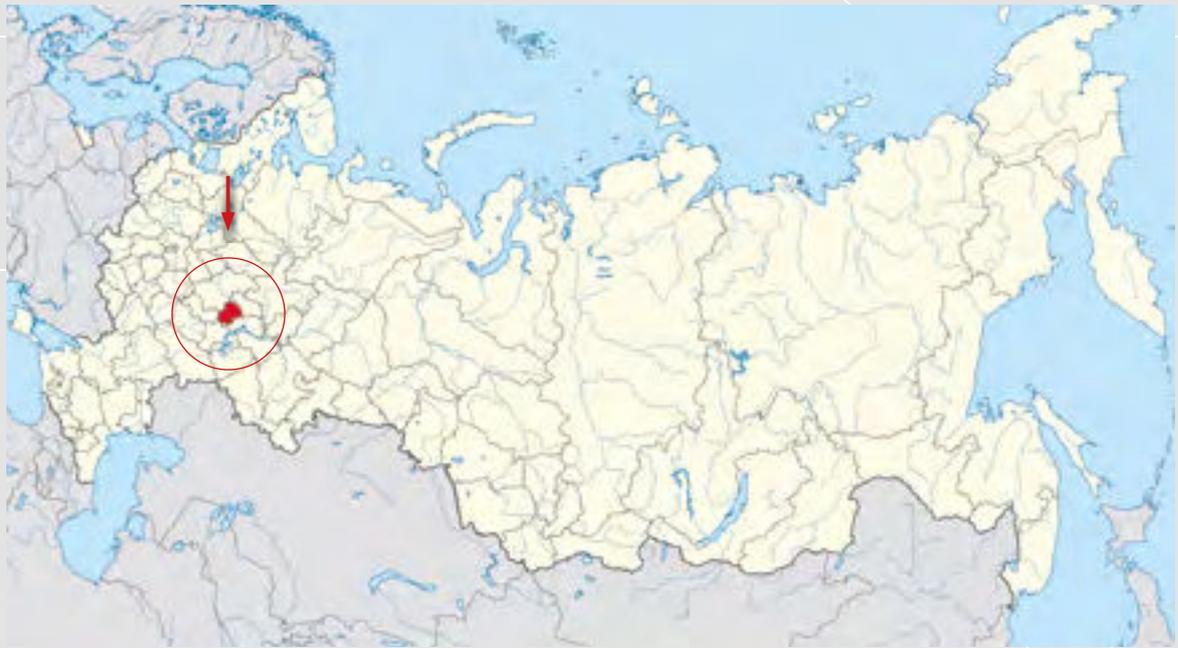
Conference  
participants



Satsita  
Israilova,  
Director,  
National  
Library  
of the  
Chechen  
Republic



# Chuvash Republic



**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

## **The Role of the State and Civil Society Institutions in Preserving the Chuvash Language**

**(October 22–23, 2020, Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic)**

### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Chuvash State Institute for the Humanities
- Chuvash Republican Institute of Education
- National Library of the Chuvash Republic

# THE CHUVASH LANGUAGE IN A CHANGING WORLD: PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES



**Alevtina DOLGOVA**  
Chief Researcher, Chuvash State  
Humanities Institute

Today, the linguistic situation differs greatly across various Russian regions, each facing specific problems. The common issue, however, is a rapid and noticeable decline, or at least a trend towards a decrease in the interest and motivation to learn native languages of the peoples of Russia, both minority and larger ones. In a rampantly changing world, it is getting more and more difficult for the so-called small languages to maintain attractiveness for their native speakers.

## Language policy implementation in the Chuvash Republic

According to the 2010 All-Russian Census, in the Russian Federation ethnic Chuvash make up 1.05% of the number of respondents who indicated their nationality. Most of them live in the Chuvash Republic (Chuvashia). There are Chuvash communities in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, in the Ulyanovsk, Penza, Saratov, Samara and Orenburg regions.

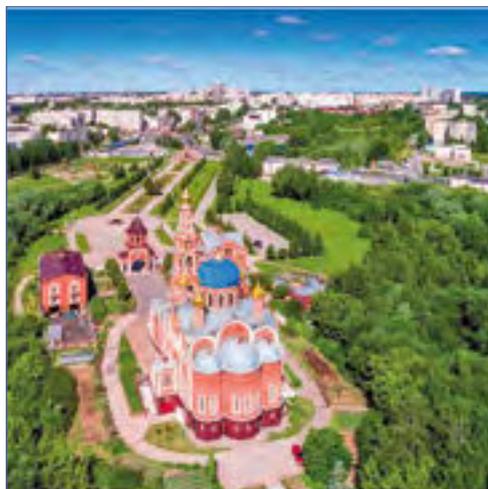
The population dynamics of the Chuvash people reached its peak in 1989 (1.84 people in the Soviet Union, 1,77 million – in the RSFSR, over 906,900 in the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which is 49.2% of all Chuvash covered by the 1989 census). According to the 2002 census, about 1.64 million people in Russia identified themselves as Chuvash, of which 889,268 (54.3%) lived in Chuvashia. Eight years later this number decreased by over 200,000 people in Russia, and by about 75,000 in the Chuvash Republic itself.

According to the last census (2010), the Chuvash make up the majority in Chuvashia – 65.09%, followed by Russians (25.83%), Tatars (2.73%), and Mordvins (1.04%). Other nationalities and people who have not indicated their nationality make up 5.3% of the Chuvash population. In 2010, the



Volga  
River  
landscape

Cathedral of  
Saint Vladimir,  
Novocheboksarsk



Chuvash language was spoken by about 1 million people, of which 987,483 identified themselves as Chuvash. As demonstrated by the 2010 Census, the Chuvash language was spoken by slightly less than 70% of the Chuvash (while in 1989, 85% considered it to be their native language). 98.6% of the Chuvash indicated their proficiency in Russian.

These data alone are sufficient to prove that the Chuvash-speaking space is shrinking.

The state's efforts to support Russia's native languages include carrying on a targeted language policy, focused mainly

on the adoption of proper legislative acts and ensuring their implementation. Thus, Russian legislation gives the right to development to all languages of the peoples of Russia, providing appropriate conditions. Article 68 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation in its Part 3 indicates that the Russian Federation guarantees to all its peoples the right to preserve their native languages and creates conditions for their study and development.

The Constitution of the Chuvash Republic, adopted in 2000, also pays certain attention to languages. In 1990, the *Law On Languages in the Chuvash Republic* was adopted (in this regard, Chuvashia was a pioneer Russian region). The current edition of the law replaced the previous one in 2003.

Three years after the adoption of the first law, the State Programme for its implementation was elaborated for 1993–2000 and subsequent years. In 2002, it gave place to the *Republican Programme for the Implementation of the Law On Languages in the Chuvash Republic for 2003–2007 and for the Period up to 2012*, followed by the Republican Programme for 2013–2020, adopted in September 2012 and canceled about a year later, on December 27, 2013. Literally two days later, almost all the activities of the third programme were included in the *State Programme of the Chuvash Republic for the Development of Culture and Tourism for 2014–2020* as one of its subprogrammes. Four years later, at the end of 2018, a new *State Programme of the Chuvash Republic for the Development of Culture and Tourism for 2019–2035* was approved, which includes three stages, the first one covering the time period for up to 2025.

The current programme consists of several subprogrammes. One of them, *Strengthening the Unity of the Russian Nation and the Ethnocultural Development of the Peoples of the Chuvash Republic*, in turn, lists seven key activities, including the implementation of the *Law On Languages in the Chuvash Republic* and intensifying the scientific study of the Chuvash language, literature and folklore. These activities are aimed at further developing the Chuvash language and ensuring its functioning as the state language of the Chuvash Republic.

The Programme's advantage is its focus on the scientific study of the Chuvash language, on ensuring the functioning of languages in the education system (creating conditions, training qualified teachers and developing learning and teaching support kits), holding conferences and other events to enhance the interest of

researchers and the public in the cultural heritage of the Chuvash people, including language, and to popularize research in this area. The catch is that the funding for the implementation of all these activities is rather moderate.

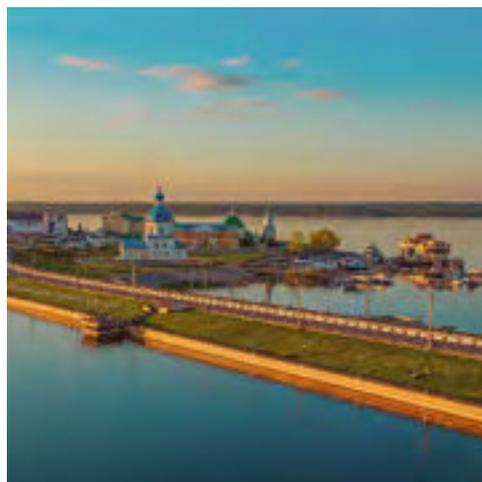
Since the spring of 2020, the *State Programme of the Chuvash Republic for the Preservation, Study and Development of the Chuvash Language* has been underway. The main part had been mapped out by the Ministry of Education and Youth Policy of the republic together with its subordinate organization – the Chuvash Republican Institute of Education. However, by the time the version finalized by the Ministry of Culture, National Relations and Archival Affairs of Chuvashia was brought up for public discussion, this document again had turned into the Subprogramme *On Preservation, Study and Development of the Chuvash Language* of the *Republican Programme On the Development of Culture and Tourism*. The project was discussed at a round table with representatives of government agencies, the academic community, cultural figures, public organizations, journalists, etc. in August 2020, and at a session of the Republic’s Government in December 2020.

Government programmes are an important tool for public administration. Translating the intentions set forth in such programmes into reality, while attracting funds from budgets of various levels, is a factor of control in various areas of activity (economic, sociocultural, etc.). Regrettably, the activities planned within these programmes are often mindlessly transferred from previous editions to the new ones, without real financial support, even if it is declared in the plans. In some cases, assistance and control from government agencies is limited to demanding reports from subordinate organizations on the activities performed.

The most noticeable efforts by the state to support languages in the Chuvash Republic are aimed at the adoption and implementation of state, regional, national, republican, municipal and other programmes. However, there are other forms of state participation in the activities to implement language policy.

In Chuvashia, these include support for education in the native language at primary schools, preparation of educational materials on the Chuvash language and literature, training educators and specialists in the field of culture, support for scientific research, cultural institutions, publication of socially significant literature, including fiction, etc.

Today, two agencies deal with the issues related to the Chuvash language. The main tasks of the Chuvash Ministry of Culture, Nationalities and Archival Affairs include “creating conditions for the preservation of unique identity and for the development of culture of the Chuvash people and other peoples living in the Chuvash Republic<sup>3</sup>”. It is under this agency that the Council for Interethnic and Interfaith Relations was established. The second agency is the Ministry of Education and Youth



Volga River  
bank in  
Cheboksary

<sup>3</sup> Statute of the Ministry of Culture, Nationalities and Archival Affairs of the Chuvash Republic: <http://culture.cap.ru/about/info/polozhenie-o-ministerstve>.

Office of the  
Head of the  
Republic of  
Chuvashia



Policy of the Chuvash Republic. According to the Ministry's statute, it facilitates "conducting state final examinations in the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation and the literature of the peoples of Russia in their native languages for basic and secondary general education; creating conditions for learning and teaching Chuvash and Russian as the state languages of the Chuvash Republic, and the languages of the peoples compactly living in the Chuvash Republic"<sup>4</sup>.

To a certain extent, the fate of the Chuvash language is determined not only by regional, but also by federal authorities. Their contribution to the

preservation of languages includes creating federal-level structures in 2019–2020, such as the Foundation for the Preservation and Study of Russia's Native Languages and the Institute for the Development of the Native Languages of the Peoples of Russia (which is now subordinate to the Centre for the Implementation of State Educational Policy and Information Technologies, but, hopefully, will turn into an independent scientific, and, possibly, educational institution); adopting the Concept of Teaching Russia's Native Languages and a plan for its implementation, as well as a departmental target programme on research, methodological, instructional and staffing support for teaching Russian and other languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, and much more.

Unfortunately, not all plans are put into action. When the results are weak, "impressive" reports do not make the challenge less pressing.

## The level of prestige of the Chuvash language and the motivation to learn it

In the above sections, we proposed a brief description of several aspects of government activities aimed at preserving languages in the rapidly changing modern world. Traditional culture, including the languages of many peoples, is destroyed by globalisation, urbanisation, unification, various innovation and modernisation processes, value change, etc. In this context, support by the state is of vital importance.

Government efforts, however, are not enough. The community of speakers in general and its every member should strive to preserve their language not only in books, archives, video and audio recordings, but also as a functional element of life, to transmit it to their offsprings, to actively communicate in this language, to protect and develop it.

<sup>4</sup> Statute of the Ministry of Education and Youth Policy of the Chuvash Republic: <http://obrazov.cap.ru/about/info/>.

According to our observations and the data of numerous polls, the population of Chuvashia in general shows a positive attitude towards the Chuvash language. This is confirmed, for example, by the sociologists of the Chuvash State Institute for the Humanities, who have been conducting annual monitoring of ethno-cultural development and interethnic relations in the Chuvash Republic for more than ten years, with a special focus on languages, as well as by surveys of other sociologists aimed at direct study of the linguistic situation. Our data shows that most of the Chuvash claim that they want (or at least do not mind) their children to know the language of their people (i.e. be able to speak it, and often also read and write in it). But this desire is not always converted into efforts to translate it into everyday life. While knowledge of the Chuvash language, which is a minority one on the national scale, is regarded by parents as an option, a good command of Russian as the dominant language is a must. Thus, the ethnic language loses this struggle.

Some parents still deem it a top priority for children to acquire the language necessary for their studies, for mastering a profession, for employment and career development. Recently, the number of such parents has been growing in rural areas, and in particular in native Chuvash villages which are almost monoethnic.

Much has been said and written about the advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism. However, this information seems to reach only the expert community and a small number of activists. It is still widely believed that abandoning one's ethnic language is the only way to achieve a good mastery of Russian.

Even those versed in language issues do not always strive to put efforts to teach children their native language in the family. Quite often parents, especially if they are young, think: "Chuvash is taught at school, my child will learn it there". Or: "Who needs this Chuvash, if it has very




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Traditional  
Chuvash  
costumes  
and crafts

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few speakers”? Or: “What’s the use of wasting time if I will not need this language anyway, everyone around understands Russian and speaks Russian,” and so on.

Nowadays, attempts to promote the Chuvash language by emphasizing its symbolic function seem to come almost to nothing. It is no longer enough to remind that Chuvash is a unique ancient language cherished and brought to us by our ancestors through the millennia, or that it is the language of a people with a rich priceless culture and phenomenal history, etc. It used to have an effect at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s. And even though it still might work to some extent, this is obviously not enough.

It is difficult to convince a native speaker to pass on their language to children just for the sake of language preservation. This has become especially evident in the last two or three years in light of changes to legislation regarding the choice of language as a subject of study or language of instruction. In order to exercise the right to choose one’s native language as a subject of study for their child, parents write an application to the educational institution. This practice was introduced in 2017 and enacted in the summer of 2018 by Federal Law No. 317-FZ<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Chuvash Ministry of Education, while in the academic year 2017/2018, 84% of parents throughout the republic chose Chuvash to be taught to their children as *native language* and 14% of parents chose Russian, a year later Chuvash was chosen by about 55% of parents, and Russian – by 43.5% of parents. That is, in just one (!) academic year, Chuvashia saw a 30% decline in the number of children studying the subject *Native Chuvash language* within the compulsory curriculum.

It is evident that the time has come to pay closer attention to the pragmatic functions of minority languages. After all, language is primarily a means of communication and thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to remind more often that Chuvash is a living, developing, modern language with great potential, which can be used to communicate on a variety of topics. It is a language of modern culture, science and education. It is used in modern technologies and represented in the World Wide Web. Appropriate measures and efforts are required to take practical steps for the comprehensive functional development of the language.

Development of the utilitarian functions of a language increases the potential for raising, or at least maintaining the current level of younger generation’s motivation to master it. But what should be done to make the society understand this? And where can resources be found to extend the functionality of the language?

There is no ready-made solution. However, one thing is for certain: it is extremely important to engage both individuals and entire communities, public organizations of various types and with various lines of efforts and goals.

Chuvash National Choir in traditional costumes



<sup>5</sup> <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201808030079?index=0&rangeSize=1>.

## Civil society institutions supporting the Chuvash language

The Charter of the Assembly of the Peoples of Russia *On the Civil Rights of the Peoples of the Russian Federation*, adopted at its Second Congress in June 2000, states that the responsibility and obligation to ensure and protect human and peoples' inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms is shared by the state and civil society institutes<sup>6</sup>.

How should these civil institutes be determined? There is no consensus on the theoretical and methodological comprehension of the concept of “civil society” and the interpretation of its structure.

When it comes to Chuvashia, civil society institutes engaged to various extent in language processes include both organized and unorganized communities of workers of culture, science, public associations of various kinds (national and cultural autonomies, communities, foundations, creative unions, teacher associations, etc.), family, church, media and even individuals (and not only so-called language activists).

A brief overview of the main structures contributing to the preservation and development of the Chuvash language is provided below.



Night-time  
Cheboksary

Firstly, these are ethno-cultural public organizations existing in various forms, such as:

- Federal national autonomy of the Chuvash of Russia – Interregional public organization “Chuvash National Congress” (Moscow),
- Chuvash Republican Public Organization “Chuvash Public Cultural Centre”,
- Chuvash ethno-cultural associations in various constituent entities of the Russian Federation and foreign countries (according to the official website of the Ministry of Culture, Ethnic and Archival Affairs of the Chuvash Republic, there are **over 90** such organizations<sup>7</sup>),
- communities in Chuvashia’s districts.

They all contribute to the support of ethnic elements of spiritual culture, and in particular to enhancing the prestige of the Chuvash language. Such associations, whether large or small, focus mainly on cultural and educational activities – gathering musical groups (more often folklore), organizing various holidays, concerts and performances, providing assistance in the preparation and publication of books on the local lore, history, and culture. However, the potential of this form of work to preserve the Chuvash language still remains untapped.

<sup>6</sup> <http://xn--80aaadglf1chnmbxga3u.xn--p1ai/hartiya>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://culture.cap.ru/action/activity/obschestvennie-organizacii/obschestvennie-organizacii/chuvashskie-nacionaljno-kuljturnie-objedineniya-su>.

Another category of civil society institutes comprises communities of like-minded people interested in the preservation and development of the Chuvash language, which emerge mainly as youth associations:

- Hawal Association,
- Khastar Association under the Chuvash National Congress,
- Irukluh Chuvash society of national and cultural revival,
- People’s Khural of Chuvashia,
- other communities (some of these function only in social networks).

These groups, although united by the same goal, differ greatly from one another, especially in their methods of work – from quite constructive to provocative. Alexander Blinov, leader of the Hawal Association, expresses his position in the following way: “While some people limit themselves to criticizing officials and authorities for not doing anything to develop their native language, we go and do it ourselves. The attitude to the language cannot be changed in a day. Hawal is a school where people get charged with positive linguistic energy to bring it to the masses<sup>8</sup>”.

Another important actor is the media (both print and digital). On the one hand, the content they produce facilitates shaping the population’s interest in languages, on the other hand, they present Chuvash-language texts (written or oral) thus making a great contribution to the development of terminology and vocabulary in general.

A range of language development projects have enjoyed certain success in Chuvashia. The Chuvash National TV and Radio Company “Chävash En” and the Hawal Association have joined their efforts to launch an educational programme “Chävashla vērenetpur” (“We Learn Chuvash”) on “Chävash en” aimed at studying the Chuvash language (more than 30 TV lessons designed for children were first aired in 2016–2018). Another interesting project by Alexander Blinov, “Steps into Chuvash”, was implemented on the website of the Russian-language republican newspaper “Sovetskaya Chuvashia”<sup>9</sup> in 2018–2019 in the form of 30 separate lessons, a kind of “steps towards learning Chuvash”. Another project by Blinov is an express online 10-lesson course of the Chuvash language, available on the page of the Polygon Cultural Centre on VKontakte, Russian social network<sup>10</sup>.



Chuvash round dance



National Library of the Republic of Chuvashia

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.idelreal.org/a/30070912.html?fbclid=IwAR2f6zUP3P4k2DCRT5vM4qef3dzyK1DFytSnNiXD\\_6pB-JWShLBhSjnKfoyyw](https://www.idelreal.org/a/30070912.html?fbclid=IwAR2f6zUP3P4k2DCRT5vM4qef3dzyK1DFytSnNiXD_6pB-JWShLBhSjnKfoyyw).

<sup>9</sup> <http://sovch.chuvashia.com/?s=шаги+к+чувашскому>

<sup>10</sup> <https://vk.com/event193367832>.

The following organizations have also contributed to the Chuvash language development:

- *Suvar* Foundation for the Support of Chuvash National Culture,
- Konstantin Ivanov's Foundation for Historical and Cultural Research,
- *Suvar* Public Association,
- Union of Chuvash Local Lore Experts,
- Chuvash People's Academy of Sciences and Arts,
- *Tura* religious organization of the Chuvash traditional faith,
- Central Council of Elders of Chuvashia.

Almost all unions of creative workers of Chuvashia – writers, journalists, composers, stage performers, theatre workers – make efforts to preserve the Chuvash language, and these efforts pay off.

Religion as an important sphere of spiritual life is also worth noticing. Back then orthodoxy played a fundamental role in the formation of the modern literary Chuvash language. It was through the translation of religious texts that the language was perfected at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Currently, Chuvash is one of the few minority languages in which services are conducted in Russian orthodox churches, not only in Chuvashia, but also in other regions, including the Republic of Tatarstan, the Ulyanovsk and Samara Oblasts, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Communities that are not formally organized – scientific, teaching, artistic and others – also have the potential to influence public perception of a language. Sometimes one enthusiast can spark interest and gather a large group of people engaged with the problems of language and traditional culture, even if they differ in opinions on other issues.

It is hard to overemphasize the role of school teachers of the Chuvash language and literature. And even though not all of them are highly skilled professionals, some really do their utmost and get great results. We have to admit, however, that in recent years the level of school staffing has been gradually declining. It is triggered both by a reduction in the number of hours allocated for the lessons of the Chuvash language and literature, and a reduction in the number of students who want to master the native language of their parents. The methodology of teaching Chuvash raises a lot of criticism, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, although these reproaches are not always fair and sometimes sound amateurish. In this regard, we need to realize the following facts.



Saint Tatiana Church,  
Cheboksary

<sup>11</sup> <http://xn--80agbqqqs.xn--80asehdb/news/988>; <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/412123.html>; [http://svyat\\_duh73.cerkov.ru/main-page/istoriya](http://svyat_duh73.cerkov.ru/main-page/istoriya).

First of all, at school, the Chuvash language is taught to children with different background. Some of them (predominantly rural children) have learned Chuvash as their first language in the family and Chuvash dominates in their communication. Others get acquainted with the Chuvash language only at school, they do not speak it in the family or the parents do not want to teach their children their native language (this refers to school students in cities and most regional centres, which are large rural settlements). The methodology of teaching the Chuvash language to students who are new to the subject is still imperfect.

Secondly, it is desirable to preserve teaching the Chuvash language in schools as a truly native language, with a focus on in-depth knowledge, on mastering all the features of its sound, lexical and grammatical structure. Without such training school graduates will not be able to receive higher education in the field of the Chuvash language and literature. Consequently, there will be no hope for new poets, prose and playwrights, literary critics, journalists, linguists, etc., and thus, no hope for language development.

Chuvash language dictionaries



Chuvash Gymnasium



People involved in the popularization of the Chuvash language in cyberspace play a special part in language activities. In addition to the above-mentioned communities, including Haval (<https://cv-haval.org/>, [https://vk.com/chavash\\_media](https://vk.com/chavash_media)), Irukluh (<https://vk.com/irekleh>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/irekleh/>, <https://ok.ru/group/54447425781876/topics>), etc., there are many gifted individual activists, like Sergey Arseniev (<https://урокичувашского.рф>), Ksenia Romanova ([https://www.instagram.com/chuvash\\_piki/](https://www.instagram.com/chuvash_piki/)) and others.

A well-designed online course “Chuvash Language”<sup>12</sup> in Russian by the Faculty of Russian and Chuvash Philology and Journalism of the Ulyanov Chuvash State University has gained much popularity. The course intended both for university students and for individual learners of the Chuvash language consists of 12 lectures in Russian with basic linguistic information about the language, its dialects, writing, phonetic and grammatical structure, lexical composition, etc.

A prominent contributor to the

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.chuvsu.ru/obrazovanie/onlajn-i-distancionnye-kursy-chuvashskogo-gosuniversiteta/chuvashskij-yazyk/>.

promotion of Chuvash through modern information technologies is Nikolai Plotnikov. He is the organizer, leader and main executor of the Chuvash People's Site project (<https://www.chuvash.org/>), which has been up and running for 15 years. It is a multifunctional resource including a news page, a forum, a collection of electronic dictionaries, a library of fiction, and an electronic encyclopedia on the history and culture of Chuvashia and the Chuvash people with a huge database. Another interesting project is the Chuvash Language Laboratory, developing such resources as “e-Library”, “e-Dictionaries”, “Chuvash Terminology”, as well as a spellchecker for Chuvash-language texts and a bilingual corpus of the Chuvash language. Of course, there still remain a lot of problems to solve. Nikolai Plotnikov himself admits that there are shortcomings in his work, caused primarily by the lack of time and workers. All this, however, is compensated for by this resource's contribution to the promotion of the Chuvash culture, history, language and much more.



Chuvash  
State  
University

In order to ensure the depth and quality of scientific research on the lexical and grammatical system of the language and its changes, to provide a more rational and accessible way of teaching Chuvash, a national corpus of the Chuvash language is strongly required. Such a corpus should be created on a purely scientific basis through joint efforts of linguists, software specialists, organizations involved in publishing and preservation of texts in Chuvash. Unfortunately, such interaction has not been established yet.

## Prospects and possible solutions to the current challenges

In the above sections, a wide range of problems, parameters and actors was outlined having a certain impact on the processes of language preservation and development. State structures, public organizations, groups and individuals involved in such activities are rather numerous. However, it is getting more and more obvious that it is the family that should play the key role in language promotion, since family determines whether a language is transmitted from the elders to the young and the connection between generations is not interrupted.

In this regard, quite an existential question arises: will the Chuvash have enough inner mental strength, desire, energy and motivation to pass on their native language from generation to generation, to involve a broad audience, including the young, in its study, preservation and development? So far, no truly inspiring solution has been found.

Neither government regulation nor individual enthusiasm alone is enough. Efforts should be consolidated. Activities by workable initiative groups and individual enthusiasts should get more encouragement. Financial, legal, organizational, information support from relevant government agencies is required. In order to

fulfill the plans enshrined in government documents, it is necessary to keep on engage the public and the most active institutions. Applying a system of grants could also serve these purposes.

A good example of consolidation are the commissions on the Chuvash language, created by orders of various ministries, with the participation of government officials and representatives of academic and creative communities working on a volunteer basis. Another example is holding the All-Chuvash Dictation. This educational action gathers activists from many organizations – the Chuvash State Institute of Humanities, Chuvash Republican Institute of Education, Khypar Newspaper, Chuvash National Radio, Tavan Radio, Chuvash National Television, Chuvash State Pedagogical University, Chuvash State University, National Library of the Chuvash Republic.

Hopefully, Chuvash people will find opportunities to unite forces in order to survive in the rapidly changing world. There will be a chance to walk the talk and move from endless conversations about the value of native languages to practical steps that bring meaningful – albeit not breakthrough – results every day. We should take it seriously and act without a delay not to let Chuvash enter the list of languages requiring urgent revitalization.

Chuvash  
children folk  
ensemble  
“Sarmantey”



Savvaty, Metropolitan of Cheboksary and Chuvashia, Head of the Chuvash Metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church



Participants of the interregional conference "The Role of the State and Civil Society Institutions in Preserving the Chuvash Language"



Svetlana Starikova, Director, National Library of the Republic of Chuvashia (2002–2020)



Nikolai Plotnikov, Editor-in-Chief, Chuvash national site



Alexander Blinov, Executive Director, "Language for Success" Language School; Head, Khaval Association



## Republic of Ingushetia



Interregional scientific and practical conference

### **Preserving Native Language: Topical Issues of the Regional Language Policy**

(October 5–6, 2021, Magas – Sunzha – Nazran, Republic of Ingushetia)

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Ingushetia
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Yandiev National Library of the Republic of Ingushetia
- Akhriev Ingush Research Institute for the Humanities
- Ingush State University

# LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF INGUSHETIA



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## General information

The Republic of Ingushetia is a Russian region populated by the Ingush people.

It is the smallest administrative territorial unit within the Russian Federation. Its area amounts to merely 3.6 thousand square km (only three federal cities – Moscow, St. Petersburg and Sevastopol – are smaller). Yet, Ingushetia is one of the most densely populated regions of our country. With 165 residents per square kilometre, it ranks fifth in Russia (only the aforementioned cities and the Moscow Oblast have more).

Ingushetia is bordered by other republics of the Russian Federation, namely the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania and the Chechen Republic, in the west and the east, and Georgia in the south (this section of the republic's border is also part of the Russian state border).

Established in 1992, the Republic of Ingushetia is also one of the youngest constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

Ingushetia was first mentioned by Arab geographers in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The oldest archaeological monuments found on the territory of the republic date back to the first millennium B.C. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Ingushetia was penetrated by Islam, which finally consolidated itself here by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (pagan customs and rituals had persisted until then).

Ingushetia became part of the Russian Empire in 1770. In 1920, following the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, the Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed, comprising Ingushetia and Chechnya along with Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia. The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Oblast was established in 1934.

In 1944, during World War II, Chechens and the Ingush, alongside ten other peoples, were forcibly relocated to Siberia and Central Asia. On March 7, 1944, the Chechen-Ingush autonomy



Barkinkhoev  
Tower

Glory  
Memorial,  
Nazran



was disbanded. Most of Ingushetia became part of the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (North Ossetian ASSR) under the name of Prigorodny District.

In 1956, all deported peoples were allowed to return to their homelands. In 1957, their autonomies were restored, including the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1991, there was a nationwide Ingush referendum on restoration of Ingush statehood by means of creating the Ingush Republic within the Russian Soviet Federative

Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In 1992, after the collapse of the USSR, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was officially divided into the Ingush Republic and the Chechen Republic.

Since their return from deportation, the Ingush had been demanding the return of territory that had been administratively ceded to North Ossetia. In autumn 1992, an armed conflict broke out over territorial disputes. As a result, the old border was preserved, and almost the entire Ingush population of North Ossetia (slightly over 35,000, according to the 1989 official census) was forced to move to the newly formed Ingushetia (separated from Chechnya).

## Republic of Ingushetia: Ethnic composition and population distribution

The current ethnolinguistic situation in Ingushetia is the product of its socio-economic, historical, and demographic development.

In 1992, it had 194,000 people, in 1995 – 263,000, in 1998 – 296,000, in 2002 – 467,000. The population growth is explained by migration of the Ingush and Chechens related to hostilities in the Chechen Republic in the 1990s and the 1992 conflict in the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania. By 2010, the population had decreased by 55,000 due to outflows of both titular and non-titular ethnic groups returning to the Chechen Republic after the situation in the region was stabilized, as well as some Ingush deported during the 1992 events returning to their former places of residence. The outflow was compensated by an increase in the titular population due to an increased birth rate (Ingushetia shows the highest birth rate among all Russian regions), and the return of the Ingush from other regions of the Russian Federation and neighboring countries. As a result, the republic's population had reached 516,000 by 2021.

Ingushetia is essentially a mono-ethnic republic. The main ethnic group is the Ingush (in 2010, they accounted for 93.7% of the population). The region is also presently inhabited by small numbers of Chechens (4.6%), Russians (0.8%), and other peoples (Turks, Kumyks, Kists, Avars, Georgians, etc. – collectively less than 1%). Ingushetia currently has the smallest proportion of Russians in the Russian Federation.

The region's urban population growth has been driven by urbanization, new towns being created, or, more precisely, some urban settlements changing their status to

that of towns, as well as the construction of Magas, the capital of Ingushetia.

When the Ingush Republic was established in 1992, there were only two cities in the region, Nazran with a population of 19,400 and Malgobek with 20,800. Urban dwellers made up 27% of the republic's population and rural residents accounted for 73%. In 2002, the number of towns increased to four, the share of urban population stood at 42.5%, while the proportion of rural population decreased to 57.5%. In 2010, 38.3% of the population was urban and 61.7% was rural.

## The language situation in Ingushetia

The Ingush language (*зIагIагъ мотт* in Ingush) belongs to the Nakh group of East Caucasian languages of the Caucasian language family, within which it is the closest to the Chechen language. It is mainly spoken in the Republic of Ingushetia, and also, to a lesser extent, in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania.

The Ingush language has no distinct dialectal differentiation.

Literary Ingush has been in existence since the 1920s. Its first alphabet was created in 1921 on the basis of the Latin script. Before 1923, the written form of the Ingush language was based on Arabic (it was used mainly by clergy); from 1923 to 1938, it used the Latin alphabet, and in 1938, it was converted to the Russian graphic system. The modern Ingush alphabet is based on the Cyrillic script.

According to the all-Russian population censuses, there were 405,000 people who spoke Ingush in the Russian Federation in 2002, and 306,000 in 2010, which represents 0.2% of the country's total population.

In the Republic of Ingushetia 99.9% of the Ingush consider the Ingush language to be their native tongue. At the same time, virtually all Ingush (over 82% in 2010) can speak Russian and actively use it. The Russian population mostly speaks their native language only (only 10% of Russians spoke Ingush in 2010).

At present, Ingush-Russian bilingualism is common in the republic, but one can assume that the situation will change before long. Even today children in Ingush families are learning Russian as their first language and begin to learn Ingush at school, making a lot of mistakes due to the influence of the Russian language.

The Russian language began to spread widely in Ingushetia in the late 19<sup>th</sup>



Ingush national costumes



Traditional carpet makers

Mosque in  
the city of  
Sunzha



century, when the Russian Empire started to actively develop the lands of the North Caucasus, settle these territories, including Ingushetia, with the Russian-speaking population, and open schools that taught in Russian.

According to the 1926 census, a total of 76,700 people lived in Ingushetia, 61.6% of them were the Ingush and 31.5% were Russians. By 2010, the Ingush population in the Republic had increased eightfold, while the Russian population had decreased by 7.5 times. While Russians had become a very distinct ethnic minority, the influence of the Russian language not only remained, but increased. It became possible, in our opinion, due to the fact that during the Soviet rule the dominance of the Russian language was preserved, and this manifested itself primarily in school teaching. Even today virtually all subjects in all schools of the republic are taught in Russian. As a result, Russian became the home language – initially, for children, and now for adults as well. This is one of the main reasons behind the language imbalance in Ingushetia, where the Ingush language is seen as being of little use in society. In 2002, 97% of the Ingush population spoke the Ingush language, whereas in 2010 this number dropped to 67.5%.

Currently there is a certain surge of interest among the Ingush for their native language and culture, which is manifested in their desire to learn and speak their language.

## Language use in regulated spheres of communication

### *Legislative, administrative and economic activities*

According to the 1996 Law of the Republic of Ingushetia *On the State Languages of the Republic of Ingushetia*, the Ingush and Russian languages enjoy the status of state languages in the republic, and are used in both government activities

and social life. However, the extent to which these languages are used varies: functionally, the Russian language is dominant, and it also serves as a language of inter-ethnic communication. The Ingush language as a state language is a symbol of the republic's statehood.

All regulatory acts of the Republic of Ingushetia can be published in both Russian and Ingush, but de facto they are both drafted and published in Russian. In 2009, the Constitution of the Republic of Ingushetia was translated into and published in the Ingush language.

According to the law on state languages, the Ingush language is permitted for administrative use, but it is barely used, except in private communication. Records are kept exclusively in Russian.

Almost all road signs and names of settlements are given in both Russian and Ingush, as well as the names of mountainous Ingush architectural monuments and archaeological sites.

The Ingush language has limited use in court proceedings, industrial production, agriculture, trade, and services. It is mostly used by individuals in private discourse.



Magas  
cityscape

## *Education and science*

In the Republic of Ingushetia education is regulated by the republic's *Law on Education*. It clearly stipulates that the Ingush language is taught and studied in state and municipal educational organizations located within the Republic of Ingushetia in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Ingushetia, while the Ingush and Russian languages, being the state languages of the republic, are studied equally under federal state educational standards applicable to the corresponding level of general education. Citizens of the republic have the right to freely choose the language of upbringing and education for their children.

The Ingush language has not been used as a medium of instruction, either in cities or in rural settlements, with the exception of the Ingush language and literature disciplines in schools, secondary vocational education institutions, and the Ingush State University.

### *Preschool education*

As of 2020, there are 64 separate preschool educational organizations in the republic, of which 42 are located in urban settlements and 22 are in rural areas. They are attended by a total of 15,900 children, including 9,400 in urban settlements and 6,500 in rural areas. The language of instruction is Russian. The use of the Ingush language is limited to private communication.

### *School education*

The republic has 129 comprehensive schools (with a total of 73,200 students). Among them, 53 schools (36,900 students) are located in urban settlements; 73 schools (36,300) are in rural areas.

The Ingush and Russian languages are taught as compulsory subjects in Ingush schools.

In accordance with the curriculum, the Ingush language and literature are taught in all grades as part of the regional component: writing and reading in Ingush in the first grade – 3 hours per week (Russian language and literature – 8 hours), in grades from 2 to 4 – 5 hours per week (Russian language and literature – 8 hours), Ingush language and literature in grades from 5 to 9 – from 4 to 6 hours per week (Russian language and literature – from 5 to 8 hours), Ingush literature in grades from 9 to 11 – 3 hours per week (Russian language and literature – from 5 to 6 hours). Since 2019, the Ingush language exam has been included in the list of obligatory exams in schools in Ingushetia.

All other subjects are taught in Russian.

### *Secondary vocational education*

There are 12 secondary vocational education institutions in Ingushetia with a total of 7,800 students. The Ingush language is taught as a subject in these institutions.

### *Higher education*

The republic has two higher education institutions (state and non-state) with a total of 7,500 students in Bachelor's, Specialist's and Master's degree programmes.

The Department of Philology at the Ingush State University offers a programme called *Russian language and literature, Ingush language and literature*. There, a number of courses are taught in the Ingush language, and term papers and final qualification papers are written in Ingush as well. All departments offer a practical course on the Ingush language and a *Regional studies and literature* course in the first year of study. There are chairs for the Ingush language, Ingush literature and folklore, where students majoring in Ingush language and literature study.



Ingush  
State  
University

All other subjects in higher education institutions are taught in Russian.

In schools, secondary vocational institutions, and universities the Ingush language is actively used in coursebooks and study guides, primarily on Ingush language itself. There are alphabet books, textbooks for grades from 1 to 11, books (including those for extracurricular reading), exercise books, teaching aids, grammar books, learner's dictionaries, literary language dictionaries, and phrasebooks in Ingush.

Numerous online Ingush dictionaries are available on the Internet, as well as Ingush language distance learning courses. Several animated films have been translated into Ingush.

In the field of science, Russian is the predominant language. Virtually all scientific works are published in Russian. However, the amount of research and study of the Ingush language, literature and folklore has been gradually increasing.

For example, the Ingush Research Institute for the Humanities named after Chakh Akhriev has published numerous dictionaries (Ingush-Russian, dictionaries of terms, dictionaries of synonyms and antonyms, orthographic dictionaries, including those for school use), a fundamental Ingush grammar *Modern Ingush Language* in two volumes – *Morphology* and *Lexicology and Phraselology*, – as well as *A History of Ingush Literature* (in Ingush) in 4 volumes, and *An Anthology of Ingush Folklore* in 10 volumes. Currently the third volume of *Modern Ingush Language (Morphemics. Word-Formation)* is underway, and an explanatory dictionary of the Ingush language is being compiled. A new generation of textbooks on the republic's native language and literature is being prepared.



Akhriev  
Ingush  
Research  
Institute  
for the  
Humanities

## Mass media

The following newspapers and magazines are published in Ingushetia:

- *Serdalo (The Light)* newspaper. Most of its content is in Russian with some in Ingush. Published three times a week, both in print and online. It had a circulation of 2,500 copies in 2015 and 2,000 in 2019.
- *Literaturni Ghalghayche (The Literary Ingushetia)* magazine. Comes out quarterly, three times in Ingush and once – at the end of the year – in Russian. Its circulation is 2,000 copies.
- *Selayad (The Rainbow)* children's magazine. Published monthly in Ingush with a circulation of 2,500 copies.

The Ingushetia National Television and Radio Company (broadcasts round the clock) and the Ingushetia State Television and Radio Company (broadcasts 5 hours a day) operate in the republic. Seven programmes are aired in both Ingush and Russian, with a duration of 25–70 minutes each. The rest of the programmes are in Russian.

Ingushetia Radio also broadcasts in Ingush and Russian.

## Theatre

The republic is home to the Idris Bazorkin Ingush State Drama Theatre, the Sovremennik State Russian Musical and Drama Theatre, and the Ingush Youth Theatre. All these theatres produce plays in both Russian and Ingush.

### *Informal communication*

The Ingush language is mostly used in private and intra-family communication, in everyday life, and in traditional economic activities.

The Ingush and Arabic languages are mainly used in Islam, which dominates in Ingushetia. Islamic literature has recently begun to be translated into the Ingush language.

A 2017 sociological survey conducted by the Akhriev Ingush Research Institute for the Humanities showed that most respondents speak either mostly their native language (55.2%) or both Ingush and Russian (30.1%) with family and friends. About 10.7% of the respondents use Russian exclusively. 2.5% use the Ingush language only in traditional settings (when visiting relatives), and 1.5% of respondents speak it only when communicating with elderly relatives.

More and more people prefer to speak Russian rather than their native language at home, which leads to the Ingush language's gradual disappearance. At the same time, most respondents (64.2%) report that they want their children and grandchildren to be able to read and write in Ingush. This indicates that people are aware of how significant their spiritual losses are under current circumstances.

In terms of language preservation, it is well known that the language in which a person thinks, i.e. the language of their inner speech, is an important criterion. Here the proportion of those who prefer to think in both Ingush and Russian (36.1%) is virtually equal to the share of respondents who prefer to think in Russian only (35.8%). Fewer respondents think only in their native language (28.1%). This, too, indicates that the process of the so-called "language shift" is actively underway.

Most respondents (56.5%) sometimes read newspapers, magazines, fiction in their native language, while 37.8% never do.

Ingush language television programmes are popular primarily among senior and elderly viewers, while young people rarely watch them.

## **Conclusions**

Despite the fact that the Ingush are the dominant ethnic group in the region in terms of population, Russian is the main language that functions in all spheres of communication.

Today most families speak Russian. Even when young Ingush parents talk to each other and to their children in Ingush, children generally reply in Russian and learn Russian as their first language.

In our opinion, this decline in the command of the native language is rooted not so much in a lack of sufficient conditions for its study in schools, secondary vocational schools and higher education institutions, nor in an insufficient research into the language itself (as had been the case before the Republic of Ingushetia was established), but rather in the public attitude toward the native language as being of little or no use in society, and also in the lack of due enforcement of the Law on State Languages in the Republic of Ingushetia. Contrary to the law, in reality the Ingush language is not used in all spheres of state and social activities.

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Radima  
Gazdieva,  
Director, Yandiev  
National Library  
of the Republic  
of Ingushetia



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Plenary session of  
the Interregional  
Conference  
“Preserving  
Native Language:  
Topical Issues  
of Regional  
Language Policy”



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Conference  
participants

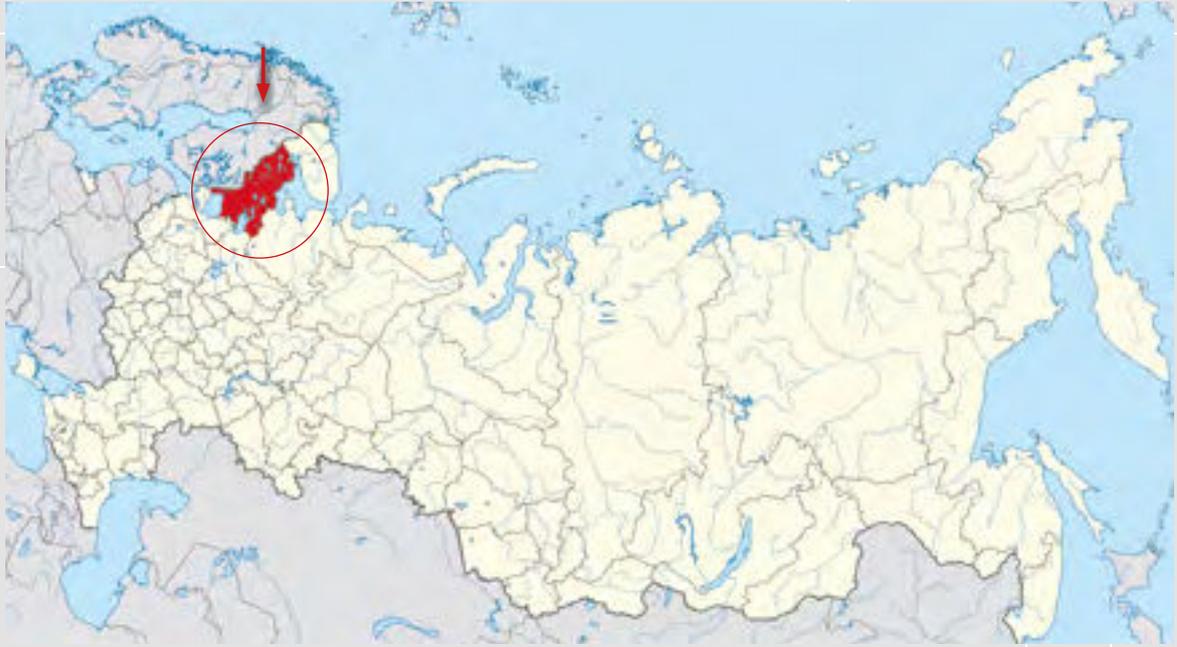


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Lidia Malsagova,  
Deputy Director,  
National Library of the  
Republic of Ingushetia  
(right), and Tanzila  
Dzaurova-Gogieva,  
Director, IstIng  
Traditional Crafts  
Studio



## Republic of Karelia



**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

### **Revitalising Indigenous Languages of the Republic of Karelia**

**(August 31 – September 1, 2020, Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia)**

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- ECHO Association of Ethnocultural Centres and Heritage Preservation Organizations

# THE KARELIAN AND VEPS LANGUAGES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KARELIA: CURRENT STATUS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT



**Alexey TSYKAREV,**  
Chair, Young Karelia Centre for Support  
of Indigenous Peoples and Civic  
Diplomacy, Member, UN Permanent  
Forum on Indigenous Issues

## Introduction

The Republic of Karelia is a region of Russia with three Finno-Ugric languages spread on its territory – Karelian, Veps and Finnish. These three languages have different status, but their position is much the same, and their fates are intertwined. All the three languages enjoy the protection of the state, and the right to their preservation and development is fixed in the Constitution and regulations of the Republic of Karelia. However, while the future of the Finnish language is ensured by Finland, the Karelian and Veps languages are in danger, and only Russia can preserve Karelians and Vepsians as unique ethnic groups of the world community.

Both Karelian and Veps have acquired a written form only recently, their alphabets were first approved in 1989. Nonetheless, over the past 30 years they have made a leap in their development: their vocabulary has been expanding and improving, textbooks and works of fiction have been created in these languages, they are now studied at all levels of education and used in all types of print and digital media. However, in a number of spheres (in government activities, electoral processes, legal proceedings and health care), these two languages still lack representation, although they are ready to perform social functions and – from a linguistic point of view – have all the prerequisites for this.

## Indigenous language resource: Factors and trends

Depopulation of Karelians and Vepsians, a negative demographic trend, is the main factor determining the modern linguistic picture in Karelia.



Paanayarvi  
National  
Park

According to the 2010 All-Russian Population Census<sup>13</sup>, there were about 60,800 Karelians in the Russian Federation, of which 45,670 lived in the Republic of Karelia (in 2002, they numbered over 93,300 in Russia and over 65,650 in Karelia). Karelia currently has the lowest share of the titular population (7%) and the highest rate of its decline among the republics within the Russian Federation. If this trend persists, by 2025 Karelians may get into the list of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.

Depopulation naturally reduces the number of people speaking the Karelian and Veps languages. While in 2002, 31,500 people called Karelian (with its three dialects – Karelian proper, Livvi and Ludik) their mother tongue, by 2010, this figure dropped to less than 16,900. The number of Vepsians and Veps speakers in Karelia is also steadily decreasing: in 2002, 4870 people were registered as Vepsians, while in 2010 this figure

dropped to 3423 people, of which only 919 people reported speaking their native language. The Veps language belongs to the languages of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of Russia.

Linguistic assimilation is accelerated by interethnic marriages, migration of the population from places of traditional residence to cities, emigration outside the republic, migration of representatives of other peoples to Karelia, and the fall in language prestige. By the end of the 1950s, knowledge of the Russian language has become ubiquitous among Karelians and Vepsians. Russian began to spread widely in all spheres of social life,

including family communication. As a result, today Karelian and Veps are practically not transmitted to children in natural family environment. Additional measures are required to preserve and develop these languages, to create conditions for expanding their scope in all spheres, and the expectations of Karelians and Vepsians for the revival of their native languages are anchored primarily on the education system.



Ruskeala  
Mountain  
Park

## Regulatory framework

The system of goals, principles, action lines, tasks and mechanisms of implementing the state national policy in Karelia is set by the *Strategy of the National Policy in the Republic of Karelia for the period up to 2025*<sup>14</sup>, approved in 2015 and aimed at the preservation and development of the Karelians and Vepsians as unique ethnic groups of the world community.

The *State Programme of the Republic of Karelia on Ethnosocial and Ethnocultural Development of Territories of Traditional Residence of Indigenous Peoples*<sup>15</sup> was introduced in 2018 as a tool for delivering the *Strategy of the State National Policy*. The programme ranks Karelians and Vepsians as well as ethnolocal groups of the

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> <http://nationalkom.karelia.ru/assets/Uploads/Novaya-papka/699r-P.docx>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/1000201801260004>.

indigenous Russian population – Zaonezhans, Pudozhans and Pomors – among the indigenous peoples of Karelia. Due to the prevailing unfavorable socio-economic and demographic factors, additional resources are guaranteed for the use of these peoples' languages in the visual appearance of settlements, in information materials and the media, in the work of local authorities, etc.

The Law *On State Support of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish Languages in the Republic of Karelia*<sup>16</sup> (2004) provides equal guarantees to the Karelian and Veps languages as the languages of indigenous peoples when it comes to the right to learn these languages, receive information in them, and freely use them in public spheres. Moreover, the Law guarantees state support for the media operating in the Karelian and Veps languages, as well as support for specialists working in this field. It also allows the use of indigenous languages in the publication of laws of the Republic of Karelia and other regulatory legal acts and in the activities by central and local government authorities.

The Concept for the Development of Ethnocultural Education in Karelia for 2017–2025<sup>17</sup> elaborated with the direct participation of indigenous peoples, establishes a framework for creating a full-fledged system of ethnocultural education in the region, including the opportunity for citizens to receive information about indigenous peoples, in particular in the digital space. Information, statistics and analytics on ethnocultural education, as well as teaching aids for teachers of native languages are available at the Ethnocultural Education Portal.<sup>18</sup>

The Republican Terminology and Orthography Commission under the Head of the Republic of Karelia is working on the formation of new up-to-date legal, socio-political, scientific vocabulary, and the media are actively introducing this vocabulary. Such complex texts as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, resolutions of the Karelian Congresses, as well as information about candidates for elections to local government authorities, the names of state institutions, etc. are translated into the Karelian language.

In Karelia, opportunities have been created for the participation of indigenous peoples in making the decisions that affect various aspects of their lives. Indigenous peoples interact with state authorities through the Council of Representatives of Karelians, Vepsians and Finns of the Republic of Karelia under the Head of the Republic. Organizations of indigenous peoples are also represented in the Head of the Republic's Council on Interethnic Relations and Council on Promoting the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights. Every four years the Congress of the Karelians of the Republic of Karelia is held to serve as a traditional representative body of self-government of the Karelian people. Thereby indigenous peoples are able to receive information about the work of government bodies, take part in the elaboration and implementation of state national, educational, cultural and socio-economic policies, and determine the priorities for their own development.



Karelian  
petroglyphs

<sup>16</sup> <http://gov.karelia.ru/Legislation/lawbase.html?lid=1751>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/465412354>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://edu-rk.ru/index.php/edu/info>.

However, despite the substantially favorable legislation and law enforcement practice, Karelia still lacks a clearly formulated long-term language policy reflecting the current language situation and setting priorities in specific fields of action. The efficiency of cross-sectoral coordination should be raised in order to timely tackle relevant challenges, including the issue of the status of the Karelian language.

## The issue of the state status of the Karelian language

Karelian is the language of the titular nation that gave the name to the Republic of Karelia. The Constitution of Karelia says that “the historical and cultural features of Karelia are determined by the residence of Karelians on its territory.” Nonetheless, Karelia is still the only republic within the Russian Federation in which the language of the titular ethnos does not have the status of a state language. This issue has been on the agenda for three decades, but still remains unsolved



Editions of the Karelian-Finnish epic “Kalevala”

Karelian writing is based on Latin script, while the *Federal Law On the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation* (1991) states that “in the Russian Federation, the alphabets of the state language of the Russian Federation and the state languages of the republics are based on the Cyrillic script.” Thus, in order for Karelian to obtain the status of a state language, it is necessary either to abandon the Latin script, or to adopt a separate federal law allowing Karelian to perform the functions of a state language. Both the Congress of Karelians and the expert community believe that after 30 years of investments and efforts aimed at developing the Karelian language on the basis of the Latin alphabet, it will be illogical and erroneous to change its writing,

one of the foundations of the language, which was chosen by the native speakers themselves and fixed by the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic back in 1989.

Another obstacle derives from the republican legislation. Part 1 of Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Karelia provides for the possibility of establishing a second state language in Karelia only through a referendum, which is highly unlikely given that Karelians make up only 7% of the population of the republic.

It is obvious that the issue of the state status of the Karelian language cannot be settled without coordinated actions of the republican and federal legislators and without engaging Karelians themselves in this process. Official status will increase the prestige of the language, expand the scope of its use, enhance the importance and role of the Karelian people in the life of the Republic of Karelia.

## The Karelian and Veps languages in the education system

The majority of Karelians and Vepsians would like their children to know the language of their ancestors, but do not speak to their children in these languages. This is an evidence of a break in the intergenerational language transmission.

Traditional  
cuisine  
classes in  
the House of  
the Karelian  
Language,  
Vedlozero



In this context, representation of languages in the education system and building an unbreakable chain from preschool to school and university education are among the top priorities. Today in Karelia there is no so-called “national school”, where Karelian or Veps would be the language of instruction.

### *Preschool education*

In the 2020/2021 academic year, 843 preschool children studied the Karelian language, and 81 – Veps. Over the past three years, the number of preschools in Karelia and, accordingly, the number of

learners of Karelian and Veps have been decreasing.

For several years, a unique experience of reviving the Karelian language through immersion-based learning (“language nest”) has been gained in the House of the Karelian Language in the village of Vedlozero. Creating a mechanism to support and propagate “language nests” in other settlements of Karelia could halt the ongoing linguistic assimilation among the indigenous peoples of the republic. However, it is clear that the use of specific methods of language promotion should be supported by the settlements’ linguistic communities themselves. So far, no realistic proposals have been made on this issue.

### *School education*

In the last few years an alarming tendency has emerged towards teaching Karelian and Veps not as core subjects but as extracurriculars. It was especially evident in 2019–2020. According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Karelia, within the compulsory curriculum Karelian was studied only by 18% of all Karelian children (389 out of 2166), and Veps – by 59% of Vepsian schoolchildren (156 out of 266).

### *Learning languages in the system of additional education*

In the 2020/2021 academic year, 144 schoolchildren studied the Karelian language within the system of additional education in 5 municipalities.

### *Tertiary education*

In 2020–2021, Karelian (Livvi dialect) was studied by 58 college students in Petrozavodsk.

As for higher education, Petrozavodsk State University is the only higher educational institution in Russia to train specialists in the Karelian language (students can choose either Livvi or Karelian proper) and specialists in three Balto-

Finnish languages (Karelian, Veps and Finnish). Since 2013, the Department of Baltic and Finnish Philology, a structural subdivision of the Institute of Philology, has been responsible for teaching these languages.

Within the *Philology* programme, the department prepares bachelors in three specializations: *Finnish language and literature, English language; Finnish language and literature, Karelian language; Finnish language and literature, Veps language*. Bachelors can continue their studies within the Master's programme *Comparative studies: Dialogue of cultures in world literature* (Balto-Finnish languages module). The Karelian and Veps languages are also taught to students of other disciplines. Thus, preservice teachers study in the Bachelor's programme *Primary education and subject area education. Native (Karelian, Vepsian) language*. Students learning the Karelian and Veps languages receive an additional scholarship.

The department enjoys the support of the university administration, which regards teaching Karelia's ethnic languages is a brand and a competitive advantage. An update of training profiles and curricula for undergraduate and graduate programmes is scheduled.

The Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences has a postgraduate course to train academic staff engaged in research in the field of linguistics.



Karelian women in traditional costumes

## Training teaching staff

One of the burning issues to be addressed is the lack of qualified educators. The number of teachers of the Karelian and Veps languages has been decreasing, which can lead to the destruction of the existing system of school-based teaching of Karelian and Veps. However, other regions' experience shows that it is possible to overcome this trend if local government bodies and the Ministry of Education are interested in developing proper solutions.

In 2018–2020, the Karelian language was taught in the Petrozavodsk Pedagogical College within extracurricular activities. Since the academic year 2020/2021, it has been included as a subject from the 1<sup>st</sup> year in the curricula for the *Preschool education* and *Teaching in primary schools* education programmes.

The Department of Theory and Methods of Primary Education of the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology under the Petrozavodsk State University provides training in pedagogical education with two profiles: *Primary education*, and *Native language*. Bachelor graduates will be able to work as primary school teachers and/or teach the Karelian language in grades 1 to 11. Since 2020, freshmen for these profiles have got an opportunity to choose not only Karelian, but also Veps as their core language.

The Government of the republic provides additional payments for educators teaching the Karelian language.

## Modern language technologies

Languages' equipment with modern technologies, representation on the Internet and social networks contribute to their use among young people and the emergence of innovative educational methods, facilitate language teaching and self study.

In Karelia, various organizations are developing their own language products, although their efforts are not always coordinated and united.

The Resource Language Media Centre of Karelians, Vepsians and Finns created under the Periodika Publishing House opened a multilingual news portal in 2020, which is now the main information resource in the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages<sup>19</sup>.

The website of the Periodika Publishing House provides an opportunity to order a press archive in national languages<sup>20</sup> since the early 1990s for free.

Since 2016, the Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Scientific Centre under the Russian Academy of Sciences has been working on the formation of corpora of the Karelian and Veps languages

to serve as the basis for the creation of digital products including spell checkers and machine translation systems. The Institute goes on with digitizing sound collections of the phonogram archive<sup>21</sup>, forming a digital folklore archive<sup>22</sup>, an electronic encyclopedia "Storytellers of Karelia"<sup>23</sup>, maintaining a thematic site on the toponymy of the European North of Russia<sup>24</sup>.

The National Library of the Republic of Karelia and the Periodika Publishing House are working systematically to digitize printed media, textbooks and fiction in national languages. Contemporary literature is presented in the online project "Electronic Library of Karelian Authors"<sup>25</sup>. A special resource contains an e-collection of textbooks in the languages of the indigenous peoples of Karelia<sup>26</sup>. This project includes over 300 textbooks published before 1991, modern textbooks of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages, as well as publications to help learners of Karelian and Veps. National Library's Internet resources also contain the national bibliography of Karelia<sup>27</sup>.



National Library of the Republic of Karelia

<sup>19</sup> [www.omamedia.ru](http://www.omamedia.ru).

<sup>20</sup> <http://rkperiodika.ru/arkhiv-smi>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://phonogr.krc.karelia.ru/folklor/index.php>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://folk.krc.karelia.ru>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://illh.ru/KC2/#4>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://toris.krc.karelia.ru/index.ru.phtml>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://avtor.karelia.ru>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://fulr.karelia.ru/oppikirjat>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://bibliography.karelia.ru/>.

About 20 websites use Karelian and Veps in their interface, however, not a single site of the republican authorities or local self-government bodies is localized into these languages.

Ordinary users play an important role, both passive and active, in the dissemination of indigenous languages. They can become content creators: write posts on social networks and blogs in Karelian, contribute to the translation of the VKontakte interface, write articles for Wikipedia, etc.

Online courses of the Karelian and Veps languages are developed by both educational and community organizations. Thus, online courses for bachelors in the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages and literature have been created and tested by the Petrozavodsk State University. An electronic educational resource for master's students is under development for the training module *Second Balto-Finnish language (Karelian language, Livvi dialect)*.

The Petrozavodsk University and the Young Karelia Centre for Support of Indigenous Peoples and Civic Diplomacy have prepared an introductory online course in the Karelian (Livvi) language<sup>28</sup>. Another basic course on the Livvi-Karelian and Karelian proper, as well as Veps, is presented on the website of the Resource Language Media Centre of Karelians, Vepsians and Finns<sup>29</sup>. 10 lessons are prepared for each language, and the organizers plan to develop new modules. The Centre also develops its own YouTube channel<sup>30</sup>, with video lessons of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages, video lectures on the languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples of Karelia within the “Smart Friday” series, and other useful language materials.

Tatyana Baranova, teacher of the Karelian language in the Petrozavodsk Pedagogical College, has developed distance Karelian language courses for students. These courses are open to public.

The number of subscribers for all Karelian language courses still remains insignificant, although with proper advertising and quality of material even commercial language courses can be in demand not only in Karelia, but also beyond its borders – with the communities of Karelians and Vepsians living in the Tver, Leningrad and Vologda regions, where the shortage of educational resources is even more acute.

Audiovisual projects, developing animation, cinema, music, podcasts in national languages open up new horizons. A team of professionals led by Maria Valeeva has created an animated cartoon “Matku Puudogaspäi Pariižassah” (“The Journey of Flax from Pudozh to Paris”)<sup>31</sup> with a rare technology of classic hand-drawn (stop-motion) and silhouette animation<sup>32</sup>. The cartoon is dubbed in the Livvi-Karelian language with subtitles in Russian.

The recording studio “Blomberg Studio” has implemented several projects on dubbing and producing artists and musical groups using the Karelian language. Vepsian organizations promote fiction and documentary films in their native language.

<sup>28</sup> <http://nuorikarjala.ru/motion/projects/yazykovye-onlayn-kursy/>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.omamedia.ru/mediacenter/learn-lang/>.

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9veL\\_OjV9hxxHYhynR4t8g/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9veL_OjV9hxxHYhynR4t8g/featured).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVeOQMTbl5M&vl=fr>

<sup>32</sup> <https://sana2019.ee/ru/matku>

## Indigenous languages in professional communication

Discussions on the revitalization of an endangered language often focus on the expansion of the spheres of its use and on returning the language to the spheres it had dropped out of.

Part of the solution is career guidance and outreach activities aimed at young population of the republic's districts, informing about vacancies and target places in higher educational institutions.

Today, the education system mainly prepares specialists with knowledge of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages for a limited number of occupations: teachers, historians, philologists, journalists. However, professionals in technical specialties with knowledge of the language (programmers, television editors, etc.) are also required. Knowledge of the Karelian or Vepsian language is an advantage in the field of tourism and craftwork. Entrepreneurial activity, developing craft skills and mastering trade jobs alongside learning one's native language can contribute to the employment of indigenous youth in places of their traditional residence.

## Indigenous languages in the cultural sphere

Cultural institutions strive to use indigenous languages in their work and provide services in indigenous languages. National Museum of the Republic of Karelia and its branch, Lonin Vepsian Ethnographic Museum in Sheltozero village, are working on equipping expositions with texts and information materials in indigenous languages. A game programme "Exciting Ethnography", based on Vepsian ethnographic material and Vepsian vocabulary related to customs, rituals, crafts, family, nature and architecture, is installed on the touchscreen kiosks in the permanent exhibition of the museum. One of the museum's divisions, "Museum for the Family", is aimed at introducing visitors to the ethnography, culture and languages of the indigenous peoples of Karelia.

The National Library of the Republic of Karelia on its website maintains the "Indigenous Peoples of Karelia" section<sup>33</sup>, as well as an e-catalogue of literature in national languages.

In 2018, the National Theatre's repertoire consisted of 28 performances, including 11 in the Karelian, Finnish and Veps languages.

Karelian Centre for Folk Art and Cultural Initiatives creates conditions for creative self-realization and preservation of the linguistic, song and choreographic heritage of the indigenous peoples of Karelia.



Kantele  
National  
Song and  
Dance  
Ensemble

<sup>33</sup> <http://knk.karelia.ru>.

Kizhi  
Open-Air  
Museum



Under the Periodika Publishing House, the House of Peoples' Friendship was created to provide public organizations with instructional and resource support. These two institutions host Karelian language courses for adults.

Kizhi Open-Air Historical, Architectural and Ethnographic Museum was one of the first to work with the Karelian language. The collection of the Museum's Internet resources includes a virtual tour of the house of a Karelian peasant in the Ludik dialect of the Karelian language<sup>34</sup>.

The repertoire of the Kantele National Song and Dance Ensemble is formed with due regard of the traditions of the spiritual and material culture of the Karelians, Vepsians, Finns, Ingrian, Russians of Karelia (local traditions of Pudozh, Zaonezhie and Pomorie). Archival documents served as a basis for compiling the "Kantele: Windows into history" website<sup>35</sup>.

Ethnocultural centres aimed at the development and popularization of the Karelian language successfully operate in various municipalities of Karelia.

## Receiving information in indigenous languages

In Karelia, the Periodika Publishing House issues print media in indigenous languages: the *Oma Mua (Native Land)* weekly newspaper in Karelian, the *Kodima (Native Land)* monthly newspaper in Veps, the *Karjalan Sanomat (News of Karelia)* weekly newspaper in Finnish, *Kipinä (Sparkle)* children's magazine in Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish, as well as two literary almanacs: *Taival (Pathway)* in Karelian and *Verez Tullei (Fresh Breeze)* in the Veps language. All these media have their own pages on the Internet and in social networks. Since 2020, Projects to increase reading engagement of the rural population have been implemented, including the organization of courses for reading and writing in the Latin script.

Three newspapers of the national municipal districts of the Republic of Karelia (Pryazha, Olonets, Kalevala) publish pages in the Karelian language every month.

Karelia State TV and Radio Company broadcasts news and thematic radio and TV shows in the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages. The programmes are also available on the company's official website and on its pages in VKontakte, YouTube and Facebook.

In order to give a boost to national journalism, the Republican competition of journalistic works in the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages is held every two years.

<sup>34</sup> <http://kizhi.karelia.ru/journey/yakovlev/about.html>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://history.kantele.ru/>.

## The role of public organizations in the preservation and development of languages

In Karelia, there are 28 public organizations of Karelians, Vepsians and Finns, which are involved in the preservation and revitalization of Balto-Finnish languages<sup>36</sup>. They implement socially significant projects both at their own expense and through attracting budgetary and non-budgetary funds on a competitive basis.

Most of these projects are aimed at popularizing, preserving and reviving the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages. Here are some examples:

- *The Karelian language: From the past to the future*. The project of the Nevond Youth Information and Legal Centre of Indigenous Peoples includes a set of training events and publishing guidelines for teachers and practitioners “Using modern technologies to promote the Karelian language and culture”. Of particular interest is a series of webinars on the use of the Karelian language on the Internet and an interactive offline/online quest, which has become widespread in educational and leisure centres of Karelia.
- *Public Network for the Preservation and Revival of Indigenous Languages*. This project by the ECHO Association of Ethnocultural Centres and Heritage Preservation Organizations aims at capacity building of linguistic communities and exchanging experience in the field of revitalisation of indigenous languages in the Baltic Sea region.<sup>37</sup>
- *Video course of breathing exercises* in the Karelian language by the Young Karelia Centre for Support of Indigenous Peoples and Civic Diplomacy<sup>38</sup> voiced in the Livvi dialect of the Karelian language.
- *Paginklub* conversation club. This project by the Society of Vepsian Culture allows Vepsians to gather and communicate in their native language on various topics, inviting special guests. A similar club, *Paginkanzu*, was organized for Karelians by the Union of the Karelian People.
- *Cradle of folk traditions*. The project by the Karelian republican public organization “Native Hearth” is aimed at preserving the native Karelian language in the village of Veshkelitsa. Within the project, the ethno-incubator “Yhtevys” (“Commonwealth”) was organized for children and adolescents aged 10 to 16 years to participate in research, educational, creative events, games, master classes.



Veps  
choir

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.nko-karelia.info/sites/default/files/Выпуск%20№26%20ноябрь%202018.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://sana2019.ee/ru/>.

<sup>38</sup> <http://nuorikarjala.ru/motion/news/nuori-karjala-predstavlyaet-videokurs-dykhatelnoy-gimnastiki-na-karelskom-yazyke/>.

Being closest to the linguistic community, public organizations can be much more accurate in determining the priority areas and target audiences of language revival activities. Key target groups include parents, educators and activists, children and youth.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The language situation of Karelians and Vepsians of the Republic of Karelia is critical and requires additional efforts, protective mechanisms and support measures. The education system is not able to independently solve the problem of the interrupted language transmission, therefore, only coordination and synergy between linguistic communities and the state will facilitate solving the language crisis.

The system of state administration and cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of language policy of the republic requires improvement. Monitoring indicators and trends, analysing qualitative changes in the sphere of language learning and their causes is essential for national policy management.

It is important that indigenous peoples also learn to interact with specific authorities, pursuing their own agenda.

Given the significant linguistic divide in cyberspace, which, in turn, exacerbates the existing digital divide, it is necessary to support the creation of unique content in indigenous languages and to promote the development of information and media literacy skills among indigenous peoples. A coordination centre for the digital expansion of the Karelian and Veps languages is needed to map out the development of digital technologies for years to come, set priorities and implement ambitious projects, studying the experience of other regions and countries.

In order to foster dialogue between representatives of indigenous peoples and authorities, increase the prestige of indigenous languages and provide access to information in these languages, websites of authorities and key organizations should have pages both in Russian and in indigenous languages.

Focusing on bilingualism and ensuring it by introducing indigenous languages as languages of instruction could be a realistic priority in education. In order to achieve this long-term goal, efforts should be directed at working with the parent community, creating textbooks and forming an indissoluble educational chain “preschool – school – university”. Teaching languages in colleges and universities on an interdisciplinary basis will allow for training specialists of different profiles with knowledge of the Balto-Finnish languages.

Consensus on the native language development within the linguistic community is a sine qua non for an efficient process of language revival and preservation. Therefore, involving all members of the community in language processes and receiving feedback from them are tasks for those people who have an internal need to engage in social work. However, the linguistic community should also value activists’ efforts, provide assistance and encourage their work to avoid burnout.

Proper prioritization, the feasibility of support measures taken, investments in the well-being of languages and language communities will allow people to regain confidence in their native language, see the benefits of bilingualism and make indigenous languages useful in a number of socially significant areas.

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Olga Ilyukha,  
Director, Institute  
of Linguistics,  
Literature and  
History



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Tatiana Kleerova, Chair,  
International Consultative  
Committee of Finno-  
Ugric Peoples (right),  
and Raisa Samodaeva,  
Chair, Council of  
Representatives of the  
Congress of the Karelians  
of the Republic of Karelia



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Zinaida  
Strogalschikova,  
Senior Fellow,  
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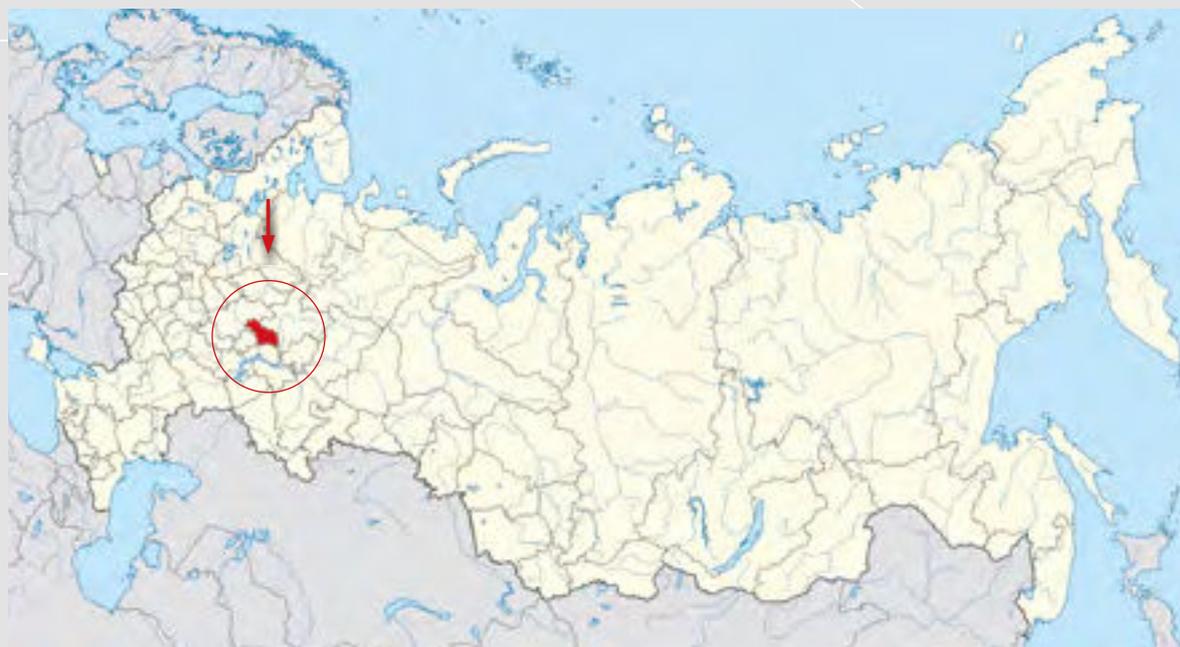


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Galina  
Galanicheva,  
Head, IT  
Department,  
National Library  
of the Republic of  
Karelia



## Republic of Mari El



**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

### **Mother Tongues in the Multicultural Environment of the Region: Preservation, Use, Promotion**

(October 20–21, 2020, Yoshkar Ola, Republic of Mari El)

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Ministry of Culture, Press and Ethnic Affairs of the Republic of Mari El
- Chavain National Library of the Republic of Mari El
- Vasiliev Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History
- Mari Institute of Education

## PRESERVING AND DEVELOPING THE MARI LANGUAGE: ACTIVITIES BY THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, PRESS AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MARI EL

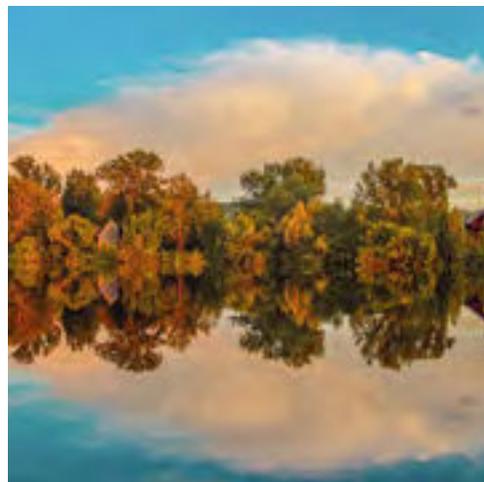


**Galina SHIRYAEVA**  
Deputy Minister of Culture, Press  
Ethnic Affairs of the Republic of  
Mari El

All 85 constituent entities of the Russian Federation differ not only in the languages (and language groups) of the peoples inhabiting their territory, but also in the level of socio-economic development. The Republic of Mari El, like most other Russian regions is multicultural and multiconfessional. The key features of the history of Mari El's development are mutual ethno-cultural influence and convergence of traditions of different peoples, as well as favorable conditions for interethnic and interfaith relations. State authorities and local self-government in cooperation with civil society institutions contribute significantly to the maintenance of such an environment, taking measures to implement state national policy both in regional legislation and in practical activities.

According to the 2010 All-Russian Census, the population of Mari El is 696,000 people. The republic is home to representatives of more than 50 nationalities, predominantly Russians – 45.1% (about 313,900 people) and Mari – 41.8% (290,800 people). Three other indigenous peoples of Russia have places of compact residence on the territory of Mari El: Tatars – 5.5% (38,400 people), the Chuvash – 0.9% (6,000 people) and Udmurts – 0.3% (1,900 thousand people)

The Mari people (Mari Kalyk) belong to ancient Finno-Ugric peoples of the Middle Volga region. The native name of the people, “Mari”, means “human”, “man”. There are 547,600 Mari in the Russian Federation, about half of them live in Mari El. The Mari also live in compact groups in Bashkortostan (103,700 people), Tatarstan (18,800 people), Udmurtia (8,100 people), as well as in the Kirovsk Oblast (29,600 people), Sverdlovsk Oblast (23,800 people), Nizhny Novgorod Oblast (6,400 people) and in the Perm Krai (4,100 people). According to the 2002 and 2010 census data, the share of the



Mari  
landscape

Traditional  
Mari  
costumes  
and coin  
necklaces



Mari population in the Republic of Mari El decreased by 1.1%, and the number of Mari in Russia as a whole decreased by almost 10%, from 604,298 people to 547,605 people.

The Constitution of Mari El (1995) proclaims Mari and Russian as the state languages of the republic. Currently, the Mari language has two standard forms – Meadow Mari and Hill Mari, and philologists have not yet come to a consensus on whether these are dialects of the same language or two different languages, and whether it is necessary to strive for their unification and the creation of a single literary language, common to all Mari.

The *Law on Languages in the Republic of Mari El* was adopted in 1995 to lay the legal basis for the use of the state languages of the republic. Legislative recognition of their official status was aimed at creating a solid foundation for preserving and developing the Mari and their national culture with full respect for the Russian language and the Russian people.

After the adoption of the *Law on Languages* a number of measures were taken to encourage equal use of the republic's state languages. In order to develop and disseminate them, the Council for the State Languages of the Republic of Mari El was established under the Mari El Government by a decree of June 11, 1998. In 2000, the Mari Terminology Commission was established. In 2003, these two bodies were united within the Commission on the State Languages under the Government of the Republic of Mari El. The Commission has been successfully performing its functions since then.

The Ministry of Culture, Press and Ethnic Affairs of the Republic of Mari El conducts continuous monitoring of the status and development of the state languages of Mari El, focusing on several aspects:

- development and application of regional normative documents on languages,
- languages in education,
- the use of languages in the field of culture and art,
- the use of languages in the media and communications,
- languages and IT.

Bruges  
Embankment,  
Yoshkar-Ola



## Regulatory framework for languages: Development and application

The implementation of language policy in Mari El follows the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Constitution of the republic. The latter grants official status to the Mari and Russian languages, guarantees the population equal human rights and freedoms, regardless of the language, ensures the right to use one's native language, free choice of the language of communication, education, training and creativity, as well as the right of peoples to develop their national cultures, languages and traditions.

The *Law on Education in the Republic of Mari El (2013)* guarantees education in the state language of the Russian Federation, as well as the right to choose the language of instruction and upbringing from the options provided by the education system. Mari El ensures the creation of conditions for studying and teaching Russian and Mari in state and municipal educational organizations, and for studying and teaching native languages of representatives of other nationalities in places of their compact residence. Educational issues are considered at the meetings of the Government Commission on the State Languages of the Republic of Mari El.

In accordance with the Government decree of 2010, socially significant information should be published in Russian and Mari in the entire territory of the republic, and also in other languages in areas where these languages are used.

Publicly available information on the activities of state authorities and local self-government bodies of Mari El is posted on their official websites in the state languages of the republic.

One of the goals of the *State Programme on the State National Policy of the Republic of Mari El for 2013–2025*, approved by the Mari Government in 2012, is the promotion of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the peoples of Russia living in Mari El.

Language policy is given special attention in the Concept of the State National Policy of the Republic of Mari El, approved by the Decree of the Republic's Head in 2015, and in the Plan of Actions for 2019–2021 to implement the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Mari El for the period until 2025, approved by the local Government's decree of 2019.

On the order of the Head of the Republic (2016), an Editorial Board for the Development of Mari Literature and the Mari Language was established to promote Mari literature as an intrinsic part of the common literary space, integrate it into the all-Russian cultural process and make it accessible for a wide range of readers, united by the Russian language and multinational Russian culture.

Frameworks for the use of the state and other languages of Mari El in organizing and holding cultural events by the republican authorities, state bodies, local government institutions and organizations are established by the relevant regulation enacted by the Decree of the Head of Republic in 2016.

The municipalities of the republic have adopted local regulations aimed at using the state languages of the Republic of Mari El.

## Languages in education

The language of instruction in all 247 daytime general education organizations of the republic is Russian.

The right to study one's native language (Mari, Tatar, Udmurt, Russian) has been implemented in 232 schools with an established practice of learning native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation. This right is exercised on the basis of written statements by the parents (legal representatives) of students in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades in accordance with the procedure established by the educational organization to meet the interests and educational requests of students and their parents. In addition, schools also grant parents (legal representatives) of minor students the right to choose, upon application, their native language from among the languages of Russia (including Russian) for children to study in grades 2 to 4 and grades 6 to 11. Thus, the choice of languages for the academic year 2020/2021 was as follows:

- Mari (native) language – 10.1% of the total number of school students (7,950 children);
- Russian (native) language – 57.7% (45,496 children);
- Tatar (native) language – 1.5% (1,176 children);
- Udmurt (native) language – 0.07% (59 children).



Young participants of the Peledysh Ayo Festival

In educational institutions located mainly in cities and urban-type settlements with a predominance of the Russian-speaking population the Mari (state) language is studied as a separate academic subject or within the *History and culture of the peoples of Mari El* academic course. Course hours depend on the length of the study week and on the curricula developed and approved by the educational organization on the basis of tentative educational programmes on subjects that secure language rights and cover ethnocultural needs of students (up to 2 hours per week). The share of students studying

the Mari (state) language as a separate academic subject or within the *History and culture of the peoples of Mari El* course reaches 45.1%.

The implementation of curricula on the Mari language and Mari literature is ensured through the publication of a range of coursebooks on these subjects, as well as organization of appropriate training for teaching staff.

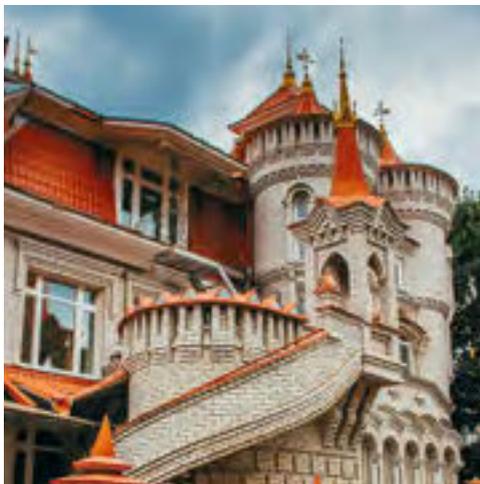
Coursebooks allowed for use for implementing state-accredited primary, secondary and basic education curricula are published by the Mari Institute of Education, a state-funded institution of advanced professional education.

In order to introduce electronic educational resources, the Ministry of Education and Science of Mari El has developed a language learning portal *Марий йылмым тунемына* (“Learning the Mari language”) aimed at teaching the Mari language. The portal is annually replenished with training modules and teaching materials for Mari language teachers.

Native language teachers are provided with theoretical and methodological support for their professional development within the system of continuous pedagogical education by the Mari Institute of Education.

On December 10, 2018, a non-profit Association of Teachers of Native Languages of the Republic of Mari El was created.

Republican and interregional stages of the Olympiad in the Mari (state) language, in the Mari (native) language, Mari literature, history and culture of the peoples of Mari El are held annually.




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Ordinary  
Miracle  
School,  
Yoshkar-Ola




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Mari State  
University

## Languages in the field of culture and arts

Mari El can boast of six professional theatres, of which four include performances (drama, opera) in the state languages of the Republic of Mari El in their repertoire:

- Sapaev Mari State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre,
- Hill Mari Drama Theatre,
- Mari Youth Theatre,
- Shketan Mari National Drama Theatre.

Mari girls



302 leisure clubs, including four republican-level, are engaged in the preservation and development of traditional folk culture, folk art, and organization of cultural work.

Since 1998, republican centres of Russian, Mari and Tatar culture have been created. National cultural centres funded by the state are aimed at implementing the tasks of state national policy in cooperation with various public national and cultural associations. They perform numerous functions and serve as ethnocultural, information and methodological centres and conveners of large-scale

socially significant state events and traditional national holidays, such as:

- International Mother Tongue Day (March 21)
- National Hero Day (April 26),
- Day of Slavic Writing and Culture (May 24),
- Day of Russia (June 12),
- Russian Language Day (June 6),
- Day of Unity of the Peoples of Russia and Belarus (April 2),
- Day of Mari Writing (December 10).

Within the Day of Mari Writing, a Total Dictation in the Mari language is held annually. This event attracts not only residents of the republic, but also Mari communities in other regions of Russia and in such foreign countries as Austria, Hungary, Germany, Finland, Estonia and Japan. The number of participants is increasing steadily every year. In 2020, about 2,400 people of different ages wrote the dictation both online and offline.

In addition, a republican competition *Book of the Year of Mari El* and a republican competition of websites in the Mari language *Stars of the MarNet* are held biennially.

Within the framework of the State Programme, the following projects and activities aimed at developing languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are supported:

- *Lingua-Territory* – a republican language festival with the participation of foreign students from universities of the republic;
- *Peledysh Payrem (Flower Festival)* – interregional national holiday of Mari culture;
- *Sabantuy* – Tatar national holiday;
- *Akatui* – Chuvash national holiday;
- *Gyron bydton* – Udmurt national holiday;
- *Shachmy mylundu (Land of the Ancestors)* – interregional folklore and ethnographic holiday;

- *Creators and Keepers* – interregional festival of family folklore ensembles;
- *Suan Pairem (Wedding Party)* – interregional festival of national wedding ceremonies;
- All-Russian festival of national costumes *Welcome to the Holiday of the Mari Costume*.

The Ministry of Culture, Press and Ethnic Affairs of the Mari El Republic together with the Mari El Ministry of Education and Science and local authorities provides support to literary and musical holidays, creative marathons, competitions, book exhibitions, festivals, conferences, round tables focused on the popularization of native languages of the peoples living in the republic:

- regional stage of the All-Russian essay competition, which includes the nomination “Essay in the Mari Language” for school (grades 4 to 11) and college students;
- regional scientific and practical conference “Hill Mari in the Historical and Cultural Context” within the Ignatiev’s Readings (annual);
- republican scientific and practical conference “Ethnic Traditions and Cultural and Educational Activities (History and Modernity)” (biennial);
- All-Russian Mari Youth Forum (annual);
- scientific and methodological seminar “Aysta marla chyn vozena da kutyrena” (“Observing the Norms of the Mari Language in Oral and Written Speech”);
- republican competitions of children’s creativity: “Avam Dene Pyrlya” (Together with Mom) and “Peledshe Tukym” (Young Generation);
- The Mari Language over Time ethnocultural educational project (educational videos on the Mari language).



Folk music artists of the village of Ivansola



Gusli ensemble

An educational animated lessons project “Marla Oilash Tunemina” (Learning to Speak Mari) was implemented, two collections of DVDs “Mari Payrem da Yula-Vlak” (Mari Holidays and Traditions) were published with information on eight calendar ritual and seven family ritual holidays in the Mari and Russian languages. The website of the Republican Centre of Mari Culture contains 30 electronic lessons and 27 animated lessons on the Mari language.

Within the framework of the republican plan of activities within the preparation and celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mari El (November 4, 2020), the following projects have been delivered: “The History of Mari El from Ancient Times to the Present Day”, “Mari-Russian Phraseological Dictionary” (2 volumes), “Russian-Mari Dictionary” (2 volumes), “Information Technology and the Mari Language”.

## Languages in the book industry

State support for book publishing in Mari El is carried out within the framework of the State Programme’s subsection on Support and Development of Mass Media and Book Publishing.

In 2020, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Mari El supported the publication of 25 socially significant books, of which eight – in Russian, 17 – in Mari (including 13 editions exclusively in Mari and 4 trilingual editions). Three out of 25 were children books. The combined circulation reached 7,900 copies, while books in national languages had a circulation of 5,400.

Editions by the Mari Publishing House are available on its official website in the Latest Releases section.

Children’s literature in the Mari language



In the run-up to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Mari El Republic, books by authors writing in other languages of the peoples of Russia were translated into Mari and published with a combined circulation of 7,200 copies; works by Mari classics were translated into Russian and published with a circulation of 9,000 copies.

## Languages in the media and communications

In the Republic of Mari El, eight periodicals are currently published, including:

- 4 republican Mari-language newspapers: *Mari El* (*Mari’s Edge*, semi-weekly); *Mari El. Ofitsialny dokumentym savyktyshe gazet* (*Mari El. Official documents*), *Kugarnya* (*Friday*), *Yamde Liy* (*Be Ready*);
- 2 magazines: *Onchyko* (*Onwards*, monthly), *U Sem* (*New Way*, in the Hill Mari language, quarterly);

- 2 magazines in the Russian and Mari languages: *Mariyski Mir – Mari Sandalyk* (*Mari World*, quarterly) and *Keche – Solnyshko* (*Sunny*, monthly), (co)founded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Mari El.

The ministry is also a co-founder of:

- four municipal weekly newspapers in the Mari language: *Morko Mlande* (*Morko Land*), *Shernur Vel* (*Sernur Land*), *Zherya* (*Dawn*); *Yamdy Li* (*Be Ready*);
- five Russian-language municipal newspapers publishing leaflets in the Mari language: *Znamya* (*Flag*, monthly), *Vperyod* (*Onwards*, semi-monthly), *Yalyse Uver* (*Rural Wildland*, semi-monthly), *Vestnik Rayona* (*Regional Herald*, weekly) and *Volzhskie Vesti/Yul Ver* (*Volga News*, weekly);
- newspaper in the Tatar language *Nasha Zhizn* (*Our Life*).

The total circulation of republican national periodicals goes beyond 17,500 copies, municipal periodicals' circulation accounts for over 3,800 copies

National television and radio broadcasting in the republic is carried out by the Mari El State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company, a regional branch of the All-Russia State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company (producing and airing a cycle of educational television programmes on the socio-economic, political and ethnocultural development of Mari El) and by the state cultural institution “Mari El TeleRadio” (“METR”).

The Mari El State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company broadcasts 25-minute news TV shows in the Mari language within the regional branch of the “Rossia-1” TV channel on weekdays, and 30-minute thematic programmes in national languages (Mari, Tatar) on weekdays and Saturdays.

The state contract with the Mari El State TV and Radio Company for 2020 required airing not less than 52 original programmes (948 minutes), including programmes in the Mari language.

The METR TV channel has been broadcasting in a full time mode since December 28, 2018. Original programmes by the channel (with about 40% of national broadcasting) account for 34.5 out of 168 hours per week.

The Mari El Radio also broadcasts 24/7, with 90% of programmes in Mari, and 9% – in Tatar. The average daily audience of radio listeners in the republic is up to 48,000 people.

The media actively use the Internet, including video broadcasting (Mari El Radio) and popular social networks.

The *Республика Марий Эл* website and its analogue in the Mari language are affiliated to the official



Chavain  
National  
Library  
of the  
Republic  
of Mari El

Internet portal of the Mari El Republic. The sites contain up-to-date information about Mari El, including sections on ethno-historical references, cultural activities and tourism.

## Languages and information technology

Since 2013, the *Марий Эл Республика* website in the Mari language (<http://mari-el.gov.ru/republic/mari/Pages/main.aspx>) has been operating under the official Internet portal of the Mari El Republic to provide basic information about the region, as well as news materials and texts of local legal enactments.

Modern text editors supporting the Unicode standard allow entering texts in Mari in the Russian keyboard layout through inserting characters and assigning shortcut keys to certain characters. The Mari keyboard layout can also be installed.

Electronic dictionaries and an automatic spell checker are available for LibreOffice.

In order to use modern IT technologies in linguistics, an educational project on Information Technologies and the Mari Language was launched in 2020. The project is aimed at creating a national corpus of the Mari language. At present, the database contains about 20 million tokens. Scanned texts are being proofread and edited. Thus, in accordance with the agreement with Yandex, the Mari language has been added to *Yandex. Translator*. Translation from Mari into 99 world languages is now available.

Much attention is also paid to the creation of an electronic library.

## Conclusions

1. Regional legislation on languages spoken on the territory of the Mari El Republic is being actively developed and upgraded.
2. The Mari El Republic has virtually all conditions for equal functioning of Russian and Mari as state languages in education, culture, the media, publishing, science, and public life. Currently, the Mari language is hardly ever used in legal proceedings, banking and financial areas, in the activities of public authorities, with the exception of some social sectors.
3. It is necessary to keep on monitoring the language policy at both regional and federal levels.
4. Excessive regulation and the existing bureaucratic hurdles should be removed to provide options to broaden the federal list of organizations entitled to publish textbooks.
5. Federal government bodies should undertake efforts within their remit to create basic language technologies in order to ensure the representation of all languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in cyberspace.

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Konstantin Ivanov,  
Minister of Culture  
of the Republic of  
Mari El



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Larisa Yakovleva,  
Chair, Council of the  
Federal National and  
Cultural Autonomy  
of the Mari People



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Andrey  
Chemyshev,  
Senior Fellow,  
Vasilyev Mari  
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Irina Scheglova,  
Director,  
Chavain  
National Library  
of the Republic  
of Mari El



## Republic of North Ossetia–Alania



**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

### **The Ossetian Language in the Context of Contemporary Globalization Processes: Preservation and Promotion Issues**

(October 7–8, 2021, Vladikavkaz, Republic of North Ossetia–Alania)

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania
- National Science Library of the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania

## LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH OSSETIA–ALANIA



**TAMERLAN KAMBOLOV**

Doctor of Philology, Professor  
Head of UNESCO Chair in Multicultural and  
Multilingual Education  
North Ossetian State Pedagogical Institute

The Ossetians, or the Alans, are an Iranian people living in the Central Caucasus.

The Alans originally were a powerful group of Sarmatian and Sako-Massagetician tribes that came from the Central Asian steppes. The name Alania designating the country in general first appeared in ancient chronicles in the second century A. D.

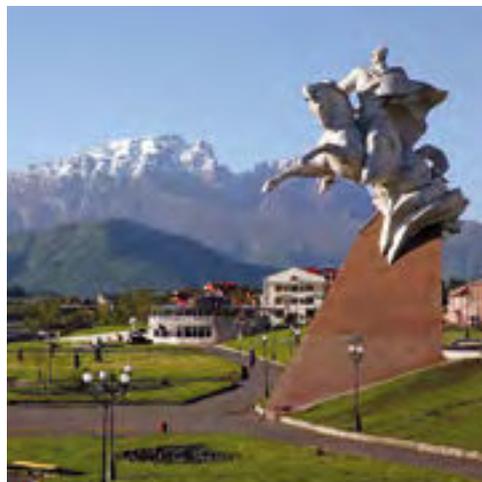
In the Middle Ages, Alania was regarded as a rich country, and was involved in world trade via the Great Silk Road, which passed through its territory. The Alanian state had extensive foreign ties and a strong influence on international processes in the Caucasus, the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. Ossetia's favourable location in the heart of the Caucasus, on both slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountain range, and at the crossroads of the principal strategic routes, made it a target of political intrigue.

The official name “Ossetians” appeared in the Russian Empire in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century as a word derived from the Georgian name for Alania *Osseti* – “Os country”.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russia's exploration of new lands led to profound changes in Ossetian economy and social life.

Under the Russian Empire, Ossetia was divided between the Terek Oblast, the Tiflis and Kutais Governorates. After the 1917 revolution, its territorial and administrative unity was restored by the will of the people. However, fairly soon the Bolsheviks, who had won the civil war, forcibly divided Ossetia again. South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was incorporated into the Georgian Soviet Republic. North Ossetian Autonomous Republic became part of the Russian Soviet Republic, while the eastern mountainous regions were seized and became part of the Kazbegi District of Georgia.

After the collapse of the USSR, there remained two Ossetian Republics, namely the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania within the Russian Federation and the Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia within Georgia. After the 2008 military conflict, South Ossetia was recognized as an independent state by the Russian Federation and several other countries.



Monument  
to Issa Pliev

Terek River,  
Vladikavkaz



Alan Holy  
Dormition  
Male  
Monastery



Today the total number of Ossetians in the world is more than 650,000, of which 510,000 live in Ossetia (450,000 in North Ossetia and 60,000 in South Ossetia). The largest groups of the Ossetian diaspora are found in Georgia, Turkey and subjects of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropol Krai and others).

Most Ossetians are Orthodox Christians, about 15% are Muslims. At the same time, traditional beliefs are preserved.

The inherent openness of Ossetian national culture is manifested in a formula coined by a prominent Ossetian poet Kosta Khetagurov: “The whole world is my temple, love is my shrine, the Universe is my fatherland”. This explains multi-ethnicity of Ossetia’s population and the absence of cultural and sectarian tensions with its neighbours.

## General information about the Ossetian language

The Ossetian language belongs to the North-Eastern subgroup of the Iranian group of the Indo-European language family and includes several territorial subdialects grouped into two dialects, Iron and Digor. The Ossetian language has territorial varieties depending on its dialect: West Ossetian (Digor) in the west of North Ossetia and in Kabardino-Balkaria, and East Ossetian (Iron) in the east and south of North Ossetia, in South Ossetia, Karachai-Cherkessia and Georgia. Iron dialect speakers make up about three quarters of the total number of Ossetians, and Digor dialect speakers account for the remaining one quarter.

The official Russian name for the language spoken by the inhabitants of Ossetia is “the Ossetian language”. However, due to historical reasons, the Ossetian language itself has lost a name that would designate both dialects collectively. Colloquial usage has recently adopted terms purporting to be a generic name for the Ossetian language that link it with its earlier development stage, namely аллон æвзаг, or алайнаг æвзаг, i. e. the “Alanic language”.

Speakers of the two dialects can understand each other, but not easily, since the dialects differ significantly at all levels of the linguistic structure: in phonetics, morphology, and vocabulary. This is mainly due to the fact that between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, separate groups of Ossetians lived isolated in different gorges

on the northern and southern slopes of the Caucasus Range. Therefore, they could not maintain regular communication, and were influenced by various substrate and adstrate languages. Ossetian integration moved forward considerably in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when two national state entities were formed under the Soviet rule: the North Ossetian Autonomous District was established as part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), its status subsequently changed to that of an autonomous republic; and the South Ossetian Autonomous District was created within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (Georgian SSR).

## Writing

Ossetian writing originated in the Middle Ages, as borne out by scattered inscriptions in the Alanic language based on Ancient Greek script. Although Ossetian writing practice was later discontinued and was not resumed until late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it would be more accurate to assign the Ossetian language an intermediate position between languages with an old established system of writing and those that have only recently acquired a written form.

Before the Revolution, some attempts had been made to create an Ossetian alphabet on the basis of the Church Slavonic script (the first Ossetian book was published in 1798 in Church Slavonic-based Ossetian) and the Church Georgian Khutsuri alphabet, which was in use in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, it was Andrei Sjögren, a prominent Russian linguist, historian and ethnographer, who made a strategic decision for Ossetian writing and for the Ossetian language in general. From 1836 to 1837, he led linguistic expeditions to Ossetia in order to find information about the language. Later, when he was working on the first *Ossetian grammar*, he faced the dilemma of choosing between Russian and Georgian base for the Ossetian language. He ultimately decided to base the Ossetian language on Russian civil alphabet bearing in mind historical prospects of the Ossetian people. Subsequently, Sjögren's script was further developed, and is still being used. There was, however, a period when Ossetian writing system switched to the Latin alphabet between 1924 and 1938.

In 1938, the Ossetian writing system in North Ossetia switched back to the Cyrillic script. At the same time, a number of symbols from Sjögren's alphabet were replaced

Monument  
to the æ  
letter



Edition of  
Ossetian  
tales

National  
Science  
Library of  
the Republic  
of North  
Ossetia–  
Alania



with digraphs (дз, дж, хъ, etc.). The letter æ is the only character of the Ossetian alphabet not found in the Russian alphabet. It is an unmistakable sign that a given text is written in Ossetian as it is the only language using Cyrillic script where this character is present.

There are 43 letters in the modern Ossetian alphabet, and some of them (ё, щ, ь, я, etc.) can only be found in loanwords from Russian or from other languages via Russian.

## Literary language

Museum  
of Kosta  
Khetagurov,  
village of Nar



Due to the absence of a lingua franca, the primary challenge in developing a literary language in Ossetia was choosing a dialectal basis for it. It was further compounded by the fact that at that moment, both Ossetian dialects met the criterion of having a written tradition, as by 1920s literary works had been created (albeit in unequal amounts) in both dialects.

This fact was not given due consideration by most Ossetian scientists and officials involved in choosing a dialectal basis, and as a result, the 1924 Joint Congress of North and South Ossetia on Culture

and Education adopted a resolution: 1) to create a unified literary Ossetian language, 2) to base it on the Iron dialect, incorporating the vocabulary of other dialects. This choice was motivated with the following: a) Iron was spoken by an absolute majority of Ossetians; b) the town of Ordzhonikidze, centre of North Ossetian economic and political life, was located in the area populated by Irons; c) Kosta Khetagurov, founder of Ossetian literature and literary language, wrote in this dialect.

Thus, for the next half a century only the Iron dialect of the Ossetian language was standardized and codified. A great role in shaping the Ossetian literary language was played by the Historical and Philological Society established in 1919 in Vladikavkaz, which was transformed into the Ossetian Research Institute of Local History in 1925. Its members wrote and published alphabet books in the Iron and Digor dialects, compiled a brief elementary practical grammar for the two Ossetian dialects, and drew up a plan for gathering data on the Ossetian language and folklore and developing spelling rules. A terminological commission responsible for drafting a new terminological linguistic system was founded in 1926. Between 1930 and 1950, considerable efforts were put into developing a special set of scientific terms, mainly for the education system, and a number of educational terminological dictionaries were published. A large body of Russian, Soviet, and world classics was translated. Since 1939, the North Ossetian Research Institute had been extensively

engaged in compiling a card index of Ossetian vocabulary. It served as a basis for the *Ossetian-Russian Dictionary*, published in Moscow in 1952.

In the 1960s, standardization of the Ossetian language started to slow down. At that time, Ossetian was excluded from the sphere of education, which further hindered the dissemination of its literary norms, and led to a decrease in the scope and pace of their development. Together, denationalization of schools and a sharp decline in the intensity of standard-setting led to a gradual loss of what had been achieved over the previous three or four decades in Ossetian language standardization.

The Ossetian literary language gained a new impetus for development in early 1990s, when the two dialects were officially recognized as equal. At present, both literary variants developing on the basis of the Iron and Digor dialects of the Ossetian language are used in education, literature, printed and electronic media, theatre, etc.

Ossetia has given the world plenty of prominent literary and artistic personalities, scientists, and public figures.

## Language situation

Sociolinguistic surveys conducted among Ossetians did not reveal anyone who spoke their ethnic language only. At the same time, on average 41.5% of the Ossetian population (up to 54.3% in urban areas) claim to speak Russian more fluently. Bilingualism types (dominant Russian, parity, or dominant Ossetian) are distributed primarily due to historical reasons. The Russian language is more widespread in Vladikavkaz, the capital of the Republic, in Mozdok, the second largest town (these were originally Russian fortresses predominantly populated by Russians), and in Ardon (its history is closely connected with the Terek Cossacks). By contrast, high level of Ossetian language proficiency in the town of Digora is determined by virtually homogeneous ethnic composition of its population, its remoteness from the territorial and ethnic boundaries of Ossetia and, consequently, a much weaker foreign-language influence. On the other hand, the intensity of the Russian language use depends on whether there is extensive industrial production in a given town or it is largely dependent on agricultural activities and, accordingly, in which sectors the population is employed.

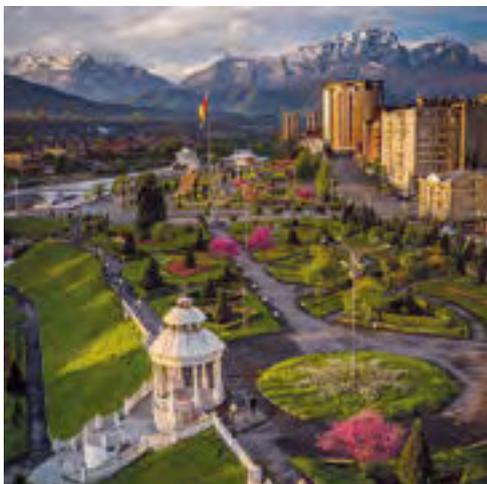


Ossetians in traditional costumes



Folk Arts and Crafts Centre

Vladikavkaz

Monument  
to Uastirdzhi,  
Alaghir

At the same time, it should be noted that the level of ethnic language proficiency has almost no effect on the linguistic self-identification of the respondents, because although 41.5% acknowledge a poorer command of Ossetian, only 1.1% consider Russian to be their mother tongue.

The degree of language assimilation increases in the urban environment. Only 7% of villagers have difficulties using spoken Ossetian. Among the urban population, the greatest difficulties in communicating orally in Ossetian are experienced by residents of Vladikavkaz (29%), Mozdok (18%), Beslan (17%), Digora (13%) and Ardon (13%).

Meanwhile, the Ossetian language is mainly used in everyday life. Russian dominates heavily in social and political life as well as at work. In towns and cities, Ossetians' opportunities to use their native language in these spheres are from 2 to 3 times more limited than in rural areas, firstly, due to the poorer command of spoken language, and secondly, due to the complexity of the topics discussed, primarily business issues.

However, even in everyday life the Ossetian language has no real predominance. It no longer prevails even in intra-family communication, and can meet the needs of everyday communication of the Republic's Ossetian population only if combined with the Russian language. There is a clear trend to use Ossetian with older interlocutors and both languages with younger ones.

Nowadays, one can admit that in most forms and spheres of its usage, Ossetian is becoming secondary for its native speakers.

Russians mostly use Ossetian to discuss everyday topics (16%), extremely rarely, social and political issues (2%), and work-related topics (3%). At the same time, only 5% of respondents can discuss even everyday topics in Ossetian without using Russian at the same time.

## Ossetian and Russian languages in social and political life

The main forms of language use in state and local government bodies are official record keeping and public speeches.

During the Soviet era, attempts were made to switch record keeping into the Ossetian language. A Russian–Ossetian dictionary of record keeping terms was published in 1935. However, the Ossetian language has never developed to the extent needed in that field, and it cannot compete with Russian.

## Education

### *General Education*

The Ossetian language is taught as a subject in all schools of the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> grades to all students regardless of their ethnicity.

At the same time, there are ongoing systematic preparations to introduce the Ossetian language as the language of instruction in preschool and in general education institutions. The Republic of North Ossetia–Alania has developed a unique multilingual and multicultural educational model for this purpose. Curricula, textbooks and teaching aids in the Ossetian language have been developed for all subjects to be used in preschool and elementary school. Pilot testing has been conducted with approximately one thousand elementary school students taught in Ossetian between 2009 and 2015. At present, preparations are underway to gradually switch preschools and schools to this educational model that will ensure a balance between Ossetian and Russian as languages of instruction.

To this end, study packages have been developed and published for all groups of preschoolers and all grades in general education institutions to teach the Iron literary version of the Ossetian language. They come in two variants: for children with a native command of Ossetian and for children who do not speak Ossetian or speak it poorly. For the first time, a curriculum, a comprehensive series of preschool teaching aids, and school textbooks on the Digor literary variant of the Ossetian language have been developed. There are also textbooks and teaching aids for Ossetian language teaching at Ossetian philology departments. There is also a set of textbooks and manuals for teaching Ossetian literature. The first electronic educational programmes, online Ossetian language dictionaries, video lessons on the Ossetian language, and several self-study guides have also been made available.

### *Basic and secondary vocational education*

The Ossetian language is taught as a subject in 11 republican basic vocational educational institutions and 14 secondary vocational educational institutions.

### *Higher education*

As of 2016, there are more than ten public and private universities, academies, institutes and both public and private branches of educational institutions in North Ossetia. Ossetian serves as the language of instruction in various chairs of the Department of Ossetian Philology and in the Chair of Elementary Education of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology at the North Ossetian State University, in the Department of Linguistics at the North Ossetian State Pedagogical Institute, as well as at the South Ossetian State University.

Periodicals  
in the  
Ossetian  
language



## Mass media

### Periodicals

October 12, 1906, is considered to be the birthday of Ossetian national periodicals. It was on this day that the first issue of a newspaper in the Ossetian language was published; it was simply called *Iron Gazet* (*Ossetian Newspaper*). Before the Revolution, there were many Ossetian national periodicals succeeding one another. They all had a very small circulation and were mainly limited to a narrow circle of urban readers partly due to difficulties in delivering newspapers to villages.

In April 1920, the first post-revolutionary periodical in the Ossetian language was published. It was the *Kermen* newspaper which existed for only a year and a half, till December 1922. In 1923, it was replaced by the *Ræstdzinad* newspaper, with a circulation of 500–800 copies. In 1925, it began to publish materials in the Digor dialect as well.

Early 1930s saw the first district newspapers. In 1932, there were six newspapers in the Republic, five of which wrote in Ossetian. In 1936, there were 16 newspapers, 12 of which were published in Ossetian. In the 1930s, a number of literary and art magazines as well as almanacs were published in the Ossetian language.

North Ossetian periodicals underwent sweeping changes between 1970 and 1984, when the number of newspapers and magazines published in the Republic increased from 11 to 20. Ossetian-language newspapers accounted for 32.3%, and Russian-language newspapers made up the other 77.7%. With their modest circulations, Ossetian newspapers and magazines could not pose serious competition to the onslaught of Russian central and local press.

The situation has largely remained unchanged. There are Ossetian-language periodicals, such as newspapers (*Ræstdzinad* in Iron; *Digora* in Digor, Iron, and Russian) or magazines (*Makh Dug* and *Nogdzau* in Iron and Russian; *Iræf* in Digor). However, Russian periodicals are more popular than Ossetian ones, which indicates the absolute dominance of the Russian language.

Ethnic Russians read periodicals exclusively in Russian. A small proportion (7.3%) of other ethnic groups living in the Republic's districts read newspapers and books in their national languages.

### Radio and television

First radio broadcasts in North Ossetia were made in the 1930s, while central television began broadcasting in 1961.

Between 1970 and 1984, the quantity and quality of the Republic's radio and television broadcasts generally increased. While there were broadcasts in both Russian and Ossetian, the role of the Russian language expanded considerably.

In the 1980s–1990s, Ossetian language broadcasts made up 15–20 minutes (5–6%) of the total TV broadcasting time in North Ossetia, which was 3 hours a day. On average, 35% of radio programmes were in Ossetian, the rest were in Russian. At the same time, two Central Television programmes and one Central Radio programme were broadcast almost around the clock.

Currently, North Ossetian TV viewers have a daily alternative of half an hour of Ossetian-language broadcasts on local TV and hundreds of hours of Russian-language broadcasts on federal channels, while radio listeners choose between similarly short local Ossetian-language broadcasts and Russian-language ones, the latter being much superior in length and quality.

## Culture

### Literature

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, constantly expanding economic and cultural contacts between Russians and Ossetians and a strong influence of Russian culture provided necessary conditions for the emergence of Ossetian literature. Thus, an Ossetian script was developed, the Ossetian language was scientifically described, a large body of national folklore was published, and first dictionaries were created. Most importantly, there were successful precedents of literary experiments that had not yet been published and were exclusively available to small circles of readers. Naturally, the growth in the number of Ossetian intellectuals and certain changes in the general educational and cultural level of the Ossetian people were of great importance.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the creation of works by prominent Ossetian poets, writers, and playwrights. In 1899, Kosta Khetagurov's poetic works were published as a collection named *Ossetian Lyre*. By that time, Ossetian literature had already included prose, poetry, and drama, but their share in the whole body of literature in Ossetia was insignificant compared to that in Russian.

Ossetian literature gained particular momentum in early 1930s, when over 30 collections of poems and stories by young Ossetian authors came out. After the Great Patriotic War, Ossetian literature began to show signs of crisis due to a decline in public interest for works in Ossetian and,

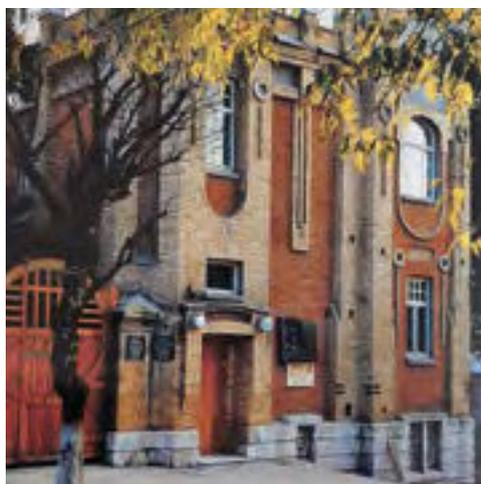


Sword  
in Stone  
monument,  
Midagrabin  
Valley



Monument to  
dala-fandyr,  
traditional  
Ossetian  
musical  
instrument

Theatre  
Museum



Philharmonic  
Hall



accordingly, a decrease in the number of readers. As a consequence, since the 1960s fewer and fewer creative young people have been joining the ranks of authors.

A recent survey among the Ossetian population of the Republic has shown that about 85% of the Ossetian population prefer to read books exclusively in Russian, 6% read books in both languages, whereas 9% note that they read books in Ossetian more often.

### *Theatre and cinema*

Ossetian dramatic art originated in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its emergence was prompted by Ossetian writers' first dramaturgical experiments. In 1931, the first Ossetian studio appeared at the State Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow. Its graduates made up the core of the North Ossetian State Drama Theatre opened in Vladikavkaz on November 10, 1935.

Until the early 1940s, translations of the classics of world and Russian drama – Molière, Balzac, Pushkin, Ostrovsky, etc. – prevailed in its repertoire.

There were four theatres in the capital of North Ossetia by early 1970s: a Russian one, an Ossetian one, a musical theatre, and a puppet theatre. The Ossetian and musical theatres provided translation of Ossetian-language performances into Russian. The Russian theatre did not provide a translation.

However, even in the most successful years the share of plays in the Ossetian language was not higher than 20%, and by late 20<sup>th</sup> century their number has been steadily decreasing.

Cinema appeared in North Ossetia in 1976, when *Kosta's Return*, the first television opera, was made. Today, there is an absolute monopoly of the Russian language in this sphere.

### *Book publishing*

The history of Ossetian-Russian bilingualism in Ossetia is directly linked to the use of the Ossetian language in book publishing. When the first *Ossetian grammar* by Sjögren was published in 1844, it was a major event for the prospects of book

publishing in the Ossetian language. It can be seen as a historic landmark because the Ossetian language was introduced to the scientific discourse, and a graphic basis for Ossetian book publishing was created.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century book printing, the Ossetian language was only used in religious literature, textbooks on the Ossetian language, scientific works, and fiction. In this period, Ossetian intellectuals mostly used Russian as the language of education, science and essays.

In the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the range of topics covered by Ossetian-language publications expanded. By 1930s, an average of 30 books were published annually: prose, poetry, folklore, art, philology, ethnography, as well as educational, socio-political, economic, legal works, etc.

The years of the Great Patriotic War saw a drastic reduction in the volume and scope of topics of books published. By 1960s, only prose, Ossetian language instructional literature, poetry, essays, official documents, and folklore were published. This range of topics has not changed since then.

Translated literature was published more actively. Between 1930s and 1960s, works by William Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Rudolf Erich Raspe, John Reed, Jonathan Swift, Shota Rustaveli, Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Lermontov, Leo Tolstoy, Nikolai Ostrovsky, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Nekrasov, Anton Chekhov, Taras Shevchenko, Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov, and many others were translated into the Ossetian language. Over the same period, a number of works by Ossetian authors, including the Nart epos, have also been translated into Russian.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a downward trend in the number of Ossetian-language books, and by early 21<sup>st</sup> century they accounted for only 26% of the total book output of the Republic's printing house.

## Science

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, individual articles on medicine, ethnography, and economics were published in the Ossetian language. During the Soviet period, a number of works on Ossetian linguistics came out, along with a fairly large number of dictionaries, including a historical and etymological dictionary of the Ossetian language, spelling dictionaries of the Ossetian language, an Ossetian-Russian-German dictionary, Russian-Ossetian terminological dictionaries on geography, history, botanics, zoology, mathematics, etc. Individual works on physics, astronomy, geography, and other branches of science were published in Ossetian. However, given their extremely limited number, one can say that in general the Ossetian language was barely used in science.

## Prospects for the preservation and promotion of the Ossetian language

The current state of Ossetian in the Republic raises serious concerns about its preservation and promotion as an instrument of Ossetian national culture. Without state protection of the Ossetian language, it is impossible to promote national culture and social spiritual and informational development.

A number of sociological studies have been conducted to assess the current state of national and cultural development of the Republic, and to work out suggestions for its further optimisation. The Government of the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania has developed the State Programme for the National and Cultural Development of the Ossetian People for 2021–2025. Its objectives include systematically promoting further development of Ossetian people’s national culture as well as identifying targets and priorities to support and promote the Ossetian language. The programme provides for, among other things, introducing children and youth to Ossetian national culture, developing and promoting modern creative activities for children and youth, releasing a series of audiobooks for primary, middle, and high school students designed to enrich their vocabulary and boost their spoken Ossetian skills, organizing free Ossetian language classes for preschool and school-age children, and holding Ossetian language and literature contests.

To meet the growing demand for literature on the history of Ossetia and the Ossetian people, collections of state libraries in North Ossetia–Alania have been stocked with Ossetian-language books and works on the Ossetian language, history and culture.

Educational projects aimed at preserving the Ossetian language will also receive support. Educational institutions will get assistance in developing methodological tools and finding professionals needed. Ossetian-language media will hire more journalists. More specialists will join the ranks of Ossetian language and literature teachers. New multimedia products (films, mobile applications, computer programmes, games, and cartoons) will be launched.

Participants of the interregional conference “The Ossetian Language in the Context of Contemporary Globalization Processes: Preservation and Promotion Issues”



Alan Bagiev, Minister of Ethnic Affairs of the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania



Plenary session of the interregional conference “The Ossetian Language in the Context of Contemporary Globalization Processes: Preservation and Promotion Issues”



Ossetian choir



Irina Khaimanova, Director, National Science Library of the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania



## Udmurt Republic



### Interregional scientific and practical conference **Mother Tongue as a Factor of Cultural Identity**

(May 24–25, 2021, Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic)

#### Organizers:

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Ministry of Culture of the Udmurt Republic
- Ministry of National Policy of the Udmurt Republic
- National Library of the Udmurt Republic
- Total Dictation Foundation for the Support of Linguistic Culture

# LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE UDMURT REPUBLIC



**Tatiana TENSINA**  
Director, National Library  
of the Udmurt Republic

## General information

The Udmurt Republic occupies a small space on the map of Russia, its area being 42,100 square km (0.25% of the territory of the Russian Federation). Nevertheless, Udmurtia is larger than such Western European countries as Belgium or Switzerland, and is approximately equal in size to Denmark.

Udmurtia is located in the east of the Russian Plain, to the west of the Ural Mountains, between the Kama River and its right tributary – the Vyatka River. It borders the Kirov Oblast in the west and north, the Perm Krai in the east, the Republic of Bashkortostan in the southeast, and the Republic of Tatarstan in the south and southwest. The distance between Izhevsk and Moscow is 1,129 km.

Today's Udmurtia is a developed industrial and agricultural region of the Volga Federal District and has all types of transport links with other Russian regions.

As of January 1, 2021, the population of the Udmurt Republic is 1.49 million people, approximately 66% of whom reside in urban areas. The capital of the Udmurt Republic is Izhevsk with a population of 646,500 people.

The land of Udmurtia gives rise to Kama, Vyatka, and hundreds of other rivers. A brilliant poet Vladimir Semakin called Udmurtia “the land of springs” – not only for the surrounding nature, but also for the local people's thoughts, which are as pure and transparent as spring water. Those who live in the land of springs are cordial, tactful, and spiritually strong. Since time immemorial, the Udmurt people have understood and valued the power of unity, the power of a large, close-knit family. “Linen fibers are weak as cobwebs, but together they form a rope; try to tear it apart and you shall see its strength” – this wisdom remains true to this day. The peace-loving, multinational people of the republic cherish it as the apple of their eye.

More than 100 ethnicities live on the Udmurt land in peace and harmony. According to the 2002 All-Russian Census, 60.1% of the Republic's population are Russians, 29.3% are Udmurts, and 7.0% are Tatars.

Udmurts are the republic's indigenous inhabitants. It is one of the ancient eastern Finnic peoples living in the forests to the northwest of the Ural Mountains. Linguistically, the Udmurts belong to the Finno-Ugric family of peoples, which also includes the Komi, the Mari, the Mordvins, the Estonians, the Finns, the Karelians, the Saami, the Hungarians, the Khanty, and the Mansi. The total number of Udmurts in the world is about 750,000 people, 67% of them live in the Udmurt Republic.

Official languages of the Udmurt Republic are Russian and Udmurt.

Baigurez  
Mountain  
outskirts



Tikhvin Male  
Monastery



## Tourism

Tourism and hospitality are rapidly developing in the republic. There are tour operators, transport, agricultural enterprises, as well as sports, recreation, and medical facilities working in these fields. Udmurtia's tourism infrastructure is comprised of hotels, health resorts, children's recreation and sports camps, recreational compounds, 32 museums, over 520 public libraries, over 2,000 historical and cultural monuments, a national park, nature parks and sanctuaries, 68 natural monuments of regional or local significance, several sports venues. Unique mineral springs and mud baths provide perfect conditions for organizing mud and balneotherapy in the region.

Currently, there are about 200 tourist routes in Udmurtia, mostly going around cities and districts of the republic. Many of them include attractions associated with the life and work of world famous people, including Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Mikhail Kalashnikov, Pyotr Krivonogov, etc. There are also ethnographic routes, since Udmurtia is one of Russia's most multiethnic and multiconfessional regions.

The famous Siberian Route, a historic overland route running across the territory of the republic from European Russia through Siberia to the borders of China, has had a great impact on the development of the cities it passed through and of Siberia in general.

Udmurtia's distinctive identity is comprised of the vibrant cultures of the peoples inhabiting this region, who represent three major Eurasian worlds (Slavic, Finno-Ugric, and Turkic), surviving pagan beliefs, archaeological sites, Udmurt legends about bogatyrs, its global- and national-scale trademarks (Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Mikhail Kalashnikov, the world-famous Buranovskiye Babushki, Galina Kulakova, and many other outstanding athletes, as well as Nadezhda Durova, the Cavalry Maiden).

## The Udmurt language

The Udmurt language belongs to the Permic group of the Finno-Permic group of languages, which is part of the Uralic language family. Its closest relatives are the Komi languages.

According to the 2010 All-Russian Census, the number of Udmurt language speakers stands at 552,300 people, 410,600 of whom reside in Udmurtia. Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Perm Krai, Kirov Oblast, Sverdlovsk Oblast, and Mari El are also places of compact residence of Udmurts.

It is customary to date the beginning of direct economic contacts between Udmurts and Russians to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Over more than five centuries of their joint history, the Russian language has greatly influenced the development of the Udmurt language and culture. The writing system of the Udmurt language was created in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century adopting the Cyrillic script. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the researchers had used the letters of Cyrillic and Latin alphabet to write down Udmurt words, but the Udmurt writing proper has always been based solely on Cyrillic alphabet.

The first written artefacts, namely lists of Udmurt words, appeared in the 1720s and were based on the Latin alphabet. In 1775, the first Cyrillic grammar of the Udmurt language was written. The first books in the Udmurt language were published in 1847. In 1890s, the Udmurt script acquired a new form close to its present state.

The 1920s and 1930s saw rapid development of literature, theatre, mass media, expansion of terminology in the Udmurt language, promotion of national education, science, and book publishing in Udmurt. These processes were largely determined by institutional support: the Votsk Autonomous Oblast was established on November 4, 1920, and in 1932, it was renamed to the Udmurt Autonomous Oblast. For the first time, the Udmurt people's endonym got official recognition. In December 1934, the oblast obtained the status of an autonomous republic. By 1939, Udmurtia's modern borders were fixed, and the language was definitively formed.

The Udmurt language has been the republic's official language alongside Russian since 2001.

## Sociological monitoring of the ethnolinguistic situation

According to a 2020 survey, Russian is the native language for the majority of respondents in the Udmurt Republic (66.9%). 14.4% of the respondents indicated Udmurt as their native language. 14.1% of respondents consider both Russian and Udmurt to be their mother tongues.

Traditional  
Udmurt  
ensemble



Buranovskiye  
Babushki  
Band



According to respondents' self-assessment, slightly over a half of Udmurts (53.6%) are proficient in their national language (can speak, read, and write in it). 20% of Udmurts have a command of spoken Udmurt, 19.5% have a passive knowledge of their national language (can understand it, but cannot speak it). 6.2% of Udmurts have no command of their national language. According to their parents, 44.4% of Udmurt children are proficient in the Udmurt language.

## Contemporary language policy

Udmurtia has developed a balanced regional language policy, the state and society act in concert to preserve and promote national languages. The republic's language promotion strategy takes into account modern global and Russian trends as well as successful language practices.

The region supports national mass media; fiction, educational, and scientific literature is published in Udmurt; there is an expanding market for goods and services designed to meet citizens' linguistic needs.

Udmurtia has established the Interagency Coordinating Council for the State Languages of the Udmurt Republic. Its goal is to improve the state policy in the field of preservation, promotion, study, protection, and support of the state languages in Udmurtia.



The Republic's Terminology and Spelling Commission has been active as well.

Free-of-charge Udmurt and Tatar language classes are available. The republic also has ethnocultural Sunday schools for children teaching Armenian, Azerbaijani, German, and Hebrew.

As part of its ethnolinguistic strategy, Udmurtia applies best international and Russian practices in bilingual education.

All of the republic's municipalities organize events aimed at preserving and promoting Udmurtia's official languages and languages of other peoples living in its territory. Among them are the International Mother Language Day (February 21), Slavonic Literature and Culture Day (May 24), Russian Language Day (June 6), Udmurt Language Day (November 27).

Four native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation (Russian, Udmurt, Tatar, and Mari) are taught and studied in the education system



Gerber  
National  
Festival

of the Udmurt Republic. Students have the opportunity to exercise their right to study their native language and literature (including Russian). The issue of certification of Udmurt language and literature textbooks is being addressed at the federal level.

Every year, the Udmurt Republic holds Olympiads in the Udmurt, Tatar, Mari, and Russian languages and literatures; an interregional Udmurt language master class contest; an interregional literary translation contest “Translation in the Field of Multilingualism”; as well as various literature and music festivals, book exhibitions, conferences, and round tables dedicated to the preservation and promotion of native languages.

Extensive work is currently underway to elaborate a state programme “Preservation, Study, and Promotion of the Official Languages of the Udmurt Republic”.

## Reinforcing the status of the Udmurt language and establishing social and cultural guarantees for its functioning

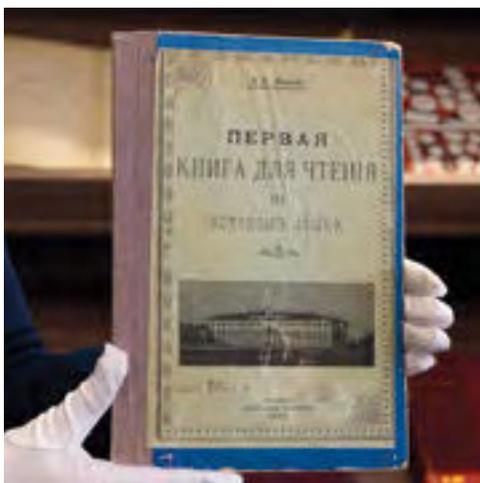
Today, the legal status of the Udmurt language is regulated by the Republic’s Law *On the Official Languages of the Udmurt Republic and Other Languages of the Peoples of the Udmurt Republic* (2001). Udmurtia has drawn up sectoral state programmes in the fields of ethnosocial development and harmonization of interethnic relations, advancement of education, culture, press, and mass communications.

In 2020, the Law *On Holidays and Commemorative Dates of the Udmurt Republic* was adopted. It represents official recognition of the significance of the Udmurt language and traditional national holidays, as well as acknowledgement of Udmurtia’s great sons’ contribution to the history of national statehood.

When the authorities officially designate a language as the official one, they undertake to promote it in every possible way and ensure its active and predominant use in political and cultural life. Such a legislative regulation implies increasing the state of knowledge of all levels of the language, taking care to preserve and study its monuments (old books, valuable manuscripts), making the study of the language mandatory, and increasing the volume of fiction, essays, scientific literature, newspapers, and magazines in that language.



Students of the Kuzebai Gerd National Gymnasium



A vintage reader in the Udmurt language

Measures are being taken to consolidate the status of the Udmurt language as one of Udmurtia's official languages and to establish the necessary sociocultural guarantees for its functioning.

In compliance with the republic's language legislation, there is an ongoing process of designing signboards displaying the names of public authorities, local self-government bodies as well as state and municipal enterprises and institutions in the official languages (Russian and Udmurt).

Public organizations are actively involved in implementing a set of measures that seek to raise the prestige of the Udmurt language among children and youth, expand the scope of its use, incorporate the language into modern youth, urban, and brand spaces, contemporary music trends, fashion industry, and organize online Udmurt language courses, develop mobile applications, and carry out bilingualism support projects.

## Education

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are facing new requirements for the educational system development. The infrastructure of educational organizations is changing, as are interactions between the participants of the educational process. We all realize that unless there are necessary conditions for the language to function in today's society, unless there are prospects for its study and application, there will be no future for the nation.

Today Udmurt, Tatar, and Mari are taught in comprehensive educational institutions of Udmurtia. A great role in the promotion of the Udmurt language belongs to the Kuzebay Gerd Udmurt State National Grammar School, the republic's resource centre for ethnocultural education. The Research Institute of National Education has been created under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Udmurt Republic to supervise issues related to ethnocultural education, including conducting monitoring, organizing methodological seminars, selecting educational institutions as experimental sites for testing innovative bilingualism methods, as well as developing textbooks and teaching aids. The Research Institute has developed a modern online educational portal *Удмурт кылдунне* (<https://udmkyl.ru/>). Creating state-of-the-art educational resources is a priority

for scientists and material developers in a modern digitalised society.

A great achievement in the promotion of the Udmurt language is the publication of teaching aids by the Udmurtia publishing house. 48 titles in the Udmurt language with a total circulation of 30,500 copies were published in 2020. Three lines of textbooks for grades 5 through 11 have been prepared for expert examinations in order to be included into the Federal list of textbooks compiled by the Research Institute of National Education of the Udmurt Republic.

Udmurt  
State  
University



Udmurtia is the only Finno-Ugric region of Russia to have included an entire set of textbooks of the Udmurt language and literature for all grades into the Federal list. A total of 33 titles of textbooks and teaching aids were published in 2020.

The continuity of the educational system – from preschool to higher education – is important for language development. Each level of the system must do its part, while also taking into account modern challenges.

Both specialized ministries and the public are currently paying close attention to professional education.

For example, future teachers of the Udmurt language and literature for different education levels study at the Borisov Mozhga Pedagogical College, the Udmurt State University, and the Glazov Pedagogical Institute named after Vladimir Korolenko. Professional education focuses on establishing close connections with kindergartens and schools, following a practice-oriented approach, incorporating interactive educational technologies into the learning process, and introducing modern grading systems, including Worldskills standards.

Together with the Udmurt Kenesh All-Udmurt Association, the republic's educational institutions organize various contests aimed at making the Udmurt language more popular with the youth. Their purpose is to show younger generations that there is a demand for Udmurt in today's society, which should motivate them to study their native language. Only systematic cooperation between all stakeholders in the educational process can make younger generations love their native language and culture.

The Institute of Educational Development of the Udmurt Republic and the scientific-methodological magazine *Vordskem Kyl* (*Native Word*) offer great professional support to teaching staff. The aforementioned institutions focus on teaching excellence while helping to prevent professional burnout.

Development of the educational system relies on Udmurt scientists' achievements. The Udmurt Research Institute of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences plays an important role in this process. Thus, applied modern science is currently developing a speech synthesizer for the Udmurt language and creating a corpus of texts in Udmurt.

Every year, teachers and students from Udmurt educational institutions win international, all-Russian, and interregional contests, which proves that Udmurtia's current system of ethnocultural education is well-organized.

Despite significant achievements in ethnocultural education, there are still several pressing issues to be addressed. These include, above all, a downward trend in learning Udmurt as a native language and its limited role in supplementary education. In addition, schools and kindergartens administrations are occasionally reluctant to or incapable of teaching native languages even if there is a sufficient number of local native speaking students. These and other issues can only be addressed through joint efforts of educational and public institutions.



Udmurt  
preschool,  
village of  
Debyosy

## Culture

### Theatres

Currently, there are four theatres in Udmurtia: the Tchaikovsky State Opera and Ballet Theatre, the State Russian Drama Theatre, the State National Theatre of the Udmurt Republic, and the State Puppet Theatre.

The Udmurt drama dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The very first play was *En lushka (Do not Steal, 1906)* by Ivan Mikheev, who made a great contribution to the formation of national drama. In 1918, the first amateur national theatre (founded in the village of Yagoshur, Glazovsky district) staged the very first play in the Udmurt language. It was based on Leo Tolstoy's *The Cause of It All*. The theatre's repertoire also included tales, legends, songs, and lore of the Udmurt people.

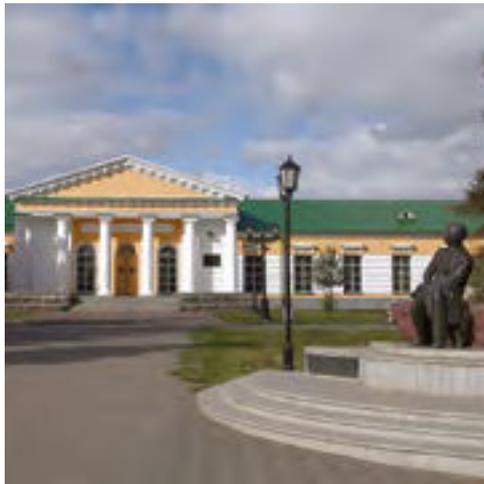
The history of the National Theatre of the Udmurt Republic dates back to 1923. Today, its repertoire includes classical plays, as well as new genres and styles based on works by Udmurt, Russian, and foreign playwrights. National drama, which traces the Udmurt history, occupies a special place in the theatre's repertoire. Performances based

on works by Udmurt playwrights have a special appeal to the rural audience.

All plays are simultaneously interpreted from Udmurt into Russian and vice versa.

In 1958, the Musical Drama Theatre was opened in the republic (in 1993, it changed its name to the State Opera and Ballet Theatre of the Udmurt Republic). Its early seasons featured productions of classical operettas, the *Lyubushka* national musical comedy, *Natal* – the first national opera, *Italmas* – the first national ballet, and the *Chipchirgan* opera-ballet.

Kuzebai  
Gerd  
National  
Museum



Theatre of  
Folk Song  
and Dance



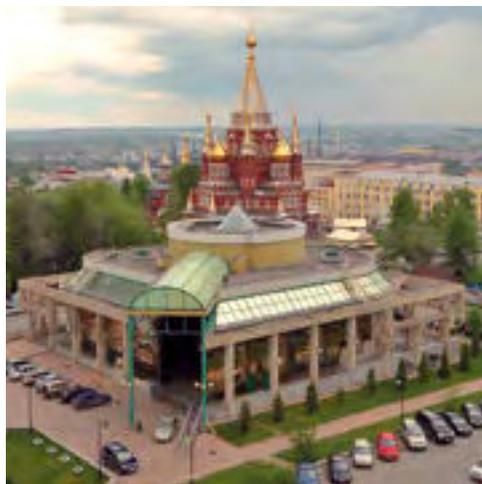
Musical  
programme  
at the  
Estate-  
Museum  
of Pyotr  
Tchaikovsky



The State Puppet Theatre has frequently put on Udmurt-language performances based on works by Udmurt authors.

## Museums

The Republic has six state museums: the Kuzebay Gerd National Museum, the “Idnakar” Historical and Cultural Museum, the Udmurt Republican Museum of Fine Arts, the State Memorial and Architectural Complex “Estate-Museum of Pyotr Tchaikovsky”, the “Ludorvai” Architectural and Ethnographic Museum-Reserve, and the Kalashnikov Museum and Exhibition Complex of Small Arms.



Kalashnikov  
Museum  
and  
Exhibition  
Complex of  
Small Arms

The “Ethnography” collection of the Kuzebay Gerd National Museum was formed as a result of ethnographic expeditions to places of compact residence of Udmurts across the republic and beyond.

The Ludorvai Museum displays traditional Udmurt farmsteads which had a house, a storehouse, a shed, a barn, an animal stall, a family sanctuary called “*kuala*”, and a sleeping barn called “*kenos*”. All the buildings feature displays of housewares, garments as well as embroidered clothing and linens.

Apart from exhibiting their collections, Udmurt museums host cultural and educational events that are important for preserving and promoting national culture and language.

## Libraries

Libraries in Udmurtia (two public and 521 municipal ones) are actively engaged in preserving and promoting national cultures and languages of peoples living in the republic. They host cultural and educational events, develop informational resources, and teach native languages.

In 2008, the Ministry of National Policy of the Udmurt Republic launched a project called “Libraries as Centres of National Culture”. It provided for the opening of libraries that served as centres of Russian, Udmurt, Tatar, Mari, Bessermian, and Chuvash cultures in places of compact residence of various nationalities who preserved their language and traditions. Today, more than 40 libraries act as centres of 23 national cultures.

The republican National Library is the largest depository of national publications. Today, its collection includes over 84,000 national and local history printed materials, of which over 13,000 books are in the Udmurt language. Besides, it should be noted that the library has lifetime publications of prominent enlighteners of the Udmurt people, historians, and ethnographers.

National  
Library of  
the Republic  
of Udmurtia



The library has unique and rich collections that are of great value for both the republic and the world science and culture, namely “National Book”, “Personal Book Collections”, “Autographed Editions”, and “Collections of Udmurtia’s Linguists Specializing in Finno-Ugric Studies”.

One of the most important missions of the National Library is to create a digital archive of national documents and provide remote access to them.

Its most popular online resource is the National Electronic Library of the Udmurt Republic (NELUR). The National Library has been maintaining

this resource since 2008. Today, the digital library contains over 50,000 digital documents, including about 5,000 books and over 43,000 periodicals published since 1918. It also has 7,700 documents in Udmurt.

Over the last three years, more than 450,000 readers have used the digital library. Between 2018 and 2020, the top ten most searched Udmurt-language publications included dictionaries, phrasebooks, Udmurt textbooks, and classics of Udmurt literature. Vocabulary and grammar of the Udmurt language are the most searched queries.

The demand for dictionaries and classics of Udmurt literature is perfectly understandable as the Udmurt language and literature are part of the secondary and vocational schools curricula. Today, the republican National Electronic Library is, in fact, the world’s only (and already quite comprehensive) body of publications on Udmurt folklore, linguistics, literary studies, art, ethnic history, archaeology, and ethnography. It is regularly updated. The publications available are in demand in scientific, educational, and cultural republican institutions. The National Electronic Library is actively used both in the Russian Federation and abroad.

In late 2010, the National Library launched another project – a *Vorshud* wiki site. It is a popular Internet encyclopedia on Udmurt culture available both in Russian and Udmurt. To date, it contains over 1000 articles on ethnic history, material and spiritual culture of the Udmurts. Most of the information is available in Russian. The Udmurt language features in three sections: *Udmurt Stars*, *Modern Udmurt Writers*, *Russian-Udmurt Dictionary of New Words*.

In the context of total urbanization, minority languages have been disappearing for many reasons. In cities, native speakers and people who take language classes are often left without a space where they can put their Udmurt language skills to use. For this reason, the library has come up with a project to organize Udmurt speaking clubs as an environment for the practical use of the Udmurt language. This project has received a lot of positive feedback.

Undoubtedly, a speaking club is a good complement to language classes. It provides comfortable settings for its members to discuss all kinds of topics, expand their own horizons, and share knowledge with interesting people while speaking an informal language, helping them improve their Udmurt speaking skills.

To meet the ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural needs of visually impaired people, the National Library provides printed texts in audio, large print, and braille both in Russian and Udmurt.

By compiling information resources and making them available to users, the library contributes to the preservation and promotion of the Udmurt language, and provides an opportunity to experience unique linguistic traditions of the Udmurt people.

## Mass media

Seven periodicals in the Udmurt language are currently published in Udmurtia, including newspapers and magazines targeting different age groups and audiences. Eight appendixes to district newspapers are published in districts with the maximum concentration of the Udmurt population. The number of copies and periodicity of district supplements varies from once a week to once a month.

In 2020, total airtime of the *Udmurtia* State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company in the Udmurt and Tatar languages amounted to 1,897 hours. All national TV programmes are broadcast in the morning on Rossiya-1 channel for one hour, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Udmurtia also has its own national TV and radio broadcasting company called *Moya Udmurtia*, which broadcasts news, authorial and entertainment TV and radio programmes in the Udmurt language.

In April 2020, active young Udmurt people launched the first round-the-clock youth Internet TV channel in the Udmurt language *Daur TV*. It generates video playlists in Udmurt, and broadcasts them live in the social network VKontakte. The channel also streams interesting events and broadcasts authorial programmes from the studio every day. Hopefully, this format will encourage young people, including those living in rural settlements, to use the Udmurt language.



Udmurt newspapers

## Ethnolinguistic policy goals

The main goals of ethnolinguistic policy for the near future include:

- developing a Concept of Ethnocultural Enlightenment;
- adjusting the republic's strategy of language promotion with due consideration of current global and Russian trends and successful linguistic practices;
- developing draft legislation *On Amendments to the Law of the Udmurt Republic "On the Official Languages of the Udmurt Republic and Other Languages of the Peoples of the Udmurt Republic"*;

- developing the State Programme on the Preservation and Promotion of the Official Languages of the Udmurt Republic and Other Languages of the Udmurt Republic;
- creating a regional Fund to support initiatives by cultural, educational, and scientific institutions, mass media, and public organizations that seek to preserve and promote Udmurtia's official languages, and native languages of peoples living in the republic, to improve conditions for developing human resources, methodological potential, and scientific linguistic materials and techniques for teaching native languages of peoples of Russia, including techniques for working with bilingual children;
- drafting and publishing a spelling dictionary of the Udmurt language and a set of Udmurt spelling and punctuation rules;
- in partnership with relevant ministries and departments, holding grant competitions for students of humanities, medical, technical, and agricultural universities to promote the Udmurt language in their professional activities;
- improving and enriching Udmurt Internet content by means of the Udmurt radio and television fund, video lectures in Udmurt language offered by museums, virtual museum tours, audio books, etc.

## Conclusion

It should be noted that steps taken as part of implementing state programmes have greatly contributed to addressing the language issue.

At the same time, there remain certain problems that require a strategic approach to promoting and popularizing native languages.

Family plays a vital role in language reproduction. When different generations (parents and their children) speak a language in a family, it helps passing on the ethnic worldview, the very cultural codes that sustain the ethnic culture over time.

Today, the need to preserve minority languages is most pressing in large cities. In this regard, it is important to create a demand on the part of children, since children and their parents (legal representatives) do not always have sufficient motivation to learn their native (non-Russian) language.

In order to stimulate interest in one's ethnic language, it is necessary to create an adequate language environment (including communicative, visual, and educational).

Minority languages play a minor role in cyberspace, which largely perpetuates a stereotype that they are archaic, "outdated", and non-prestigious.

Today, the fields of language marketing and language engineering have not yet been sufficiently developed both scientifically and practically. Meanwhile, methodological studies of these technologies designed to preserve minority languages and improve their image are of practical importance in a number of multinational regions.

In light of changes in the current legislation, in order to revitalize and promote native languages of Russia's peoples and the official languages of the republics, educational and instructional guidelines for teaching and learning them are needed.

It is essential to promote the use of the Udmurt language in the names of consumer goods, trademarks, and companies.

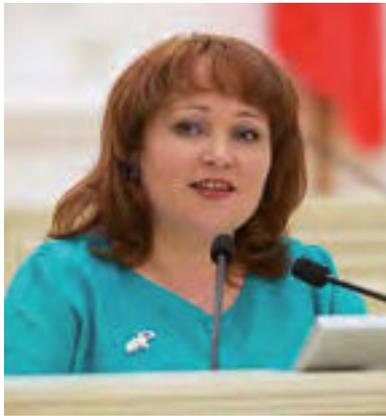
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Vladimir Soloviev,  
Minister of Culture of  
the Udmurt Republic



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Tatiana  
Ishmatova,  
Head, All-  
Udmurt  
Association  
“Udmurt  
Kenesh”



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Svetlana  
Bolotnikova,  
Minister of  
Education of  
the Udmurt  
Republic

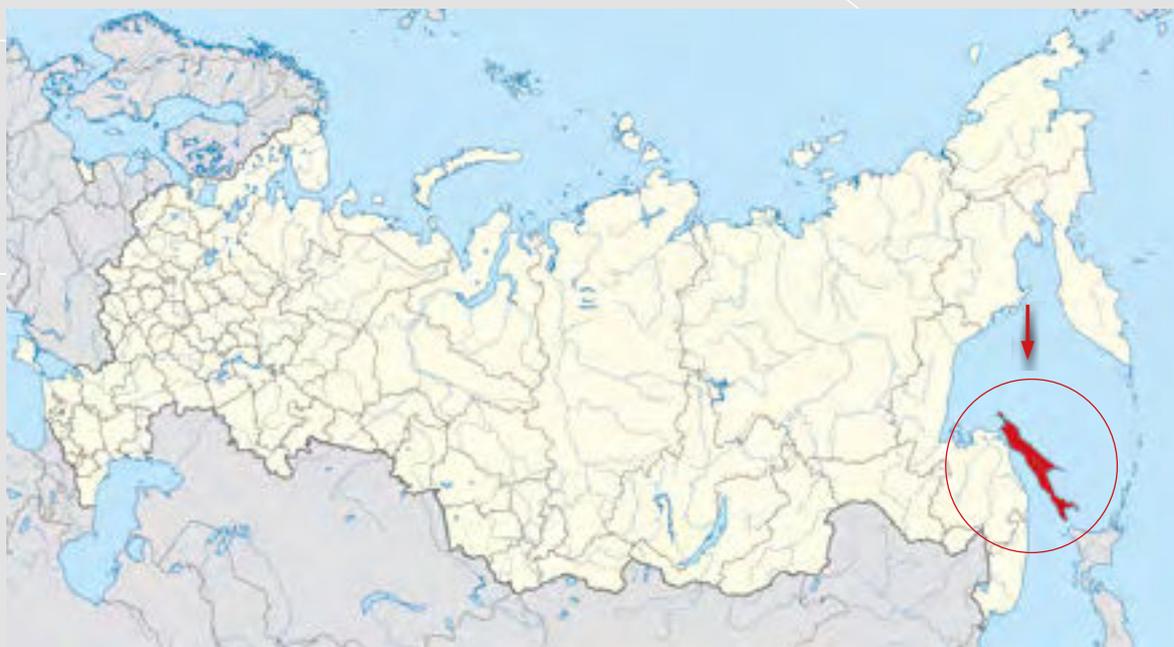


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Participants of  
the interregional  
conference  
“Mother Tongue  
as a Factor of  
Cultural Identity”



## Sakhalin Oblast



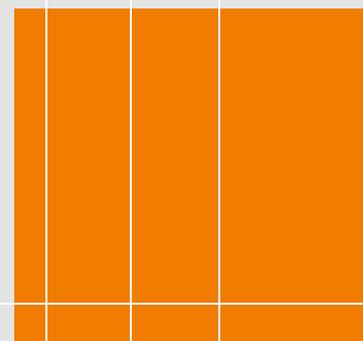
**Interregional scientific and practical conference**

### **Advanced Linguistic Computer Technologies for Preserving and Reviving Minority Languages of Sakhalin**

**(October 6–9, 2020, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk – Nogliki, Sakhalin Oblast)**

#### **Organizers:**

- Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme
- Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
- Sakhalin Regional Science Library
- Nogliki Centralized Library System
- Dominanta Information and Cultural Education Centre



# INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF SAKHALIN: CHALLENGES OF PRESERVATION AND REVIVAL



**Olga  
ROZHNOVA**  
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Centralised Library  
System



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PARSHAKOVA**  
Deputy Director,  
Interregional Library  
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Project Coordinator,  
Russian IFAP Committee

## Introduction

Sakhalin, the largest island in Russia in terms of population, is located at the very east of the country. It is part of the Sakhalin Oblast inhabited by representatives of many ethnic groups, each with its own history of settlement and fate.

According to the 2002 All-Russian Census, the island housed a population of about 530,000 people of which 84% were Russians, 5.6% – Koreans, 4.0% – Ukrainians, 1.2% – Tatars, 1.0% – Belarusians. Indigenous population accounted for less than 1%.

In the post-Soviet times the island saw an outflow of the population to the “mainland”. With mortality steadily prevailing over the birth rate, from 2002 to 2009 Sakhalin’s population continued to decrease at a fairly rapid pace – by about 1% per year. As a result, by 2010 the population of the island was about 490,000 people.

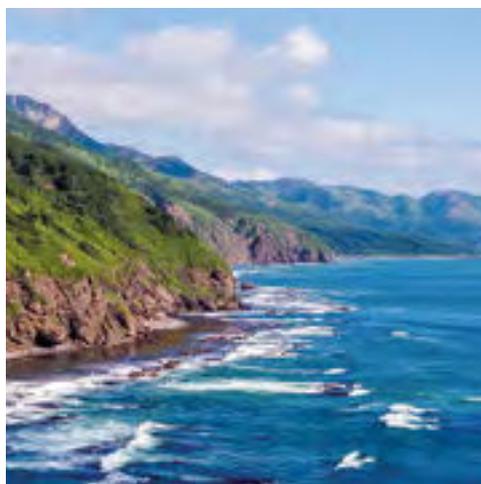
Indigenous peoples of the Sakhalin Oblast, including the Nivkhs and Uiltas, account for only 0.7% of the island’s population (4,000 people).

## Indigenous peoples and languages of Sakhalin

### *The Nivkh*

The Nivkh are the most numerous group of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North of Sakhalin. Apart from this island group, there is also a mainland group in the Khabarovsk Krai inhabiting the lower Amur River, the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk and the Tatar Strait.

Today the Nivkh on Sakhalin account for 2,682 people (75% of the island’s indigenous population). Almost two-thirds of the Nivkh live in two settlements – in the village of Nekrasovka and in the township of Nogliki.



Sea  
coast of  
Sakhalin

The issue of the genetic affiliation of the Nivkh language has not been solved yet. Today, Nivkh is usually regarded as a separate unit of the Paleo-Asian languages, unconnected to any other group or subgroup.

There are 4 dialects/varieties of the Nivkh language:

- Amur;
- East-Sakhalin;
- North-Sakhalin – spoken on the coasts around the Amur Liman, including the mainland and West Sakhalin, it is placed somewhere in between the Amur and the East Sakhalin dialects;
- South-Sakhalin – dialect of the Nivkh who used to live in the southern part of Sakhalin (which was under Japanese control) until 1945. After the war, most of them moved to the Japanese island of Hokkaido and were assimilated, hence the South Sakhalin dialect is now considered extinct.

The lexical and phonological differences across these dialects are so great that speakers of the Sakhalin and Amur dialects can hardly understand each other. Therefore, some linguists define these varieties as separate languages belonging to the small Nivkh family.

The Nivkh language is not standardized and has no supra-dialectal forms. The language of folklore is somewhat different from the spoken language, but it also has dialectal features.

Over the past century, the number of the Nivkh and their share in the indigenous population of Sakhalin have been quite stable, with 4,500 people counted in 1897, and 5,200 in 2002. However, the share of native speakers among these dropped from 100% to 23.3% in the same period and continued to decrease. At present, almost all the Nivkh who speak their native language are bilinguals, fluent in Russian as well. The Nivkh language has no official status and is used mainly in everyday family communication.

Although according to the 2002 Census, 688 people reported their knowledge of Nivkh, these data reflect only symbolic aspects of language use (recognising the most frequent words and expressions or having books in the Nivkh language in their home library).

According to the results of the 2010 Census, 4,652 people in Russia considered themselves ethnic Nivkhs, of which 198 people spoke the Nivkh language. The number of speakers who have a really good command of Nivkh, can easily construct sentences, speak fluently, tell stories (and whose speech is not strongly influenced by the Russian language) is extremely limited and does not exceed 20 persons. Slightly more people speak the Nivkh language less fluently, but this group still numbers only about a hundred persons. The overwhelming majority of Nivkh speakers were born before 1940s.



The Nivkh

The Uilta



### *The Uilta*

The Uilta<sup>39</sup> are currently one of the smallest indigenous peoples of Russia which numbers about 300 persons. Modern Uilta communities are concentrated in three settlements – Poronaysk, Nogliki and the village of Val.

The Uilta language belongs to the Amur Tungusic branch of the Tungus-Manchu languages. According to researchers, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Uilta language was used only in everyday life. Among middle-aged people, less than a few dozen

could speak Uilta fluently. By 2010, this language was on the verge of complete extinction – according to the 2010 Census, the Uilta population numbered 295 people of which less than fifty people could communicate in their native language to any extent.

Today the Uilta language is practically out of use. Representatives of the oldest generation very rarely communicate with each other in Uilta. Several persons aged from 40 to 50 have poor command of the language. In fact, the number of speakers capable of communicating in Uilta is no more than 10 persons.

## Sociolinguistic situation on Sakhalin

The sociolinguistic history of Sakhalin is unique due to the fact that its aboriginal population has been communicating in many different languages since ancient times. Preservation of multilingualism in this region was fostered by the convenient location of the island, a developed network of trade and exchange relations, development of navigation, and the peculiarities of the mobile lifestyle of the population of Sakhalin.

According to the data of all-Russian population censuses, the share of the Nivkh and Uiltas choosing the language of their ethnic group as their native language is gradually decreasing. While in 1959, 76.4% of all Nivkhs considered Nivkh as their native language, in 1989 this figure dropped down to 23.3%. For the Nivkhs of Sakhalin this figure reduced to 11.6% by 2002 and further to 5.1% by 2010. As for the Uilta language, in 1989, about 21% of the Uilta named it their mother tongue, while in 2002, only 3.7% of them had a certain command of the language of their ethnic group, and by 2010 this figure dropped down to 3.5%. There is a strong disparity between the number of those who regard their ethnic languages as native and those who actually speak them. Today, many Uiltas do not master the Uilta language, but understand certain words and regard Uilta as a native language either for themselves, or for their ancestors. In fact, the main language of communication is Russian.

<sup>39</sup> The term “Uilta” is used by scientists, politicians, and national intellectual elite, rather than local reindeer herders, fishermen, and urban aborigines, who often call themselves Oroks.

## Creating systems of writing for Nivkh and Uilta and introducing them into the educational process

It is generally believed that before the establishment of Soviet power indigenous northern peoples had not had their own written language, although this is not quite true: while they had not got a written language based on the Latin or Cyrillic alphabet, according to some researchers, the Nivkh might have used pictographic writing.

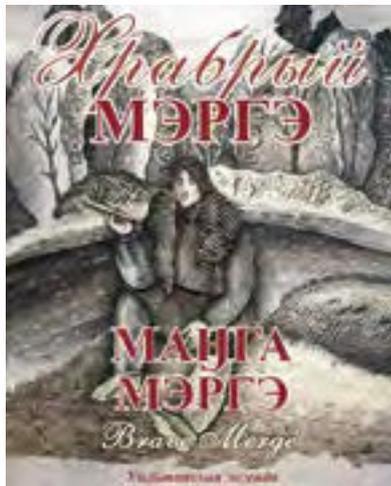
Most of European-type alphabets for indigenous languages recently put into writing, including Nivkh, were created by Russian linguists in the 1930s based first on Latin script and then on Cyrillic script. The current Nivkh alphabet was introduced in the late 1970s.

Since Uilta was not regarded as an independent language at that time, the alphabet for it was created only in the 1990s.

Teaching indigenous languages on Sakhalin began in the late 1920s, when the first cultural centres and boarding schools were opened in Nogliki and on the Rybnovskoye coast to eliminate illiteracy among the indigenous peoples of Sakhalin. Until the end of the 1950s, Nivkh was used as the language of instruction in preparatory classes.

The *Law on Education* of 1958 allowed Soviet parents to choose which language their children should learn. However, in fact, the choice was limited by the capabilities of the school system and learning environment. Russian-language schools were often better equipped with all necessary resources and teaching staff than “national” schools. In addition, Russian-language schools gave graduates striving for a university degree a better chance for successfully passing entrance exams. Parents usually regarded Russian as much more necessary for the prosperous future of their children. Hence, after the reform most indigenous parents chose Russian as the language of instruction for their children.

Most national schools also had boarding schools for the Nivkhs from traditional fishing settlements, for the Uilta and Evenkis from reindeer herding brigades, and for children from those villages where only ungraded elementary schools existed. In multiethnic schools for the indigenous population Russian was



Preserving the traditions of Nivkh literature

predominantly used as the language of communication and instruction, although in the preparatory classes of some schools children were taught in indigenous languages, for example, in Nivkh. Almost all boarding school graduates who used to speak their ethnic languages in early childhood dropped them in favor of Russian. That is why boarding schools are often regarded as the main reason for a language shift. Another




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 Nivkh  
village

factor was the switch of indigenous peoples towards urban lifestyle with Russian as the main language of communication due to the high rates of urbanisation of Sakhalin.

After a long break, in 1981, teaching Nivkh in preschool and school was relaunched from preparatory to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the village of Nekrasovka, largely thanks to the efforts of local activists. In 1981–1982, a primer for the speakers of the Sakhalin dialect was created, as well as a Nivkh language curriculum for senior preschool, accompanied by a study guide. Nivkh was taught three hours per week in grades 2 to 4.

Putting more focus on the problems of indigenous languages in the first half of the 1990s allowed for implementing several important projects. Thus, an Ethnolaboratory was opened in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk to unite native language teachers and methodologists; radio in the Nivkh language was launched; printing in the island's indigenous languages was resumed. Works and translations by Vladimir Sanghi – the main and practically the only writer writing about the Nivkh and for them in the Nivkh language and widely known outside Sakhalin and even Russia – were republished. The *Nivkh Dif* (*Nivkh Word*) newspaper has been published since 1996.

In the mid-1990s funding for projects to revive the languages of Sakhalin was slashed, some educators left the island, the broadcasting of Nivkh radio programme was stopped, and time allocated for native languages at school began to reduce.

## Teaching the indigenous languages of Sakhalin at the modern stage

The Nivkh language has been taught in grades 1 to 3 at the schools of Nogliki and Nekrasovka since 1980. After the transition to new educational standards, teaching indigenous languages has become an optional extracurricular activity, which

Sakhalin  
Regional  
Science  
Library,  
Yuzhno-  
Sakhalinsk



Children  
at the  
presentation  
of Nivkh  
books

Literary  
and Art  
Museum  
of Anton  
Chekhov's  
Book  
"Sakhalin  
Island"



negatively affects the quality of their study.

Within the system of higher education, Nivkh is taught at the Faculty of the Peoples of the North at the Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg.

Teaching the Uilta language at school began only in 2011. The Traditional Northern Crafts Lyceum on the Yuzhny Island is the only educational institution in the region with an ethnocultural profile. In this boarding school children master folk crafts skills along with

general education subjects, including the Uilta language and literature of the indigenous peoples of Sakhalin. Uilta is taught for grades 1 to 3. Preschool education does not include Uilta language lessons.

In Nogliki, Uilta language courses have been organized at the Local Lore Museum. Classes for all comers are conducted by one of the carriers of the Uilta culture and language Elena Bibikova, who has contributed a lot to the development of traditional Uilta culture.

In the village of Val, which is home to native speakers of the northern dialect of the Uilta language, it is not taught at any level of education. Local residents and educators doubt that teaching this language will ever become possible in Val, since the remaining native speakers either do not have a degree in Teacher Education, or are already too old.

Lack of teaching staff on Sakhalin is an extremely acute issue not only for indigenous peoples, but for the whole population of the island.

Even those specialists who have a degree that allows teaching their native language do not always have a sufficient level of knowledge. Therefore, instead of learning a language, children are often taught only to recognize words in the text. Within the school curriculum, children read the texts of Sakhalin writers

almost always in Russian. Sometimes pupils are given the same passages of text (for example, Vladimir Sanghi’s “The Swan Girl”) in the Russian and Nivkh languages. Literature teachers often have to develop curricula themselves due to the lack of teaching aids and coursebooks. Educators try to develop methods of teaching Nivkh as a foreign language based on their knowledge of English teaching techniques. This work is extremely difficult, as it requires appropriate education, efforts and time.

## Parents’ engagement in the transmission of languages and traditions of indigenous peoples

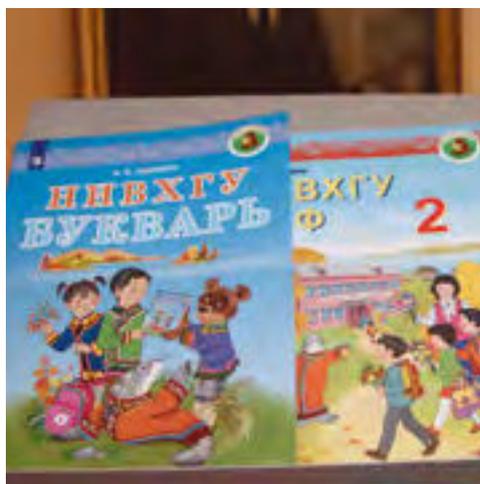
Along with the extremely limited number of hours for teaching native languages and the lack of teaching aids, educators mention the gap in language transmission to younger generations as a key challenge of teaching indigenous minority languages. Kids enter school without a basic knowledge of their ethnic language. Even if they are interested in learning the language, they can hardly receive the missing information from parents, who normally do not master it either (active members of folk ensembles and craftsmen are a rare exception of the rule).

Most Nivkh speakers are elderly people (over 60), and many of them do not have higher education, therefore they cannot be officially hired to teach Nivkh in schools and preschools. The only option for them is to transfer the language to their grandchildren in the process of everyday communication. 40–60-year old Nivkhs have only passive knowledge of the language. For the Uilta language, the situation is ever more complicated due to the sharply limited number of speakers.

## Sakhalin libraries’ contribution to the maintenance of indigenous languages

The Nogliki District Central Library named after Vladimir Sanghi has been contributing greatly to the preservation, development and popularization of the indigenous cultures and languages of the Nivkhs and Uiltas for over 20 years.

To date, the library has published 28 books and 10 audiobooks in the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North of Sakhalin with translation into Russian and English. Funding for this work is received through grant projects. Books have a circulation of 1000 copies and are donated not only to representatives of indigenous peoples, but also to all libraries of the Sakhalin Oblast. Electronic layouts of books and audiobooks are published on the website of the Nogliki Library<sup>40</sup> in order to



Nivkh primers

<sup>40</sup> <https://lib-nogliki.shl.muzkult.ru/>.

popularize resources in national languages, increase their availability and represent them properly in cyberspace.

The audio dictionary of the Nivkh language, created in collaboration with Vladimir Sanghi, allows to see the correct spelling and hear the correct pronunciation of more than 1,500 Nivkh words with Russian and English translation.

The library has also implemented the *Uilta Folklore for Kids* project. These are online nursery rhymes in the Uilta and Russian languages, with Russian and Uilta subtitles, encouraging children to love their native language in a playful way. This content is available at [сказкисахалина.рф](http://сказкисахалина.рф).

In 2020, with the support of Exxon Neftegas Limited, and in cooperation with the Tatarmultfilm studio, *Shaman*, the first cartoon in the Nivkh language, was created, conveying the spirit of the Nivkh people and Sakhalin. Russian and English versions of the cartoon were released to attract a wider audience. The cartoon is also available at the library's website.

## Preserving cultural traditions

Indigenous peoples currently tend to represent themselves through folklore. The traditional way of life and industry practices are supported and sponsored by the state and oil and gas enterprises, the media highlight traditional aspects, when giving coverage to the culture and everyday life of these peoples. Both the authorities and language activists consider holding various national holidays, competitions and festivals to be a major tool for preserving indigenous cultural traditions of Sakhalin.

Self-presentation through national cuisine also deserves mentioning. Fish, seal meat and bacon are traditional meals for the Nivkh and for some of the Uilta. Since many indigenous people regard eating these meals (even if prepared in a Europeanised way) as an integral part of their identity, national cuisine is preserved and revived.

Certain efforts are being made to familiarise indigenous children with the traditions of their ancestors, in particular within the educational process. These include staging “traditional rituals”, making handicrafts with national ornaments, memorizing certain vocabulary associated with traditional culture at native language lessons.

Sakhalin  
State  
Museum  
of Local  
Lore





Victory  
Museum and  
Memorial  
Complex

More opportunities are provided by extracurricular activities, which can take place both at school and in other cultural and educational institutions.

In Sakhalin schools, children of the indigenous peoples of the North get acquainted with the traditional northern multiathlon. It includes sledge jumping, archery, ax throwing, triple long jump, running with a stick, wrestling and sometimes lasso throwing. National sports can be presented at physical training lessons and in separate sections at schools. Northern multiathlon as the main form of manifestation of their native culture gives indigenous children (especially boys) a sense of belonging to their people, arouses interest and encourages children to develop. Girls are more likely to attend national ensembles. Their performances combine singing, dancing and playing folk instruments. The use of native languages in stage performances is limited to certain phrases for greeting the audience, etc. Many girls continue to perform in the ensemble after graduation from school.

Local public organizations, with the support of clan farms, have managed to implement the idea of organizing ethnic summer camps, where children can join the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples.

## Representation of Sakhalin's indigenous peoples in the media

The mass media have a pivotal role to play in covering all the directions and ways of self-representation of Sakhalin's indigenous minorities.

Regional media mostly cover holidays, festivals and other events held by indigenous minorities, as well as Sakhalin delegations' visits to major festivals of the indigenous peoples of the North on the mainland. They also provide reports of presentations of books on the indigenous Northern minorities. The media run by the indigenous peoples themselves also pay certain attention to folklore holidays

and festivals, but go beyond this topic. In particular, the *Kykhkykh* (*Swan*) Centre for the Preservation and Development of the Traditional Culture of the Indigenous Minorities of the North, a local NGO of the town of Oha, publishes a fairly wide variety of materials on political and economic issues on its website <http://www.kykhkykh.org>. It should be noted, however, that online materials are available to a limited number of readers, since not all representatives of the target audience have access to the Internet and computer literacy skills.

## Conclusions

At the moment, all indigenous languages of Sakhalin are under threat of extinction. Nevertheless, they continue to live in the memory of generations as the basis of their ethnic identity. The Nivkh and Uilta strive to revive their languages from oblivion. Even though it is impossible to introduce these languages into everyday life, modern generations could master them at a certain level as an asset of their ethnic culture. In the recent years they have got more interested in the culture of their ancestors, and in order to adequately understand it they should know the basics of the language. Representatives of indigenous peoples are gradually learning the ropes of information technologies and are ready to exchange audiovisual information in their native languages using smartphones and computers. However, the potential of ICT is not fully understood and used.

Most active and educated Nivkhs and Uiltas are well aware of the fact that measures are needed to restore the process of intergenerational transmission of the language within the family, to strengthen and reinforce the desire, willingness and motivation of indigenous peoples to preserve and develop their languages. Providing language teaching in preschools, primary and secondary schools is not enough, since parents must clearly understand future prospects for children to speak their native language (not only for the feeling of belonging to their ethnic group, but also for active use in modern life).

Sakhalin's multiethnic population and local authorities recognize the importance of giving a boost to the community of native speakers, demonstrating interest in their language and culture from the outside, concern of the present and future of their languages and cultures, followed by real practical actions rather than declarations. A crucial element of language policy is mobilization and involvement of language activists in decision-making processes in the field of language preservation and development.

It is also essential to strengthen the intersectoral interaction of the authorities in charge of regional language policy, experts and the community of native speakers, as well as interregional exchange of experience and networking.

Vladimir  
Sanghi,  
Nivkh  
writer



Nivkh  
teachers  
Natalia  
Sanghi and  
Svetlana  
Gavrilova



Elena  
Bibikova  
with Uilta  
children



25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Nivkh  
ensemble  
"Ari-la-mif"





