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ЯЗЫКОВАЯ ПОЛИТИКА И ЛОКАЛЬНЫЕ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В РОССИЙСКО-СКАНДИНАВСКОМ ПРИГРАНИЧЬЕ

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В статье исследуются некоторые аспекты языковой политики и локальных идентичностей в Российско-Скандинавском приграничье. В фокус исследовательского внимания попадает взаимодействие между идентификационными стратегиями различных групп населения региона и языковой средой. Понятие языковой политики, которое используется в работе, включает в себя широкий спектр практик, убеждений, стратегий языкового планирования и взаимодействия, связанных с лингвистической средой приграничья. Основные данные были получены методом глубинного антропологического интервью в ходе социолингвистической экспедиции на северо-запад Карелии и запад Мурманской области. В связи с характером материала анализ ограничен российской частью региона. Один из выводов исследования заключается в том, что хорошее владение языком соседней страны (финским в случае Карелии, норвежским – Мурманской области) не является обычным явлением на российской стороне приграничья и ассоциируется с конкретными жизненными сценариями. При этом финский и норвежский по-разному представлены в нарративах, связанных с локальными идентичностями, а также в языковых ландшафтах и образовательных практиках. Кроме того, языковое и культурное разнообразие отражается в социальной жизни, в том числе в коллективных практиках и нарративах о региональной идентичности, значительно отличается в Республике Карелия и Мурманской области. В целом, исследование вносит вклад в обсуждение многоязычной и мультикультурной среды на приграничных территориях между Россией и Скандинавией.

Ключевые слова: *языковая политика, локальная идентичность, приграничье, Россия, Скандинавия, Карелия, Мурманская область, Финляндия, Норвегия*

LANGUAGE POLICIES AND LOCAL IDENTITIES IN THE RUSSIAN-NORDIC BORDERLANDS

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The paper investigates some aspects of language policies and local identities in the Russian-Nordic borderlands. It focuses on the interplay between identification strategies of local groups and linguistic environment of the multicultural region. The concept of language policy used in the study encompasses a wide range of practices, attitudes, beliefs as well as management strategies that are connected to linguistic codes used by borderland inhabitants. The primary data was sourced from the in-depth anthropological interviews collected during the fieldwork in the north-west of Karelia and the west of Murmansk Oblast. Due to the nature of the material, the analysis in the article is limited to the Russian side of the region. One of the findings of the study is that good command of a Nordic language (Finnish for Karelia, Norwegian for Murmansk Oblast) is not common on the Russian side of the borderlands and associated with particular life scenarios. Another observation worth mentioning is that Finnish and Norwegian are represented differently in local identity narratives as well as in linguistic landscapes and educational practices. Besides, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity uniquely reflects the social life of the each of the two Russian borderland territories. Overall, the study contributes to the discussion on the multilingual and multicultural environment of the Russian-Nordic borderlands.

Keywords: *Language policy, local identity, borderlands, Russia, Karelia, Murmansk region, Nordic countries, Finland, Norway*

Introduction

The territories along the borders between the Nordic countries and Russia (further – the Russian-Nordic borderlands) have been a place of intense sociocultural and linguistic interactions for centuries. In this paper, we attempt to analyse language policies implemented by various groups living in the north of the Russian side of the borderlands – the northwestern Karelia and western Kola region. Besides, we consider certain aspects of the identification processes in the borderlands, especially their interplay with the local linguistic environment. In the *Regional context* section, we provide a brief description of the borderlands and its historical development. The *Defining key concepts* section introduces notions of language policy and identity. It is followed by the section in which we describe the data and methods we used to gather it during the fieldwork. Two *Case study* sections present our analysis of language policies and local identities in the two parts of the

borderlands. In the *Final considerations* section we summarise our interpretations of the data and propose some future trajectories for sociolinguistic research on the Russian-Nordic borderlands.

Regional context

Only two of the five Nordic countries – Finland and Norway – currently have land borders with Russia. The Nordic side of the borderlands includes (moving northwards) six Finnish administrative units (maakunta) – Kymenlaakso, South Karelia, North Karelia, Kainuu, North Ostrobothnia, Lapland, and the Norwegian easternmost county (fylke) of Finnmark, which was merged, as a result of the governmental administrative reform, at the beginning of 2020 with a neighbouring county of Troms to form a larger unit Troms og Finnmark. The Russian part of the region consists of three federal subjects: Leningrad Oblast, the Republic of Karelia, and Murmansk Oblast.

The northern territory of the borderland region (without Leningrad Oblast, Kymenlaakso, and South Karelia) is an essential part of the Barents region – the transnational macro region established in 1993, shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, to promote cooperation between the northernmost provinces of Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-western federal subjects of Russia.

The project has been based on the premise that these territories have similar natural environments and share a long history of interaction between various cultures, both of indigenous peoples and settlers from other regions.

While different parts of the borderland have specific local contexts, the whole space can be seen as a multicultural environment characterised by various types of contact between diverse speech groups and social practices that may transgress the state boundaries.

Territories that now constitute the Russian-Nordic borderlands have been a frontier zone at the periphery of several state formations for many centuries. Long before real border lines appeared on the early political maps of Northern Europe, a number of ethnic groups were engaged here in different kinds of contact – trade, military conflicts for domination over parts of the region, missionary activities, and so on. The kingdoms of Sweden, Norway, and the medieval republic of Novgorod were the first major regional powers that considered these territories their sphere of influence and contributed to the initial stage of local colonisation.

During Russian and Swedish expansion in XVI–XIX centuries, the region played the role of a frontier between the two northern empires. Years of peaceful interaction constantly alternated with periods of war turning borders into front-lines, the states gained and lost control over different parts of

the territory. Serious shift of the border happened at the end of the Napoleonic Wars when Finnish lands were ceded from Sweden, which had owned them for several centuries, to the Russian Empire.

The XX century shaped the political map of the Russian-Nordic borderland as we know it today. After the First World War, Russian Revolution and Civil War led to the emergence of Finland as a new independent state, Finnish eastern borders formed the northernmost part of the demarcation line between the Soviet Union and Western democracies. During World War II, the region turned into a zone of intensive military conflict between Soviet, Finnish, and German forces the end of which was followed by important territorial changes. Finland handed a big part of Karelia, part of the Salla municipality and the entire Petsamo province that included the country's only Arctic port to the Soviet Union and hundreds of thousands of Finnish and Karelian speaking inhabitants migrated westwards. When the Soviet control over Petsamo – renamed to Pechengsky district – were established in 1945, the USSR and Norway became neighbouring states.

Although the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not affect the geometry of the borders in the region, it activated political, economical, and social transformations of the local context. The fall of the Iron Curtain created opportunities for active interaction between Russians and citizens of the Nordic countries. Such interaction, however, has not become as intensive as in other parts of the post-Soviet frontier (e.g. in Polish-Ukrainian or Romanian-Moldavian territories) partly due to quite strict visa policies [Kolossov et al., 2012; Aure, 2011]. The linguistic and cultural barrier that enhances the dividing effect of the Russian-Nordic border might be another reason for that.

Defining key concepts

As the term language policy[1] appears in sociolinguistic literature in quite diverse contexts, the usage of it in this paper has to be clarified. We adopt the interpretation by Bernard Spolsky who suggested that language policy should be seen as consisting of three independent but at the same time interconnected components: language practices, language beliefs and ideologies, and language management [Spolsky, 2004]. The first of them denotes the actual linguistic behaviour of a certain community – what languages, language varieties (and particular variants) the members choose for different domains of communication as well as for various interlocutors, and what conventional rules control such choices inside the community. The second component deals with the values that the community assigns to particular language varieties and variants. Lastly, language management is made up by conscious actions whose goal is to change language practices, attitudes and ideologies or,

[1] The plural form *policies* used in the paper highlights multiplicity of linguistic practices, strategies, as well as actors implementing them.

conversely, to preserve the linguistic status quo inside the community. Actors of language policies are not necessarily connected with official institutions. They might as well be individuals, social groups or non-state organisations that have (or presume to have) certain authority over the linguistic behaviour of community members.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of identity has been one of the cornerstones of social sciences. In the recent decades, it is becoming increasingly important in interdisciplinary fields focused on sociocultural dimensions of language. Early sociolinguistic studies (e.g. variationist ones) often perceived identities as fixed dispositions associated with stable categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and so on trying to reveal underlying connections between linguistic forms and sociocultural divisions. While such views have been later criticised as essentialist, modern works on language as cultural practice prefer more flexible approaches based on social constructionism. Analysing identity as a dynamic process, "the social positioning of self and other" [Bucholtz et al., 2005] might be especially insightful in the highly heterogeneous context of the Russian-Nordic borderlands. Inhabitants of the region constantly build, recreate, and shift symbolic boundaries demarcating their social worlds.

As language is habitually realised as a practice crucial to interpersonal and intergroup communication, it plays an essential role in the processes of social positioning. Linguistic mechanisms are often involved in indexical processes behind identities – overt usage of category labels, activation of ideological links between certain language forms and specific groups and individuals, expression of presuppositions regarding self-representation or perception of others. Contrary to the early essentialist approaches, language practices are not merely a reflection of identity. Modern studies take into account both cultural dispositions reflected in linguistic codes and the linguistic mechanisms of sociocultural identification [Johnstone, 1996:182]. Obviously, such interpretation implies interconnections between strategies and attitudes regarding identities and language policies.

Data and methods

The current paper is based on qualitative data collected during the research trip to the Republic of Karelia and Murmansk Oblast in March 2020. The trip supported by the project "Rediscovering Russia" ("Otkryvaem-rossiyu-zanovo") was conducted by HSE students and researchers. The research team was mainly focused on the Karelian town of Kostomuksha near the Russian-Finnish border and the two urban settlements of Nikel and Zapolyarny situated close to the Russian-Norwegian border. Unfortunately, research trips to Finnish and Norwegian border towns planned as an important part of the fieldwork were cancelled due to the regime of lockdown implemented by the governments of these

two states at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. This resulted in the lack of important data that would have allowed the study to present relevant points of view of speech communities living in the north-western part of the Russian-Nordic borderland. The scope of the paper is therefore mostly limited to the analysis of identification processes and language policies on the Russian side of the region.

As the main method of data collection, we used anthropological in-depth interview. The major criterion for the choice of informants was that they had to be local inhabitants, whose life scenarios unfolded in the sociocultural contexts of the borderlands. Among the 60 interviewees (41 females and 19 males; 25 in north-western Karelia, 35 in Murmansk Oblast) were activists concerned with preservation of indigenous minority languages and cultures, administrative workers responsible for the issues of cross-border cooperation, employees of big industrial enterprises operating in the region, students, pensioners, and so on. It would be difficult to measure the representativeness of the sample, as it is problematic to identify all the parameters that might affect informants' language behaviour and attitudes prior to conversations. As all of the local inhabitants are involved in various sociocultural practices happening in borderland areas, they are potential sources of information relevant for the current study. In addition, we used linguistic landscaping (more on the method see [Gorter, 2006]) to gather insights into local policies concerning the use of written languages in public spaces.

Case study: Kostomuksha

Kostomuksha was founded in 1977 to maintain the functioning of a large iron ore mine. Albeit, being a young Soviet town created in cooperation with Finnish specialists, includes parts that were previously rural settlements of indigenous Karelian population. Certain names of the streets (e.g. Aurinko) or districts (e.g. Kontokki) reflect remnants of the pre-industrial history of the place. While some inhabitants still identify themselves as ethnic Karelians or claim to have Karelian ancestry, the overwhelming majority of the population was formed by migrations from other parts of the Soviet Union during the industrial development of the territory.

Numerous elements of Karelian, Finnish, Vepsian, Sami, and Slavic origin that emerged on the region's map at different stages of history [Mullonen et al., 2008] have been of particular interest for comparative linguistics. For a sociolinguistic study, however, a subjective (or rather intersubjective) view of toponyms presented by inhabitants is much more important than actual etymologies as it may help reconstruct local self-identification strategies in relation to the territory. Russian-speaking inhabitants of Kostomuksha seem to be aware of the foreign nature of regional toponymy.

Commenting on the etymology of the very town's name, informants suggest different versions, all of which, however, imply non-Russian source of it and, what is even more important in the context of local identity, indicate that the territory is historically connected with cultures of "others".

"There are many ways to translate the name of our town. One of the translations is not really pleasant – "rotten swamp" or "deadly place", something like that. <...> There are mostly Karelian or Finnish names around here".

For some of the townspeople (especially those involved in cultural / linguistic activism), the toponymic system is not an absolutely rigid symbolic space – it can be modified in order to represent the territory's identity more adequately (obviously, according to their dispositions).

"They [a Karelian society] proposed naming one of the streets after Jaakko Rugojev [a famous Karelian writer]. I wrote a letter [to the administration] too. <...> And I suggested [to the commission] that a new street should be named Беломорская [Russ. 'White Sea' (street)]. Our region was known as Vienan Karjala [Karelian 'White Sea Karelia']".

Language policies which are related to the verbal representation of space might be interpreted as one of the symbolic tools used by Russians living near the Russian-Finnish border to perceive parts of the two independent states as a single region characterised by active cross-cultural interaction. Perception of the borderland territory is reflected and to a certain extent even constructed in local language practices. Talking on the mobile phone and specifying his / her whereabouts, an inhabitant of Kostomuksha would easily utter phrases of the type "I'm not in Russia yet, I'm in Kostomuksha". The spatial status of the neighbouring state is also expressed in everyday discourse of the townspeople. When answering whether they have been abroad, some of those informants who have crossed the Russian-Finnish border hesitated and admitted that it is difficult for them to see Finland as a 'true' foreign country.

"And when I was asked if I'd ever been abroad, I said no… But then I thought: 'Wait, but I have: I go to Finland from time to time!' So you don't even realise you travel abroad".

The shorter symbolic distance between life contexts of the Kostomuksha population and the neighbouring country seems to be indicated by local vocabulary. Discussing something related to Finland, informants frequently used the term 'Finka' (Finn) which is a colloquial equivalent for the standard Russian name of the country ('Finland'). Such usage is also attested in Leningrad Oblast and Saint-Petersburg [Skrebtsova, 2019], whose inhabitants are often engaged in cross-border interaction and see Finland as a neighbour, but is completely untypical for Russian speakers of the regions situated far from the north-western frontier. This resembles the situation when Russian-speaking

inhabitants of the Russian-Norwegian borderland developed colloquial toponyms Kirsanovka and Kirik as new 'russified' names for the Norwegian town of Kirkenes [Rogova, 2009].

Informants tell about several types of regular cross-border interaction with Finnish citizens. The Russian-Finnish practices of cooperation are reflected in the local linguistic landscape. While Russian is used most frequently as a written language of public spaces of Kostomuksha, there is a considerable number of inscriptions in Finnish. They are usually found in bars, cafés, restaurants and shops where they function as tools for communication between Russian-speaking staff and Finnish clients.

On the other hand, a good command of Finnish is mostly associated with life scenarios more tightly connected to the neighbouring country – studying or working in Finland, creating a family with Finnish citizens, doing business with Finnish companies, etc. Although there is a demand for learning Finnish in the town as well as opportunities to do that, English is often believed to be more beneficial even in the borderland social environment.

"Those who want to move to Finland – they learn the language. There are fee-based courses [in the town]. <...> People think English is more promising than Finnish. They don't learn it without a specific reason. People learn it when they want to study in Finland".

While Kostomuksha is a part of the multilingual environment characterised by regular interaction between speakers with different sociocultural backgrounds, local inhabitants express a wide range of opinions regarding linguistic codes that are present in the territory. Those townspeople who identify themselves as Russians and are not involved in activities connected with indigenous cultures of the region often describe minority languages (mostly referring to Karelian) as something they hardly ever encounter.

"As for Karelians, I haven't really dealt with them. And I don't think I know any true natives".

In the eyes of local Russians, Karelian ethnic identity is inseparable from the Karelian language – it is impossible to be a 'true' (interviewees used markers коренной Russ. *'indigenous', 'root'*; истинный *'true'*; старовер *'old-believer'*) Karelian without keeping the community's "authentic" linguistic code alive. Russian interviewees often express quite indifferent attitude towards the Karelian language and do not expect it to be of importance for anyone who does not belong to the ethnic community.

"It's just this way. I've never had any [specific feelings about Karelian]..."

The main function of Karelian recognised by the linguistic majority is that of cultural preservation; therefore, it is not believed to have any pragmatic significance for inhabitants.

"I don't think those living in Karelia have to learn Karelian. Those raised in [native] families should – to preserve their culture".

The indigenous language most closely associated with the territory is Karelian. While some informants mention Vepsians and Sámi when asked about local ethnic minorities, these groups are represented in the narratives as something more distant and almost mythical completely unrelated to contemporary social life. Ethnic minorities are often perceived as "hidden" cultures existing in rural areas, several different speech communities can be grouped together as opposed to the linguistic / cultural majority. Sometimes they are even closely associated with Finns which seems to create a symbolic distance between Russian-speaking settlers and Finno-Ugric indigenous population of the region.

"[As for Karelians], maybe [they still live] somewhere in Voknavolok, Olonets, where there are Vepsians. They don't live [in Kostomuksha] here anymore, so the language disappears. <...> I've never met them personally. I think there are still Vepsians, Lapps [лопари – an obsolete Russian name for Sámi], Sámi out there, if you start searching".

Voknavolok (Vuokkiniemi in Karelian) is a relatively small settlement situated within one hours' drive from Kostomuksha inside the same urban district. It is regarded as one of the oldest villages of the region and a centre of North Karelians' culture. The contemporary social life of the village reflects different policies of Karelian linguocultural revitalisation in such diverse aspects as primary education, representation of space, festival activities, etc. Its toponymy, for instance, illustrates how active inhabitants attempt to shape the image of the place through the policy of giving "indigenous" names to its parts.

"Village House" ("Dom derevni") is an administrative and cultural centre of Voknavolok involved in various projects on Karelian revitalisation in the region, one of which is to fill the local landscape with indigenous toponyms. In our conversation, one of the "Village House" employees claimed that setting up signs with Karelian names for different parts, streets and historic buildings of the village can serve two major purposes. First, it contributes to the internal identity of the place as inhabitants become exposed to the symbolic evidence establishing Voknavolok as a native Karelian settlement. Second, it creates the same image for tourists and other visitors and makes the minority language and culture visible.

There is a certain duality underlying the project itself and the positioning strategies of the place in general. On the one hand, the village is represented as a unique locale. There are names and objects that recall its vital role in the creation of the Karelo-Finnish national epic Kalevala, parts of which Elias Lönnrot recorded here. Family names of prominent inhabitants of the village are seen to indicate

its individual history. On the other hand, there is an attempt to present Voknavolok as a "true", "prototypical" Karelian settlement. For instance, there are several traditional wooden buildings brought here from other villages that were reorganised or completely liquidated during the Soviet period. Place naming policies implemented by the activists also reflect the concept of Karelian authenticity.

> *"The centre is ryhjä. Maybe this word wasn't used in Voknavolok. But in general, in Kalevala, in Yushkozero – in these villages the centre of the village is ryhjä. <...> We would put it [the sign] in a place where there's a shop and the main crossroads".*

One of the main problems hindering the revitalisation, according to activists, is a lack of systematic Karelian instruction in comprehensive schools of the region. Even in the Voknavolok comprehensive school Karelian is not taught as a full-fledged subject. The situation could change only if schoolchildren's parents would be willing to include the indigenous language in the curriculum. Currently, a linguistic code that is usually first acquired by Karelian children is Russian. As parents do not speak the indigenous language, Karelian classes in schools are seen as a compensatory mechanism. Among the Karelians born in the middle of the twentieth century, however, there are still those who are considered native speakers. According to the activists, they can play a major role in transition of the language to the youngest members of the community.

In general, the north-west of Karelian frontier is inhabited by different groups with diverse sociocultural identifications. All of them are in one way or another influenced by the borderland context. The closeness of Finland makes transnational interaction possible and provides local inhabitants with biographical trajectories that are harder to realise in inner regions. Although only a small part of the population decide to move to Finland (e.g. to start a family or have an education), such life strategies are not considered unconventional. Language of the neighbouring state is seen as a communicative tool enabling transition between sociocultural environments and successful integration. Whereas the Russian-speaking majority consider Karelian (and other indigenous languages) to have solely a symbolic function of preserving ethnic identity, mutual intelligibility existing between North Karelian and Finnish contributes to the linguocultural integrity of the frontier. There is no single communicative code that unites all the inhabitants of the region, and yet certain local patterns of language use, language attitudes and ideologies establish the Russian-Finnish borderlands as a space that crosses the official boundaries.

Case study: Nikel and Zapolyarny

The towns of Nikel and Zapolyarny are situated in the northernmost area of the Russian-Nordic borderlands. While there seems to be no indigenous minority groups among the predominantly Russian-speaking population, local inhabitants are engaged in cross-border interaction with Norwegian neighbours. The two towns are perceived in the local discourse as a kind of siblings: they are often compared and at the same time considered to be parts of a single space not only due to closeness to each other, but also through the chain of industrial production, common administration and constant movement of people between them.

Nikel is an urban settlement located in the northwestern part of Murmansk Oblast several kilometres to the east from the Norweigan border. Soviet authorities founded it right after the end of World War II on the site of the Finnish settlement Kolosjoki specialised in nickel ore mining since the entire Petsamo district had been ceded from Finland. The town's population and economy grew steadily until the collapse of the socialistic system, whose aftermath affected the local industry and forced thousands of inhabitants to move to other regions. Whereas the dream of the technocratic paradise in the Arctic had failed, the fall of the Iron Curtain and liberalisation of the border regime provided conditions for the town's transformation into the northern outpost of Russian-Nordic cooperation [Mikhailova, 2014].

The narratives of common identity in the town predominantly refer to the Soviet industrial and military colonisation of the region. Being the children or grandchildren of those who came from the South (in local narratives this "variable" geographical concept mostly refers to the central and southern territories of European Russia, as well as to several post-Soviet states), locals do not feel a historical connection with the region. They tend to contrast themselves to Norwegians from the borderland towns whose families have lived in the region for centuries and developed much stronger ties to the territory. Informants characterise population of the Russian side not only as "*those who came from other places* [i.e. from the South]" but as "*time-servers* (временщики)", always ready to move away. However, several informants tell that, despite this 'nomadic' mindset, Russian inhabitants often consider the North to be their home and cannot leave it.

The Norwegian municipality of Sør-Varanger is located several kilometres to the west of Nikel and townspeople admit that the borderland position has a vital role in defining their life.

"The closeness of the border affects us a lot. <...> It doesn't feel as if it was locked".

Informants mention practices of cross-border shopping (Russians usually buy food in Norwegian supermarkets while Norwegians are also interested in alcohol, cigarettes and gasoline as these products are cheaper on the Russian side). There exists interaction between Russian and

Norwegian educational institutions (e.g. kindergartens and music schools). Despite the active processes of cross-border interaction, there are few townspeople in Nikel who have knowledge of Norwegian enough to communicate with their foreign neighbours.

"Those who speak the [Norwegian] *language are few and far between".*

There seems to be several major reasons for that. First, Norwegian is not taught in Nikel comprehensive schools (even as an elective) with English being the only foreign language in the curriculum. A local language school focuses on English study programmes, although it offers a Norwegian course. Another option to learn Norwegian is to apply to a programme in Pasvik Folkehøgskole (Norw. Pasvik Folk high school). It is an educational centre situated on the Norwegian shore of the lake Svanevatn divided by the border. As the language programme is quite expensive, the institution provides one free position for a student from Nikel's comprehensive school.

Second, as the main destination of those townspeople who regularly cross the border is Kirkenes, local views on the role of Norwegian in their practices of interaction substantially formed by their experiences there. Many shop assistants in Kirkenes are native speakers of Russian or at least can maintain a conversation with a client in Russian. Since shopping is the most prototypical cross-border interaction practice, the opportunity to do it without any code-switching creates a representation of Kirkenes as a place not "completely abroad", as a part of the local functional space.

"In each Norwegian shop, at each counter, there stands a Russian-speaking woman. All our folks who moved, who settled down there, got married – they work as shop assistants".

When Russians in Nikel do learn Norwegian, it is usually connected with family life, education, or career in the neighbouring country. The first scenario appears most frequently in the narratives shared by the interviewees.

"A friend of mine left for Norway, married there, gave birth to two kids. She works as a medic. She divorced her husband but stays in Norway, doesn't want to come back to Russia. [Her] *kids speak both Russian and Norwegian".*

Attitudes towards learning Norwegian in the local context vary. Some informants think it might be advantageous for a career in Nikel, whereas others consider English to be much more important saying that Norwegian is for those who decide to emigrate to the neighbouring country.

The town of Zapolyarny is situated about 30 kilometres eastwards from Nikel. Founded in 1956 as another industrial settlement, it has undergone similar phases: economic growth and workforce immigration in the first decades, crisis in the 1990s and the ongoing outflow of the population. The life in the town is also to a large extent defined by a metallurgical plant – with the one in Nikel they form a combine owned by the Nornickel («Nornikel'») corporation. Situated at a longer

distance from the border than Nikel, Zapolyarny is visited by fewer Norwegians. However, there still exist quite common practices of cross-border interaction.

"They visit us, we do them. There's something on their side, something on ours. So you've got kind of an exchange. We get something cheaper or tastier there, or at least we think so. Something – the other way round".

According to informants, language education in Zapolyarny is worse than that in Nikel. A teacher at a music school recalls that the strongest interest in learning foreign languages in the region was during the Perestroika and immediately after the border regime liberalisation. He learnt Norwegian in the 1990s and later worked as a language teacher in a local comprehensive school and held Norwegian classes for townspeople. Currently, the demand for learning this language (and foreign languages in general) in the town appears to be relatively low.

"My students might have been the first ones in Russia to have Norwegian as a subject included into a school certificate"

Just like in Nikel, English is considered a language knowledge of which is sufficient for cross-border communication with Norwegians. For instance, comparing linguistic landscapes in Kirkenes and Zapolyarny, one of the informants sees English, not Norwegian, signs and inscriptions in the Russian town as a counterpart to the Russian ones in Kirkenes. Our observations support such a view – there does not seem to be any significant presence of Norwegian in the linguistic landscape of the town (the same holds for Nikel).

"In Zapolyarny signs in English were set up just recently (a year or two ago) while in Kirkenes Russian signs appeared ten years ago, so we're nine years behind them".

For the most part, both Nikel and Zapolyarny townspeople whose main destination of cross-border trips is Kirkenes view the Norwegian town as a part of a functional space where Russian is a sufficient tool for interaction. None of the informants thinks that habitual cross-border activities require knowledge of Norwegian – it is perceived as a linguistic code whose command is needed for those Russians whose life scenarios are more deeply tied with Norwegian social contexts.

The only informants (except members of the language minority communities themselves) who could provide information on indigenous cultures of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands were those whose professional life is somehow connected with the cultural life of the region – librarians, an artist making souvenirs in the traditional Sámi style, a cross-border cooperation specialist, etc. Others do not reflect on indigenous groups in the narratives of contemporary borderland life. This seems to indicate that the concept of "indigenousness" personified in particular minority groups is not a common part of the local discourse on the ethnolinguistic life of the territory. Russian settlements of

the frontier are often perceived as surrounded by "no man's land", while groups of Sámi, if mentioned at all, are described as a disappearing culture whose remaining members now dwell outside the frontier. On the other hand, several informants claim that Norwegian Sámi are integrated in the life of Norwegian municipalities including the border municipality of Sør-Varanger.

To summarise, the language situation in the northernmost part of the Russian-Nordic borderlands is characterised by certain asymmetry between the Russian and Norwegian parts of the frontier. Although local Norwegians quite often cross the border and are engaged in regular practices such as shopping, their language does not seem to be perceived by Russian-speaking population as a functional code for local international communication. It is English that is believed to be a much more suitable system in this respect. The Norwegian part of the territory, however, is inhabited by a significant number of Russian immigrants; many of them are involved in cross-border interaction. This creates a sociolinguistic environment in which crossing the state border does not require from Russian speakers to switch the language and contributes to the representation of the frontier as a single space transgressing the official boundaries.

> "*We don't have Sámi here, but on the Norwegian side there are even Sámi municipalities. The economy is based on reindeer herding. It's a Sámi land, there are no other national activists here".*

Final considerations

Language policies in two areas of the Russsian-Nordic borderlands examined during the fieldwork – the north-west of Russian Karelia and the Russian-Norwegian frontier – share several characteristics:

1. The good command of an official language of the neighbouring Nordic state (Norway or Finland) is quite rare among Russian citizens of the borderlands. Such knowledge is closely associated with the realisation of life scenarios in the Nordic states (family, education, career).

2. Regular interaction between members of the dominant speech communities of the two sides of the border (Russian- and Finnish-speaking; Russian- and Norwegian- speaking respectively). Such interaction emerges in cross-border practices of the local population.

3. English is used and perceived as a linguistic code sufficient in cross-border communication. However, Norwegians and Finns are reported to have a significantly better command of it. As learning English is a typical strategy for those Russians who want to interact with the Nordic

neighbours, it serves the function of a lingua franca while any of the official languages of the region cannot play this role.

Nevertheless, there are several important differences related to language policies in the two areas:

1. There are more options for learning Finnish in Russian Karelia than options for learning Norwegian in the Russian-Norwegian frontier. Perhaps, it is connected with the fact that the demand for Finnish language education is greater. On the other hand, Russians frequently engaged in cross-border trips to Norway do not feel the need to learn the Nordic language since they perceive the frontier as a functional space where a Russian-speaker does not have an inevitable necessity to switch the linguistic code for certain practices.

2. Northern Karelians, despite being a minority, seem to have a symbolic role of an ethnic group that connects Russian and Finnish parts of the region. Finnish and the local dialect of Karelian are perceived by the speech community as mutually intelligible. Finns (especially those who have Karelian ancestry) are said to support the local Karelian community. Sámi of the Kola peninsula appear to be out of the context of the Russian-Norwegian cross-border interaction. The borderland population (at least its Russian-speaking part) are mostly not aware of their current sociolinguistic situation, the cross-state events and programmes involving Nordic and Russian Sámi do not seem to have any noticeable effect on attitudes of the dominant speech community towards indigenous languages and cultures.

3. The population structure both in Russian Karelia and Murmansk Oblast has been substantially formed by migration of industrial workers during the Soviet period. Therefore, it is considered multiethnic (among the most frequently mentioned immigrated minorities are Ukranians and Belarussians). However, the two areas differ in terms of attitudes and actual practices related to them. In Karelia, there are groups of activists organising regular events whereas in the Russian-speaking part of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands, ethnic heterogeneity of the local population functions mostly as a collective identity narrative and diversity is not actively manifested in the current social context.

As mentioned earlier, the current study has a quite limited territorial scope. Both the Nordic side of the region (still unavailable for field research due to the pandemic-related restrictions) and some other Russian parts of the borderlands (for instance, south-west of the Republic of Karelia and western areas of Leningrad Oblast) are yet to be examined. Besides, there are a number of issues related to language policies and identification processes in the modern Russian-Nordic borderlands

that have to be investigated, such as the role of ethnic minorities, local authorities' language management, etc. These research paths might lead to a more complex sociolinguistic analysis of the "crossroads of cultures" in the Russian-Nordic borderlands.

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