CHAPTER - V

A Perspective on Problem-Areas
Changes in the population structure of the Russian Federation after 1991 have not only created the basic problems of language contact, but these have also added a new dimension to such problems. Secondary levels of contacts have emerged, especially, but not exclusively, in the urban areas. The changes in population structure, as discussed in Chapter 2 & 3, have threatened the position of several of the non-Russian national languages in their traditional habitats. At the same time, they have encouraged the dispersal of large numbers of speakers of these non-Russian languages.

Factors other than population movement have also been responsible in creating various other linguistic problems in the Russian Federation. The nature and extent of the secondary levels of contacts, such as the size of the nationalities involved, their history of previous contacts with the same or other linguistic groups, and their geographical and cultural contiguity, all affect these problems. Political instability and economic hardship have also added to the problems of language maintenance and social function of most of the minority languages.

Such issues as language attitudes, legislation, education, and the survival, restoration and maintenance of various minority languages are common in any multilingual environment. The case of the Russian Federation is, however, very different on account of the variables that are operative. A pronounced articulation of ethnolinguistic identity in the new democracy is bound to take place after years of suppression and discrimination against the
linguistic/ ethnic minorities. Forced introduction of uniform alphabets and mass-deportation of titular nationalities in the Soviet regime are the two extremes, combining linguistic and political/ demographic factors, which draw the present day contours of discontentment. To address them, a truly pluralistic and scientific approach is required.

Here, we shall discuss the problem-areas in the emerging language situation in the Russian Federation, with reference to the efforts that are being made to cope with them.

The Problem of Language Attitudes

Language is not only an instrument for the communication of messages. This becomes especially clear in multilingual communities where various groups have their own language. With its language a group distinguishes itself. Therefore, it is a common assumption in sociolinguistics that languages carry social meanings or social connotations. The fact that languages are linked up with the identities of social or ethnic groups has consequences for the social evaluation of, and the attitudes towards languages. In a multilingual/ multiethnic environment, as in the Russian Federation, there is a strong relation between language and identity. This relation finds its expression in the attitudes of individuals towards these languages and their users.

Theoretically, the degree to which individuals self-categorize themselves as members of ethnic groups is critical to understanding their
language attitudes.\textsuperscript{1} In multiethnic environments, however, self-categorization alone can not adequately explain language attitudes. Rather it is necessary to take into account the difference between self-categorization as a member of the larger culture and self-categorization as a member of a specific ethnolinguistic group. In addition, subordinate group members convergence toward dominant language subtracts from their ethnolinguistic identity.\textsuperscript{2} The underlying assumption is that in a society different social or ethnic groups have certain attitudes towards each other. These attitudes affect attitudes towards cultural institutions or patterns characterizing these groups such as language.

In Russia, this attitudinal problem has by and large been caused by the differences in social positions of ethnolinguistic groups. The realization that certain languages, i.e., non-prestige languages or minority languages, do not have a function in gaining upward social mobility plays a great part in defining attitudes towards them.

The speakers of minority languages are reported to exhibit a negative attitude towards their own language in many respects. But, this may be far from concluding that they do not attach any importance to it. One's attitude towards a language of another group is by and large precipitated by factors such as cultural differences, social inequality, economic viability, political domination, and historical prejudice. Economic viability seems to have affected the new


\textsuperscript{2} Gudykunst, William B. and Schmidt, Karen L., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 10.
trends most. A majority of Russian speaking people, almost 95% of the total respondents, cited English as the language they would love to learn, in a Survey conducted in Moscow in September 2001. It is significant here to note that most of them knew only one, the Russian language. This inherent penetration of English language in the mindset of a majority of population in the country is bound to relegate further the position of 'smaller' languages. Attraction of the west and anything 'American' is also manifest very clearly in the language attitudes of the Russians.

According to a survey (March – August 1994), conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in three Russian republics, about 3% of the Tatars, 3.2% of the Ossets, and 5.3% of the Yakuts in their respective republics revealed that they had 'often' experienced violations of their rights because of ethnic/linguistic affiliation. Among local Russians, 1.7% in Tatarstan, 4.6% in North Ossetia, and 4.6% in Yakutia have had the same experience. These figures may not indicate the true picture of attitudinal discrimination, given the fact that attitudes is more of an internal and mental state, which may give rise to forms of behaviour. Furthermore, identities and languages are not monolithic wholes but are clearly differentiated, heterogeneous and variable. This makes their relation in specific situations

4 Tishkov, Valery, op. cit., p. 111.
even more intricate.\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Language attitudes} play a bigger role in all spheres of sociolinguistics, and the problems related.

\textbf{Figure 5.1}

\textbf{Schema Representing the Formation of Attitudes}\textsuperscript{6}

Attitudinal bias is more often than not likely to take a back seat with improving social equilibrium among different \textit{ethnolinguistic} groups in the Federation. Attitudes nevertheless are as important in acceptance of the language laws.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.
Problems in Acceptance of Language Laws

We have already seen how the Language Laws of the Russian Federation 7 was a counterbalance to the Republican laws, already passed in 1989 by some other former Union Republics (Chapter II). Its provisions were not dissimilar from those contained in the former USSR Law on Languages. This provides the first point of departure as far as the acceptance of this law is concerned among the minority language groups.

Language policy can be defined as a system of measures regulating the influence of the state on the language functioning on its territory. There is a need to distinguish clearly between state language, official language and national language and define their specific social roles to remove the legal ambiguity.

In connection with accepting language laws in Russia, there arise different problems: -

(I) The mode of functioning of languages and cultures of nationalities, which are separated;

(II) The problem of the functional development of national languages and their reasonable combination with the Russian languages;

(III) Alongside with the formation of the general economic space, the problems of formation of a general language space by introducing the Russian language into different spheres of organized communication;

(IV) The choice of realization of language laws without conflicts, for obtaining this goal it is necessary not only to count with language rights of the nationalities but also with the language rights of the individual person;

(V) The problem of the so-called language nihilism, and also the language expansion.\(^8\)

These problems impede the realization of the language laws in the Russian Federation. Despite the Russian language being globally accepted as a lingua franca in all the republics of Russia, each republic's endeavour to add one or more official languages creates the real problem of language selection and exclusion. Quite often the problem is to be found in the criteria for choosing these official languages. All the Republics, excepting four of them, have adopted linguistic laws that give priority to the language of the titular nationality. In Bashkiria, the official status of the national language together with Russian is the object of major controversy given the opposition of the Tatars. This is because of the refusal of the Bashkirians to proclaim the official status of Tatar in the Republic. The situation is especially complex in Daghestan where 80% of the population is Daghestani but more than 30 languages cohabit. Also, some decrees establishing the adoption of the Latin alphabet instead of the Cyrillic one (for instance, the Decree of July 1999 in

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Tatarstan) are usually interpreted as an overt challenge which aims to increase the distancing from Moscow.\(^9\)

In addition, the adoption of constitutional clauses that limit and even impede the access to political or administrative responsibilities for citizens also represent a danger to the stability of interethnic relationships. This is the case in Adygea, Northern Ossetia, Bashkiria and Mari El, where the citizens do not know the national language of the titular ethnic group. In such cases, it becomes a rather difficult task for linguists and policy makers to evolve a policy, which could be widely accepted.

The factor of linguistic multiplicity in Russia makes a wider acceptance of language laws a tough proposition. In spite of the extraordinary care and drive of the Russian Federation in pursuing its language planning process by whatever strategies and techniques, there are bound to be some voices of discontent and disagreement. Although, what most strikes, in the end, is the resilience of the large number of ‘national languages’, several of them quite small, and the tenacity with which they are maintained. This resilience of hundred of languages in the Russian Federation minimizes the scope of acceptance of a language law, which is still based on the ‘national-territorial’ status of the languages.

As a Russian scholar on the subject has suggested, a possible solution to this problem may lie in the forecast oriented studies of the language situation.

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and in the implementation of an adequate language policy. The possibility to forecast the advent of the language conflicts and the intentions to prevent aggravations of the national and language conflicts can perhaps improve the acceptance of language laws in the Federation. But there are no fruitful efforts in this direction in Russia. The official policy in parts of Russia, where the position of Russian is weakening, such as in Tuva, Yakut and Tatar Republics, is generally connoted with the development of bilingualism. But, some leaders of national intelligentsia declare that bilingualism is only an intermediate stage on the way to national monolingualism. With these utopian ideas, it is difficult to eradicate the problem of acceptance of language laws. It would rather accentuate such problems.

The Problem of Language and Education

The problem of language and education is an important sociological problem of national development in a polyethnic community, like Russia. Among numerous functions performed by the language in different fields, the educational function is the primary one. Education moulds an individual not only as a personality but contributes to the development of his linguistic competence. Hence, the linguistic role of education is very significant in a multilingual environment.

In the language situation of the Russian Federation, the problem of language and education is primarily two folds: languages as a subject of study, and languages as a media of instruction. The second problem is of wider consequence, in the present context. The problem, associated with languages as media of instruction, includes issues of language choice, which is based on the relative status of the language and its demand in the job market. Obviously, the most sought after medium is Russian language in the country as a whole. The last choice remains in favour of the State official languages, which have limited job market, restricted only within the republics where it is spoken.

Thus, a great inequality exists between pupils who have Russian as their native language and those who do not. Russian school children have access to the riches of their own and most other national cultures since the best literature of all the languages are usually translated into Russian. Other ‘nationals’ are often faced with the question of which school they should send their children to - to a Russian-language or a national-language school. On leaving a Russian school, one has a fair knowledge of the Russian language, and this facilitates admission to better colleges and universities. Then, the Russian schools follow a uniform syllabus throughout the country. This creates a clear-cut bias in favour of the Russian language in education, in the Russian Federation. Besides, Several minority and indigenous groups have no access to education in which they can use their own language. When they deal

with administrative and judicial matters, they are frequently precluded from using their own language. ¹²

However, measures for the expansion of the educational functions of the languages of minorities are taken in many regions of Russia. For example, in the Republic of Daghestan, there are about eleven to fourteen languages used in the primary education. Likewise, the polyethnic Republic of Bashkortostan provides the high school education in five languages - Russian, Bashkir, Tatar, Chuvash, and Mari. Udmurt, German, Latvian, Mordvin, and Ukrainian languages are taught in secondary schools as school-subjects in the same republic. ¹³

But, mere increase in the numbers of national schools can not bring the attitudinal change. Russian continues to be the major medium language in general education. This penetration of Russian, in the educational system, has produced more extensive Russian related types of bilingualism among school children.

The only scientific solution to this problem of language and education is to create a parity of opportunities for all the languages, in question, in the Russian Federation. Given the socio-economic condition of the country and the existing linguistic scenario, this solution is difficult to adhere to.

Problem of Development of Minority Languages

The fate of languages of minorities comes to three possibilities. The best possibility is their role as a regional language. Second possibility is the use of a language only in everyday life. And the worst possibility is the extinction of a language. 14 Minority languages in the Russian Federation face all the three possibilities as mentioned above.

Some languages of the Russian Federation are in the process of standardization and are made up of several distinct and sometimes extreme dialects. They are spoken by groups for whom the tradition of education and of literacy is relatively short and its incidence shallow. In addition, there are cleavages between urban and rural communities speaking the same language. Some of these languages lack a well-defined writing system and an exclusive lexicon.

Extraordinary internationalization, in the Soviet period, has led to the erosion of the national cultures and national languages. The languages of the Far Eastern minorities, the Nanaj, Ulchi, Udihe, Negidal, Orok, Oroch, and some groups of the Evenks and Evens and genetically isolated Nivkh, met the same fate. 15 Though, off late, efforts are devoted to the revival and development of these languages, the greatest impediment that obstructs these efforts is the multiplicity of variants of any of these languages. It is a tough task

to select any one dialect of these languages for development, as the dialects of
the same language are, at times, unintelligible for even that language-group
using another dialect. Many languages of this type, often, lack a literary
tradition, which is another problem in their revival and development.

Besides these languages, there are several other languages having a
uniform script and spoken by a larger group, which still requires an
enhancement in their social status and function. Languages, like Kabardin,
Balkar, Khanty, Selkup, Mari, Lezgin, Ket, Buryat, Shor, and even Komi, fall
in this category. Their social functions need to be re-addressed, along with an
urgent need to develop and expand their lexicons.

The efforts in this direction, in Russia and its republics, are
commendable. Measures for expansion of functions of these languages are
undertaken in many republics. National language schools are opened, the
publications in languages of minorities are actively supported; the official
correspondence in several of these languages is revived.

As far as the revival and development of the lesser languages are
concerned, more scientific methods are applied in order to evolve and develop
the alphabet and writing systems for these languages. The multimedia
computer systems are being widely used for studying languages and phonetic
investigations. For example, such systems and program complex SONA have
been used for investigation of prosody in small Nenets texts.\textsuperscript{16} Likewise, a

\textsuperscript{16} LubilinsKaya, M., "Computer Possibilities for Saving and Processing Sound Records of
comprehensive databank on the "Languages of Indigenous Minorities of Russia" has been developed at the Centre on Ethnic and Language Relations of the Institute of Linguistics (Russian Academy of Sciences). But some indigenous minorities, as in the Far East, are so distantly located from each other that a typology of language can be fruitfully developed only at the level of a settlement, and not at the level of a minority ethnic group as a whole.

The Problems of Restoring the State Languages in the Republics of the Russian Federation

Although the processes of restoration of State languages had begun in the former Union Republics of the former USSR by the end of 1988 and 1989, this process was followed by the constituent republics of Russian Federation in the year 1993. Komi was the first of the republics within Russia to adopt the Law on two state languages (Komi and Russian), on Feb. 17, 1994. But this can not be put into effect at the same time as the new constitution, since a legal and juridical lexicon has not yet been worked out for the Komi language. This is only an example of how the inadequacy of languages can create practical problems in their restoration as the state languages. Most of the non-

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18 A new Constitution was adopted on 17 Feb. 1994, at an extraordinary session of the Komi Republic Supreme Soviet, which also adopted the Law on the two State languages.

Russian state languages, that have been given the status of official languages in the republics, suffer from a number of linguistic and functional inadequacies.

Several state languages, such as Buryat in the Republic of Buryatia, Kabardin and Balkar in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, Meadow Mari and Hill Mari in the Republic of Mari El, Komi in the Komi Republic, etc., have their functioning sphere getting narrower, besides their colloquial form being more commonly used.

**Table 5.1**

**Dialects of Some State Languages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Non-Russian State Languages</th>
<th>Republics</th>
<th>Dialects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Komi</td>
<td>Komi</td>
<td>(i) Komi-Zyryan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Komi-Permyak</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Komi-Yazua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karelia</td>
<td>Karelia</td>
<td>(i) Karelian Proper</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(ii) Olonets</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Ludic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tatar</td>
<td>Tatarstan</td>
<td>(i) Kipchak</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(ii) Volga Tatar</td>
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<td>(iii) Kazan Tatar</td>
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<td>(iv) Mishar Tatar</td>
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<td>(v) Kasimov</td>
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<td>(vi) Teptyar</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(vii) Astrakhan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(viii) Ural Tatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mordva</td>
<td>Mordovia</td>
<td>(i) Erzya</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Moksha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossete</td>
<td>Ossetia</td>
<td>(i) Iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Northern)</td>
<td>(ii) Digor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although, almost all of the republics have Russian as one of their State languages, the non-Russian State languages fail to make grade with the Russian
language, on account of lack of linguistic competence. Many of them do not have even a scientific lexicon and a developed literary form. Some of them are afflicted with the lack of uniformity, as several dialectical versions of one language exists (Table 4.1). For example, the Komi language has three different dialects: Komi-Zyryan, Komi-Permyak and Komi-Yazua, making it rather difficult to choose one from them as a standard form for the state- adoption. The same problem exists for several other languages, such as Karelian, Tatar, Mordva and Ossete. These factors contribute to the problems of practical functionality of all so many languages, which has been adopted as state languages in the Russian republics.

However, numerous efforts are on, in the republics, to formulate an efficient programme to enhance the social and functional roles of the state languages. Expert committees have been endowed with the responsibility to evolve and expand the lexicons and to identify other linguistic discrepancies.

**The Problem of Russian Language Use in Inter-ethnic and International Communication**

Since long, the Russian language has been used as a means of inter-ethnic communication on the territory of the Russian Federation. The main problem lies in the functional adaptation of Russian language by the non-Russian people. There are several aspects of this problem: -
(i) The Speech preferences of a bilingual person selecting communicative significant words necessary to organize a normal Russian utterance;

(ii) To differentiate the objective and subjective sides of the Russian language variability in polynational space;

(iii) To differentiate the collection of variable units of the Russian language and the selection of those in interethnic language;

(iv) To select the functionally significant units and their preservation in associative-verbal network of a bilingual person;

(v) And to ascertain non-identity of Russian as a mononational language.  

Moreover, politics, economics, business and culture have accelerated the process of language change due to heavy English borrowing into the Russian language. This process covers semantic shifts and formation of new words. This adds new spheres of paradigm shift in communication as far as Russian language is concerned.

The growing ethnolinguistic consciousness is another problem in acceptance of Russian language as a second language, which hampers its progress as an interethnic or international language. But functional problem is

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the main. *Dialectization* of Russian is happening in non-Russian environment, as non-native speakers do not conform closely to the norms observed by native speakers.

This problem of interethnic linguistic interaction can be sorted out by formulation of basic outlines of functional and communicative differentiation of lexical and grammatical stock of Russian used by non-native speakers. A liberal consideration to the *ethnolinguistic* reality and to peculiarities of lingual situation has to be given, in order to examine the prospects of Russian as a means of interethnic communication within Russia. An attempt to make a scientific forecast may lead to the idea that this process is certain to become deeper as it entirely depends on the integration of contacts and expansion of all spheres of communication.

All said and done, the expansion and social function of the Russian language is far from being threatened despite the strengthening of the local languages in the Federation. All the CIS level meetings and official correspondences invariably use Russian language as the sole and most convenient means of communication. A far wider acceptance of the Russian language as compared to any other is further attested by Estonian academician Yukhan Kahk, who proclaimed: “My book in Russian about Estonia will be read by a hundred times more people in the country and abroad than it would have been if I had written it in Estonian”.22 Thus, the Russian language

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22 As quoted in Tishkov, Valery, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
continues to be the language of higher education, research, literature, media, and international communication at large.

**Problems Associated with Bilingualism/ Multilingualism**

The interaction of people and their languages leads to the formation of bilingualism, which develops either through the control by legislation or by spontaneous linguistic factors. Both these means are the ways of development of bilingualism in Russia.

*Bilingualism* in polyethnic regions, like those of the Russian Federation, is quite necessary for the functioning of economics, culture, education and science. It is connected with the actual problem of the communication culture between the representatives of different ‘nations’.

The basic problem of bilingualism, in the Russian Federation, is created by a ‘paradigm-shift ’ in the language policy on bilingualism. Whereas the Soviet policy pursued a goal of ‘national - Russian - bilingualism’, current policy is, allegedly, to pursue the opposite, namely the goal of ‘Russian - national - bilingualism’. It will be helpful to list briefly the chief characteristics of each type of bilingualism in the Russian Federation:

**National - Russian - Bilingualism:**

---------- Three types of school - R-1, R-2, Russian as the medium of instruction; R-3, Russian as the medium of instruction.

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with the national language as a school subject; and 'national schools', the national language as the medium of instruction with compulsory study of Russian.

--------- Russian was promoted as the 'second mother tongue'; the other languages were not so promoted, their functions were reduced, their use as languages of instruction was reduced or discontinued.

--------- Non-Russians were encouraged to be fluent in Russian.

**Russian - National - Bilingualism:**

--------- Development of the functions of the local language.

--------- The local language is taught as a subject and used as a language of instruction.

--------- Russians willingly acquire knowledge of the local language.

The second type of bilingualism, as said to be the present policy, definitely eases the situation, as far as the question of ‘minority linguistic rights’ is concerned. But, the claim of the national-intelligentsia that bilingualism is only an intermediary stage on the way to monolinguisn, generates skepticism, in the minds of non-Russians, towards bilingualism.
For a multilingual state like Russia, ‘bilingualism is necessary and advantageous’. But, to provide all conditions of the successful formation of bilingualism and the culture of Russian Speech, all kinds of interlingual interference must be exposed. Due to interaction between the mother tongue of the non-Russian and the Russian Language, Russian Speech of bilinguals has some peculiarities, the same errors, which can be conditioned by the interlingual interference. And, now, this is happening in Russia, which can promote bilingualism, along with other national languages, as well.

Here are some other problems associated with language contact and bilingualism/multilingualism.

**Language Maintenance, Shift and Loss**

Adoption of majority language as a regular vehicle of communication in the Russian Federation is growing, often mainly because of better chances of upward social mobility and economic success. Language shift in general can hence be equated with shift towards the majority or prestigious language in the Federation. Russian language is the best example.

There is a combination of three main factors, namely status, demographic, and institutional support, which affect language maintenance and Shift, as we have tried to show in Figure 5.2. Economic status is the most

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prominent factor. Where groups of minority language speakers have a relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift towards the majority language. Social standing of any language is closely aligned to economic status, and thus affects language maintenance and shift. *Sociohistorical* as well as language status is also quite important variables guiding language shift/maintenance in Russia. Russian and English have a high status as languages of

Figure 5.2

**Factors Affecting Language Maintenance**

![Diagram of factors affecting language maintenance]

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international communication. Therefore language shift towards them is inevitable.

The geographical distribution of minority-group members also affects language maintenance and shift quite considerably, given the vastness of the country. As long as they live concentrated in a certain area, minority groups have better chances of maintaining their language.

When a community stops speaking a language, of course this language will not always be extinguished. But, what happens is the shift towards the majority language. Language shift linked up with gradual loss will finally result in language death, as have happened with many of the endangered languages of the Russian Federation.

**Linguistic Interference: Code-Mixing and Code-Switching**

Bilinguals often engage in language mixing when communicating with another person who also speaks both languages.\(^{26}\) Russia presents a most likely case for such linguistic processes. Code mixing is the use of elements, most typically nouns, from one language in an utterance of another language. Whereas, code switching refers to a change from one language to another in the same utterance or conversation. Switching is not an isolated phenomenon, but a central part of bilingual discourse\(^{27}\), and as much depends on borrowing.


\(^{27}\) Appel, Rene and Muysken, Pieter, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
Borrowing of linguistic items is a significant and almost inevitable consequence of language contact. The process of borrowing from Russian language into the minority languages, and more recently of English into the Russian language has intensified. The most common and obvious reason for borrowing is necessity. The other main motive for the process is prestige. Of
much less importance is borrowing due to negative evaluation for derogatory reasons.  

Code mixing, on the other hand, is also viewed as 'a sign of linguistic decay, the unsystematic result of not knowing at least one of the languages involved very well'. This is best exemplified among the children of the minority languages in the Russian Federation. Lack of linguistic competence in the language of their group or the ethnicity, the minority language children are increasingly using Russian words and phrases while speaking in their respective native language. This phenomenon is increasing rather alarmingly in the youth, as they prefer to have a more systematic and regular learning of Russian language for economic reasons, and yet their parents or older family members are only proficient in their native language.

In Figure 5.3, we have tried to illustrate how the various processes involving linguistic borrowing and code-switching result in language convergence giving birth to Pidgins and Creoles in a multilingual/bilingual environment. Language-mixing or code-mixing is what the linguistic-interference ultimately culminates into. The necessity of communication among different or even partially intelligible linguistic-groups makes linguistic-interference an inevitable sociolinguistic reality.

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29 Appel, Rene and Muysken, Pieter, op. cit., p. 117.
Gumperz’s description of “code switching in bilingual conversation as socially orderly discourse strategies which index localized norms and values” holds quite true of linguistic interference in the Russian context. Individuals strategically use the codes in their bilingual repertoires to achieve specific interactional goals.

An increase in such linguistic interference among the bilinguals is most likely to weaken the position of minority languages in the Russian Federation. This may be an obstacle as well in strengthening the already narrowing social function of the minority languages and in saving the endangered languages from extinction.

**Problem of Revival and Survival**

The country with maximum number of languages, which have minimum number of speakers, is the Russian Federation. Many of them are either extinct or on the verge of it, as there are about 25 languages with less than 500 native speakers (see Chapter IV). According to the *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages*, there are only three minority languages in Russia that are not endangered. All the others are considered as being "on the verge of extinction" or "threatened".

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31 Mator became extinct long time back, and Kamas was reported to have one 92 year old speaker in 1987. Languages such as Kerek, Yugh and Yupik (Serenik) have only a couple of old-aged speakers surviving. Enets, Itelmen, Vod, Udihe, Yukagir Southern, and Yupik (Nankan) have less than a hundred speakers as of now.
Languages traverse through the routes of construction and destruction. Years of social segregation and geographic isolation helped the maintenance of these languages in the past. With greater social mobility and distant interaction growing with time, the situation of “these languages is ‘at risk’ today – or threatened, pressured, beleaguered, being encroached on, in recession, declining, dying – in face of a culturally dominant language”\(^\text{32}\) – Russian. The penetration from the dominant Russian language into the vocabulary and idiom of the minority languages is one indicator of weakening of resistance to the threat to the latter’s existence. On the social sphere, however, this problem may be associated with the decrease in numbers of speakers, or with a reduction of quality and status in the languages themselves; with changing economic circumstances affecting individuals and communities, or with the political implications of language change.\(^\text{33}\) Besides, many of the factors which may lead to the extinction of languages today have been a result of the policies put in place in years past. Not long ago bilingualism and biculturalism were essentially conceived as maladies, and promotion of one language was thought as an instrument of nation building.

The demographic factor seems the biggest hurdle in saving some of the endangered languages, as the groups are declining in the wake of alarmingly reduced population growth over the last decade. The seriousness of this natural


population decline can be best put in the apocalyptic manner of President Vladimir Putin, who said in the summer of 2000, “we are facing the serious threat of turning into a decaying nation”. Whatever the consequences for the nation, languages are sure to decay if they don’t have people to speak.

The process of protecting a minority or endangered language has much in common with the protection of endangered species of plants and animals. We need to identify circumstances, geographic, political, ideological, economic, demographic, social, cultural, educational, and more significantly, linguistic, which are or have been favourable or unfavourable to the languages concerned. Purely linguistic considerations have to be fruitfully applied to the central problem of survival or revival of the endangered languages. Realization that the cost of maintaining small languages is far less than the values that are lost if we let them die would help the matter no end.

Another factor, which is of more contemporary nature - the so-called ‘Americanization’ of the Russian language, is quite vital to the issue of ‘language-maintenance’ and ‘language-corruption’. Transportation of English words and American ‘slang’ into the urban Russian language use is becoming more and more frequent. Since language behaviour of the people can not be kept aloof from the demands of the market forces, English is increasingly becoming the language of preference among the youth, especially in the big cities. According to a very recent survey, carried out in Moscow in September 2002, about 83 percent of the total respondents expressed great desire to learn

A good percentage of the young population is also quite keen on learning any of the European languages, such as German, French, or Italian. Attraction for anything ‘American’ or ‘European’ has to do with this new linguistic trend, especially in the urban areas.

Besides the above-mentioned linguistic problems, there are a host of other language-related problems, which are, at times, extra-linguistic in nature. The whole complex that we may refer to as ‘Linguistic Culture’ is the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, religious structures, and all the other ‘baggage’ that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their background. The relationship of language to culture and social change in the Russian Federation creates one such problem. But, this needs to be pursued along the extent to which society itself is exposed to structural strains because of language contacts of a new sort, and particularly because of the penetration of a *lingua franca* such as Russian. There are a few aspects of society where restructuring may occur because of changes in the relationship between languages. On the one hand, the very introduction of a new language, especially if it is prestigious, cuts across the existing divisions in society; on the other, it is likely to help set up new status groups. The existence of status groups is the problem of the relationship of language to traditional social classes. This relationship between language and society is, though, bound to

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35 "Linguistic Awareness: Language Attitude and Maintenance", *A Sample Survey* conducted in Moscow by the candidate, 14-28 September 2001.
change with time, but is also likely to complicate further, depending on the process of socio-economic development of the country.

The emerging language situation and related problems of language maintenance are obviously influenced by the socioeconomic factors. The economic instability in the Russian Federation has enhanced importance of the languages in trade and commerce. The Russian language, on this account, scores over others. Due to this economic implication, the situation of ‘national languages’ is likely to deteriorate. Their demand in the job-market is only confined to the respective republics, where these languages have attained the official status. Thus, the socio-economic variable adds a new dimension to the already existing problem of language maintenance as far as the case of ‘national languages’ is concerned. The national language must be investigated in relation to the way of thinking of a person, and not as an abstract system. The subject and responsibility of Sociolinguistics is the investigation of the language as well as of the social and personal factors; these must include resolution of the contradictions and determination of the ways of the development of the dialogue of cultures. 37

To address the problems we need a more accommodating language ideology. Unfortunately, thus far it has only been considered as “set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of

perceived language structure and use”38. As a matter of fact, the role of language ideologies has to be redefined in constructing perceptions of social, ethnic, and national difference.

However, a healthy change in general social behaviour and attitude, perceivable across the country, augurs well for the future. A serious sociolinguistic study carried out in Bashkoria in 1993, for example, showed a very high level of inter-ethnic tolerance concerning the language issue: 90% of ethnic Bashkir citizens do not agree that non-Bashkir residents of the Republic should have to learn the Bashkir language. They are also ready to accept different models of educational practice based on bilingualism or trilingualism principles.39 This positive change in air as far as inter-ethnic relations in the Federation are concerned is bound to translate into other domains of social life. This is bound to create an atmosphere of greater understanding and cooperation in an otherwise a conflict-ridden society, and in a sociopolitical set-up, which is yet to attain any degree of stability.

Ethnicity and problems related to it thus remain a major problem-area for New Russia. This was amply shown recently in Chechnya. Thus, in the long run, the ethnolinguistic crisis may multiply. But gradual restoration of

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order in the Russian society along the democratic lines may duly address the issues.

Nevertheless, given the multiplicity of sociolinguistic problems in the Russian Federation, a scientific and truly pluralist approach is required in order to find some widely acceptable solutions. But, as often with an idealistic and popular approach, there may arise some immense practical difficulties. Hopes lie only in a timely redressal of any approach that is undertaken for the purpose. A true democracy and a strong civil society can perhaps take care of the rest.