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LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CONTACTS IN THE RUSSIAN-NORDIC BORDERLANDS: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY⁴

Russian-Nordic borderlands are an important area of intense contact and cooperation between various communities with diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. During the recent decades, such contact has significantly intensified, bringing into life new linguistic and cultural strategies and creating new identities in the region. Based on field data, we argue that this borderland region features a unique linguistic and cultural landscape imbued with multilingualism and multiculturalism, most of whose residents — indigenous and non-indigenous alike — become involved in the cross-border contact in one way or another. The contact becomes an indispensable feature of the local landscape, defining its sociocultural image and acting as the strongest marker of the local residents' identity. The study also highlights the general idea of linguistic and cultural contact as one of the main life strategies in the region.

Keywords: language situation, borderland communities, Russian-Nordic borderlands, language contacts, cultural contacts, Arctic

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Introduction

The Russian-Nordic borderlands have been an area of intense contact between various indigenous and non-indigenous communities with diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds at least since the medieval times. The broader historical context as well as local events, however, have always affected the intensity of such interaction and shaped the forms it takes. While the Soviet period spanning over the seven decades of the twentieth century saw the radical limitations on cross-cultural communication in the area, the fall of the Iron Curtain has brought conditions for liberalisation of border regimes vital for cooperation between local individuals and communities as well as governmental, business, and non-profit organisations. In the early 2010s, a political conflict between Russia and Western countries broke out and Russian authorities introduced a number of legislation changes to have more control over activities involving both Russian and foreign citizens, communities, and organisations. Obviously, it created significant obstacles for cross-border cooperation in the Russian-Nordic borderlands, especially for local businesses and non-governmental initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020 made most practices of cross-border interaction problematic leading to their transformation or, in some cases, termination, at least for the pandemic period.

The goal of the current research has been to investigate language and sociocultural contacts in the Russian-Nordic borderlands in the modern turbulent context. The study is based on empirical data we have gathered during a series of field trips to two major regions on the Russian side of the area – the Republic of Karelia and Murmansk Oblast. Both regions have an extremely diverse population in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds as well as groups of inhabitants widely accepted as indigenous ones – Karelians and Veps in Karelia, Sámi in Murmansk Oblast. Whereas each of these communities has its distinctive identification strategies, cultural practices and even language, all of them are engaged in cross-border interaction, albeit to a various extent. Besides, the indigenous groups are characterised by processes of language shift, attempts at linguistic and cultural revitalisation and ongoing identity reinvention. Our work mostly focuses on Sámi and Karelians since their ties with the Nordic neighbours – first of all, Nordic Sámi and Finns respectively – are particularly relevant for the understanding of the linguistic and sociocultural situation in the borderland region.

One of the central concepts in our research is language situation. While it is still unclear who coined the term, it became widely accepted in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology due to the influential works of Charles Ferguson on diglossia. Ferguson's usage refers to "an aggregate of language varieties (dialect and register) and their patterns of acquisition, use, and modalities by and among various linguistic communities within a particular geographical region" (Ferguson 1996: 17). In our paper, we follow this broad interpretation which includes both purely linguistic phenomena and related sociocultural processes of identification, group integration, cooperation as well as contention and hostility, various policies of local communication, etc.

Related Research

As stated previously, our understanding of the language situation dates back to classical works by Ferguson (1996) and the related research tradition. Another central concept of our study is language policy, broadly understood as a combination of language practices, language

beliefs and ideologies, and language management coined by Bernard Spolsky (Spolsky 2004: 17). Since we focus on communities with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, we always use the plural form “policies” to highlight the “multivoicedness” of local social life. This has been a trend in research on a broad range of areas – from the autonomous province of Catalonia (Woolard & Gahng 1990) to the post-colonial Francophonie (Bourhis 1997) or post-Soviet communities (Smagulova 2008).

Obviously, language policies are implemented not only by state institutions, but also by social groups, non-official organisations and individuals. Language policies are tightly connected to one of the key concepts in modern anthropological research, namely identity. While ethnographers have always been interested in studying sociocultural positioning of various communities and whole nations, in the recent decades such phenomena have become increasingly important in the interdisciplinary fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. In this work we adopt the interpretation of identity as a dynamic process, “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz 2005) which is developed in social constructionism paradigms and seems to be especially insightful for research on the multicultural landscapes of the region in question.

The Russian-Nordic borderland (or rather *borderlands*, as reflected in the paper title) has long been in the focus of social science due to it being a “crossroads of culture” (Rogova 2010: 228-229). Based on extensive history of cultural and language contact (Gnatenko and Vlachov 2018: 169; Hønneland 1998: 278), the region has been operationalized as a political entity after 1991 (Rogova 2009: 35), becoming the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (Vlachov 2014: 155-162). Regional identity of its residents has been extensively studied by Russian and Nordic scholars such as Geir Hønneland (Hønneland 1998: 278-283); (Hønneland 2010) and Anastasia Rogova (Rogova 2009: 35-38); (Rogova 2010). Cross-border contact in the region has been profoundly studied by anthropologists and political scientists, both on institutional (Rubtsova 2009; Izotov 2012) and grass-roots level (Hønneland 2010; Zimin et al. 2012; Vlachov 2020). Linguistic dimension of cross-border contact has been specifically addressed by scholars (Ivanishcheva 2008; Rogova 2008; Ryzhkov 2020), including the indigenous perspective (Nedaikhleb 2020) and the linguistic landscape of the borderland region (Ryzhkov et al. 2021).

Methods and Data

To gain both broad and detailed understanding of the linguistic and cultural situation in the region, we used qualitative research methods adopted in sociocultural anthropology and macro-sociolinguistics, namely qualitative interviews and observation complemented with linguistic landscaping. Such methods are common for the field, allowing to combine the emic (first-person and “subjective”) data of local residents’ opinions gained through interviews with etic (external and more “objective”) assessment of the situation by the researchers gained through various observation techniques. While not allowing to draw any statistical correlations, using such methods is the best choice for creating a multifaceted description of the complex sociocultural and linguistic situations on specific territories, taking into account various aspects of their daily life and residents’ linguistic behavior.

The first-hand knowledge in this study derives from qualitative interviews with residents of two regions in Northwestern Russia, namely Murmansk Oblast and the Republic of Karelia. A dedicated interview guide designed by the research group includes thematic sections on

biographical data, individual linguistic behavior, collective linguistic identities and language awareness, as well as local identity, life choices and strategies (Appendix 3). The interview guide varied depending on the region specifics but the main themes and ideas of interviews were common. The interviews were conducted by all co-authors during the field trips to these regions attempted between June and August 2021. In addition to that, legacy data from previous self-funded field trips of the first author were used in this study to provide the necessary temporal perspective. In Murmansk Oblast, data was collected in such localities as Murmansk, Nikel, Zapolyarny, Pechenga and Lovozero, while in the Republic of Karelia the focal points were Petrozavodsk, Kostomuksha, Sortavala, Pitkyaranta and Olonets as well as rural settlements of Pryazhinsky and Olonetsky municipal districts (Appendix 2).

The overall sample size totals 278 interviews, with 114 interviews from Murmansk Oblast and 164 from the Republic of Karelia. Detailed demographic data of participants will be presented as a table at a later stage of this study; informants quoted in this paper are listed in Appendix 1. All interviews were recorded on the condition of prior informed consent, thoroughly anonymized and fully transcribed. The recording and transcript database is kept and managed at the HSE University Faculty of Humanities. The visual data (photos and videos of local linguistic and cultural landscapes) as well as field notes of the research group pertaining to the study is also part of this database.

The study aims at finding balance between the viewpoints of actors at different levels (i.e. decision-makers, experts, local officials, as well as the grass-roots level) and presenting the sociocultural situation in the region as a multitude of voices, which follows the general Actor-Network Theory framework and develops the approach suggested by the corresponding author in (Vlakhov 2019). Therefore, the general research questions of this study focus on the role of linguistic and cultural contacts in the collective identity of the Russian-Nordic borderland residents. Does living in the borderlands create a unique linguistic and cultural landscape? To what extent do cross-border cooperation and contact define multilingualism in the area? Is the situation different for indigenous and non-indigenous communities of the region? And what are the possible trajectories of development for such linguistic and cultural landscapes, as well as collective identities of the local residents? This study is an attempt to provide an ethnographic answer to these questions, by no means complete but a multifaceted and multi-voiced one.

Language and Sociocultural Situation in the Russian-Norwegian Contact Area⁵

Physically the Russian-Norwegian part of the Borderlands is represented by the Murmansk Oblast. Russians make up 642,310 people. In the Murmansk Oblast there are indigenous peoples. Sámi number is 1,599, Izhma Komi — 472, Finns — 4,366, and Karelians — 1,345 (Russian Census 2010). Besides, there are numerous other ethnic groups. Russian-Norwegian relations can be described as a long-standing phenomenon. Throughout history, Russia and Norway have been forming sociocultural and language contacts on the borderline territory as

⁵ This section is based on unpublished term papers by three co-authors submitted in 2021 as part of the MA curriculum at HSE University: (Deresh 2021), (Mironova 2021), (Reshetnikova 2021). Some field data used in (Ryzhkov 2020) and (Ryzhkov et al. 2021) was also used when preparing this section. Proper citation and reference management will be completed upon final submission of the text to the refereed journal.

well as on the state level. Before the 1990s, Russian-Norwegian contacts were mostly conducted through official channels, primarily through the foreign ministries in Oslo and Moscow. Nowadays, the goal has been to establish direct contacts between Russian and Norwegian partners — authorities and management bodies, non-profit organisations, enterprises and schools. Since 1990, there has already been an extensive network of such contacts. Nowadays, the two countries cooperate via international organisations. Norway and Russia are actively involved in cooperation within the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which includes 11 administrative units of several Northern European countries altogether. Norwegian priorities are energy, economic cooperation, democracy development, health and public safety whereas Russia focuses on the sustainable development of cooperation in the field of modernisation and innovation, promotion of tolerance as a mechanism of opposing extremism and radicalism, easing the visa regimes. The establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 1993 was to give force to existing cooperation and to consider new initiatives and projects. The purpose of the Council's work is to promote the sustainable development of the region, bearing in mind the principles and recommendations contained in the Declaration of the Rio Conference and the Agenda for the Twenty-first Century of the UN Conference on Environment and Development. The activities of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) are focused on establishing broad international cooperation in the Barents Region, supporting the integrated development of the North-West regions, and solving their socio-economic and environmental problems (Rubtsova 2009). Today, there are close Russian-Norwegian ties at all levels, from government agencies to interpersonal contacts. The border, recently hermetically sealed, nowadays is crossed in both directions by a large number of Norwegians and Russians engaged in various types of bilateral cooperation. Active collaboration is a common phenomenon for the neighboring communities.

The border neighbourhood in the North naturally plays a major role in relations between Norway and Russia. The Russian-Norwegian border, except for the period 1920–1944, when the Petsamo Corridor was the Norwegian-Finnish border, remained unchanged. Now it is the oldest state border of Russia. The geographical meeting of Norway and Russia takes place first on the segment of the Jakobselv River in Sør-Varanger, then the border turns West through the mountains into the Pasvik Valley and from there continues south to Trierksrøysa. In the Pasvik Valley, there is the Borisoglebsk – Storskog border crossing, through which 138,375 Russian citizens and slightly fewer Norwegians passed in 2019 (Fedstat). Each country has its border commissioner. The basis for their joint work is the 1949 Border Treaty, under which they must cooperate on the state of the border, its inspection and demarcation. Border commissioners must also prevent border violations. Direct control at the border is carried out by Norwegian police and Russian border guards. In recent years, cooperation at the border has expanded to include the fight against crime, and passport control. In 1998, Norway and Russia signed a special agreement on fighting crime (1999), and the staff of the Embassy in Moscow and the Consulate General in Murmansk now includes the police attaché (police liaison officer).

Since March 25, 2001, Norway has joined the Schengen Agreement, which includes 15 European countries. Passport control is carried out when crossing the external border of the Schengen area, which has now become the Russian-Norwegian border. Russians wishing to visit Norway must apply for a visa at one of the Norwegian diplomatic missions. However, a visa-free regime between Russia and Norway is valid for residents of border areas. The current

border of the 30-kilometre visa-free travel zone between Russia and Norway is defined by the regulatory documents of the European Union. The agreement on simplified border crossing for residents of the border area, signed by Russia and Norway in November 2010, has been in force since May 2012. Citizens of Russia and Norway who permanently reside within a 30-kilometre zone from the state border began to receive permits for visa-free border crossing on May 29, 2012. The certificate, permitting residents to cross the border, is issued for three years. The owner of the certificate gets the right to an unlimited number of crossings and to stay on the territory of the 30-kilometre zone for 15 days. Residents of the settlements of Zapolyarny, Pechenga, Nikel, Korzunovo and residents of the Norwegian municipality of Sør-Varanger in the province of Finnmark can use the right to obtain the document.

Pechengsky District is the only Russian municipal unit bordering Norway and the only crossing point, Borisoglebsk – Storskog, is located here. As Norway belongs to NATO military alliance and the territory is believed to be of strategic importance by authorities on the both sides of the borderlands, Pechengsky District is heavily militarised – a number of localities are inhabited predominantly by the Russian armed forces personnel and public access to several areas is restricted. The two biggest settlements in the district are Nikel (around 11,000 residents) and Zapolyarny (around 15,000 residents), company towns integrated in the mining and metallurgical industrial complex controlled by “NorNickel” corporation. The two towns have been our primary fieldwork locations in Pechengsky District.

Citizens of Nikel and Zapolyarny actively interact with Norwegians (Mikhailova 2014). There are a number of events aimed at cooperation that are held annually and also several programmes that support the consolidation on a permanent basis (Neumann 1994). The libraries of Zapolyarny keep different works in Norwegian, Finnish and Sámi languages. From time to time they conduct reading evenings aimed at fairytales of Sámi peoples and works by Finnish and Norwegian writers. The pupils of the locality also visit the libraries as part of their school tasks to read about the history of the region and international affairs between Russia and the neighbouring countries. The education system also requires presentations in class on these topics.

In 2019, local activists, authorities, and representatives of “NorNickel” opened the centre for social development of Pechengsky District “Vtoraya shkola” (“The Second School” – its office occupies a former school building) in Nickel. Financed by the “NorNickel” corporation, the centre supports (both in terms of resources and organisation) various initiatives and projects in diverse spheres – from children education to eco-tourism, from new forms of local entrepreneurship to contemporary art. Promoting people-to-people cooperation between borderland Russians and Norwegians, as the centre representatives claim, is one of the main aims of the organisation.

The international race “Ski Track of Friendship” has been held annually since 1994 in Raykoski (close to the Russian-Finnish-Norwegian tripoint on the Muotkavaara hill) and passes through the territory of Russia, Norway and Finland. This event has a unique borderline regime as it does not require participants to have visas or travel passports. Instead, every skier gets a personal label with ID allowing them to cross the borders of the three states. This event is a part of the implementation of the Barents Region agreement on cooperation and at the same time – of the annual festival “Prazdnik Severa” (“North Fest”) in Murmansk Oblast. Since 2004, the Barents Spektakel (Barents Region Play) has been staged to share the

talents of the citizens of the countries belonging to the Barents Region (Lukashin 2004). The festival includes creative compositions, art objects, group performances, etc. Originally, it was held in Norway, but in the current pandemic situation the organisers had to introduce online-formats to allow young artists from different cities, including Russian borderline territory to participate in the programme.

Historical memory is one of the most important factors attracting Finnish and Norwegian tourists to Murmansk Oblast. The Petsamo – Kirkenes offensive (as well as other local events of WWII) left a huge number of landmarks on the borderline territory. A tiny museum next to the memorial at Titovka checkpoint is often visited by Finnish and Norwegian citizens, according to the guest book signed by them many times. Besides, a graveyard (referred to by the locals as “the German cemetery”) where war prisoners are buried can be found in a small military town of Pechenga. The names on the tombstones are not only German, but also Scandic, Polish, and Jewish. Informants in Pechenga have highlighted that many visitors are Finns coming to honour the memory of their fallen family members. The Pechenga museum located in Nikel is open to both Russian and foreign visitors. The history of relations between Russia, Norway and Finland is one of the main topics here, and the museum collects artefacts related to it. However, the popularity of the museum among foreign visitors is not high, according to its head.

Undoubtedly, Finnish and Norwegian citizens also come to Murmansk Oblast to buy some goods. The most popular product, according to informants, is petrol as it is cheaper than in the EU. Alcohol and, to a lesser extent, tobacco products are also mentioned as one of the most attractive goods due to the high state-regulated prices on them in the two Nordic countries. Nikel citizens also noticed that Nordic citizens frequently visit local beauty salons. Cross-border trade influences the language landscape of the territory and printed ads can be found on the walls of shops in Nikel and Zapolyarny. When it comes to languages, most informants confessed that their level of English is not high, but enough to communicate with foreigners. Those who cannot speak English use gestures. It relates to shop assistants, beauty salon workers and other citizens. However, some visitors from abroad learn Russian to communicate with the locals, and several informants shared a positive attitude to this. According to them, people from Finland and Norway do not often come further than the locality. It can be explained by two factors: the visa-free zone covers only 30 kilometres, and there is no need to go to other towns as everything can be bought close to the border. Nevertheless, some tourists still go deeper for hikes, and local inhabitants often suggest visiting the Rybachy Peninsula or Teriberka village. Local attitudes towards Nordic citizens crossing the border are primarily positive. Informants often compare Russian tourists to Europeans and point out that the latter seem more well-mannered and eco-friendly. Obviously, it is not a universal opinion. The narratives about Finnish tourists who drink too much are common in this area. One of the informants described Finnish tourists highly negatively. To her words, their manner of drinking is much louder in comparison to Russians. She supposed it to be a consequence of strict laws in Finland, where they cannot behave in such a way, while in Russia they have an opportunity to be noisy.

On the other hand, many residents of Nikel and Zapolyarny frequently cross the border to buy certain products in Norway – cheese (by far, the most popular example), coffee, clothes, and so on. Our informants often mention small unofficial shops with European products brought from over the border by several enterprising locals. Another point of attraction for Russians

is Kirkenes Airport that might be used to get to some European locations (e.g. with transfer in Oslo) faster and sometimes cheaper than via Murmansk. Apart from that, borderland Russians tend to highlight that it is exciting just to be able to spend some time in another country, “drink a cup of coffee in a completely different atmosphere” as put by one of our informants. Obviously, the pandemics made all the mentioned practices temporarily unavailable for inhabitants. Not only do our informants miss active cross-border interaction, they are also sure that their Nordic neighbours also cannot wait for the reopening of the borders.

As it was mentioned above, the Murmansk Oblast is considerably diverse in ethnicities and nationalities. Thus one of the first questions we asked our informants was related to their ethnic and national identity. It is important to mention that in the Russian language there are two different meanings of the word *Russian*. One of them means Russian as ethnicity and another one means Russian as nationality. Sometimes this leads to the unclarity in one’s identity. All of our informants identify themselves as Russian by their nationality. Some of them specify that they are not fully Russians, but a mix of ethnicities. Many of them emphasize such details about their ethnic origin even before we asked them about their parents’ origin.

(1) [Can you tell what your ethnicity is?] Me? Well... I’m half Russian, half Ukrainian, I guess. And... a little of Belarusian. (Informant 1)

That is to say, for the majority of our informants, it is familiar to identify themselves as Russians and for some of them it is important to mention their ethnic origin. Among our informants, there were Belarusians, Ukrainians, Roma, Komi, and representatives of other ethnic groups.

Another question was related to the story of their family. As expected, less than three generations of their families lived in this region. Most of our informants were born in Murmansk Oblast and their parents and grandparents were the ones who moved to the Northern region. In the 1950s there was a huge need for workforce for factories and the Kola railway construction. So people from all the regions of the USSR were sent to this region as workers. Some of them did it voluntarily. Based on our observation, some of the most popular places from where the ancestors of our informants migrated to Murmansk Oblast are Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the southern regions of Russia. Based on the answers we received during the interview, the following popular reasons for moving can be identified: work in a factory, work in the construction industry, moving following a spouse.

Another question related to the origin of our informants and the story of their family was aimed to get information if our informants speak the ethnic language of their family and what is the reason for that. Most of our informants with emphasized origin do not speak their native language or can understand only a few most used phrases. There are some popular reasons for this phenomenon.

(2) I did not want it myself, because I was more into such languages as English and French. (Informant 2)

– that is the explanation provided by a 16-year-old male informant, whose parents are from Kazakhstan and Dagestan, but who identifies himself as a Russian. Older informants (30-50 years old) explain that they cannot speak their ethnic language since their parents did not

teach them. One of them mentioned that Russian was more convenient for education and work. It would be reasonable to assume that in both cases the non-use of the mother tongue is due to the greater prestige of other languages.

Besides ethnicities and nationalities there are local identities. In the Murmansk Oblast it is so-called Northerners, “*vremenshiki*” (usually it is a word for fly-in fly-out workers), “*korennye*” and “*priezzhie*” — natives and immigrants. All these identities may intersect, include one another and so on (Llamas 2007).

Most of our informants (excluding those who moved to the region a couple of years ago or who came there for a short period to meet their family) consider themselves as Northerners. But they all have different criteria of what it means to be a Northerner. The relatively marginal opinion is that a Northerner is the one who was born in the North (in this case the phrase “in the North” means “beyond the Arctic Circle”). Arguably the most common opinion is that a Northerner is a person who has been living in the North for a certain period and who adores the North. It is important to note that the given time period ranges from one year to several decades. But the feeling of love for the region was noted as a crucial aspect. Our informants noted that if a person lives in the North but does not perceive the region as a comfortable place to live, then he or she has no right to identify themselves as a Northerner.

A person who has experience of living in the region, but who moved to another place motivated by the more comfortable conditions provided by another region, has no right to call themselves a northerner. The Northern region is described by the informants themselves as a place with challenging climatic, ecological, and economic conditions (Johansen 2013). Based on this, it can be assumed that the aforementioned “love for the North” can be interpreted as a person's ability to feel comfortable in conditions that may seem difficult to a non-Northerner.

(3) To be honest, I don't like the North at all. I hate it. I don't like the cold. And that's why I'm not a Northerner. (Informant 3)

Having come to this conclusion, we asked the following question, which was supposed to help determine what factors force people to make a decision — whether to stay in the region with challenging life conditions or to move to another place: “have you ever wanted to move to another region and why”? Before conducting the research, we suggested possible reasons for decisions to move to another region: a difficult environmental situation (air pollution caused by factories aimed at the extraction and processing of metals) and a difficult economic situation (job cuts, lower wages). Contrary to expectations, environmental problems did not motivate the informants to want to move to another region. Most of them noted that the ecological situation is getting better.

(4) Reindeer lichen doesn't grow in polluted areas. Norwegians consider it organic, consider it helps with oncology... Reindeers feed off it, it really helps with some sores. Although, it doesn't grow in polluted areas. Still, I believe that the level of pollution is pretty low. (Informant 4)

Some informants mentioned that the amount of toxic emissions has been drastically reduced due to the installation of a modern filtration system at factories. Also, some informants (women, 40+ years old, have been living in the region all their lives) highlighted that it was the first “warm and blooming summer in a long time”. Challenging climatic and ecological conditions can not be considered as the cause for leaving the region for our informants. On

the contrary, as it was noted above, the ability to survive in conditions of harsh environment is considered to be one of the core characteristics of a Northerner. Nevertheless, the economic problems seem to have a severe impact on the lives of the residents of the region.

At the moment, the economic situation in the borderland area can be characterized by the following events: a shortage of jobs (including the situation that occurred due to the closure of some factories) and a decrease in wages due to the abolition of the “Northern allowance” (wage rise for arduous working conditions in the Northern region). Informants who would love to move to another place mentioned these reasons more often than others. At the same time, it is worth noting that some adult and elder female informants noted that they do not want to leave the region but would like their children to move to another place. In this case, economic reasons faded into insignificance since the opportunity for their children to move to a place with better ecology, warmer climate, and better educational services. Economic issues are also the reason why our corinformants do not even consider the possibility of leaving for another place. Still, most of our informants noted that the main reason for their motivation to stay in the region is their emotional attachment to the region. It is important to note that when describing the “Northerner” some informants mentioned that the person who moved to another place can not be considered as a Northerner since it means that he (or she) does not like the North anymore and does not identify himself (or herself) related to the region.

Frequent use of the phrase “love for the region” while describing the characteristics of a “Northerner” seemed to confirm the idea that the informants should have extensive knowledge of the characteristics of the region. So the next question section allowed us to gain information about what our informants know about indigenous peoples. In particular, we were interested in the information related to the Sámi. Most of the informants noted that they could not recall anything, but they were sure that their school curriculum included such a topic. The younger generation (schoolchildren and people who graduated from school one or two years ago) said that they discussed this topic in classes of regional studies. The representatives of adult and elder generations could not recall the name of the school subject. Perhaps we should also point out the fact that the information about the indigenous people our informants could recall was unclear and limited. One of our informants said, that “Lapps and Sámi once have been competing for territory”. Here, “Sámi” and “Lapps”, names for the same ethnic group (although with different connotations), refer to two different communities existing in informant’s knowledge. Also, some of our informants refreshed the memory about the Sámi village of Lovozero only after our question about this place.

(5) [Do you know any indigenous peoples or languages of Murmansk region?] I can't even remember now. [There's a Sámi village near Murmansk, in Lovozero. Haven't heard of it either?] Yes, I've heard about it. My friends have been there, too. So I've heard a lot. Pretty interesting place. (Informant 1)

The most detailed information about the Sámi was gathered as a result of the interview with librarians.

It must be reasonable to start the description of the language diversity represented on the street signs with the description of the signs in the border zone. The rules of conduct in the

border zone are printed in two languages: Russian and English. Information about the works (planned by the local authorities) on the improvement of the infrastructure located near the border zone is published only in the Russian language. It is possible to meet the street signs in both Russian and English in all the towns we have visited during the research trip. Most often, the street signs translated into English are located mostly in the center of the town. However, there is no commonly established translation of the street names. For example, in the town of Zapolyarny, one can meet the street sign with the title “Gvardeyskiy avenue” on the wall of a house, while the address of the flower shop on the street sign is spelled as “Gvardejskij, 22 central avenue”. Most of the advertisements and street signs created for tourists are in English. However, we noted that in the borderland area (Zapolyarny and Nikel), some advertising texts are written in Norwegian (including menus in some cafés), while in Murmansk the tourist policy is mostly focused on Chinese tourists, therefore street advertising is designed in Russian, English, and Chinese.

To sum up, the Russian-Norwegian border region has been characterised by active interaction between groups with diverse social, cultural, ethnic and linguistic identifications at least since the fall of the Iron Curtain. It exists on different levels and includes various official programmes of integration (e. g. via the Barents Region institutions), local activist projects and initiatives, as well as regular practices of people-to-people cooperation. While this part of the borderlands is definitely a multicultural area, local communities do not seem to have a common linguistic code for cross-border communication. Nordic languages are used by a relatively small part of the Russian population in Pechengsky District and good command of them is usually associated with particular life strategies closely tied to the neighbouring countries (mostly Norway) – professional / higher education abroad, work migration, multicultural family relations, etc. While Sámi indigenous communities play a significant role in sociocultural life on the Norwegian side of the borderlands (the fact admitted by some of our informants), they are virtually absent from the everyday discourses in Pechengsky District. At best, Russian Sámi is mentioned as the former inhabitants of the territory and its only “true natives”, often in relatively exoticised contexts.

Language and Sociocultural Situation in Karelia⁶

Linguistic and sociocultural life of the Republic of Karelia has been shaped by a multitude of factors. The region’s indigenous population – Karelians and Veps, the common border with Finland as well as turbulent historical events such forced relocations of ethnic groups, military conflicts, and industrial migrations can be said to significantly contribute to the complex socio-cultural landscape of modern Karelia. Furthermore, the common border with Finland has a great influence on the language situation in Karelia: the interaction of residents on both sides of the border and their regular contacts can be observed in Karelia.

Primarily, it should be noted that over 130 ethnic groups (Federal Service of State Statistics) reside in Karelia, and the most numerous among them are the Russians, who comprise about

⁶ This section is based on an unpublished term paper by one co-author submitted in 2021 as part of the MA curriculum at HSE University (Nedaikhleb 2021) as well as their BA thesis (Nedaikhleb 2020). Some field data used in (Ryzhkov 2020) and (Ryzhkov et al. 2021) was also used when preparing this section. Proper citation and reference management will be completed upon final submission of the text to the refereed journal.

82% of the population of the republic (507,654). There are also indigenous peoples — the Karelians (45,570; the Karelians themselves, the Livviks and the Ludiks) and the Veps (3,423) — who form only a small part, 7.3% and 0.3%, respectively (Russian Census 2010).

When it comes to languages, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Karelia (2001), the official language in Karelia is Russian, although at the same time other official languages can be established in the republic by holding a referendum. Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish are considered to be national languages of the Republic of Karelia and are used in many spheres as well, although they do not have the official status. In general, it should be noted that Karelia is the only republic within the Russian Federation, where the language of the titular people does not have the official status, which causes a number of difficulties.

Due to historical events (the implementation of Russification policy in the twentieth century), there was a prohibition on the use of indigenous languages, which led to a linguistic shift (Fishman 1997) towards the Russian language and the displacement of Karelian and Vepsian languages from the sphere of use (Boiko 2019: 97). Thus, the indigenous languages almost became neglected and ceased to be passed on to the next generations.

However, starting from the late 1980s, representatives of indigenous peoples began to show interest in their identity, as well as in their languages. Thus, Karelian and Vepsian languages began to be gradually revived and got a new writing system based on the Latin alphabet. Subsequently various dictionaries, books and textbooks in Karelian and Vepsian languages were created. Various actions have also been taken in the republic in support of the Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages, for instance, national festivals, implementation of national languages in music and mass media, etc. (ibid: 98)

The aspect of cross-border interaction between residents of Karelia and neighboring Finland. Karelia and Finland have always had a close connection with each other. For a long time they had a common history (for instance, in the 1940s – 1950s there was the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic), and the territorial border between them changed multiple times (Nedaikhleb, 2020). The common historical past is reflected in the local toponymy: many geographical objects of Karelia have Finnish names or contain elements from the Finnish language, and some streets in the republic are named after Finnish politicians.

Regular contacts between Karelia and Finland can be observed nowadays at different levels of society: cultural, social, economic and others.

Firstly, studying the Finnish language in schools and higher educational establishments is quite common in Karelia. Students often choose to study Finnish in order to continue their education in Finland after graduation. In addition, many of these students remain there to live and work.

Marriages between residents of Karelia and Finland are not unusual as well. Thus, this also serves as one of the factors motivating local residents to learn Finnish.

Circular migrations of Karelian residents to Finland are a frequent occurrence, in particular, due to the fact that it is easier for them to get a visa than for residents of other regions of Russia, since Karelia is a border region. Such short trips are usually made for the purpose of shopping or recreation. The Finns come to Karelia as well in order to relax or buy certain goods, for example, tobacco products or alcohol.

Apart from that, Karelia and Finland participate in joint cross-border cooperation programs aimed at developing the social and economic levels of the border regions, as well as the development of the environmental and cultural spheres (Nedaikhleb, 2020).

Despite the fact that indigenous languages of the Republic of Karelia do not enjoy official status, they are used in different spheres: mass media, education, culture and others.

On television and radio there are various programs that broadcast in Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages; daily news blocks are shown in national languages as well. Moreover, various print media of the “Periodika” publishing house are published in Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages: the newspapers “Oma Mua”, “Kodima”, “Karjalan Sanomat”, “Vienan Karjala”, the literary and art magazine “Carelia” and the children's magazine “Kipinä”. The existence of such newspapers and broadcasts is approved by the residents of the republic. However, the audience is not numerous.

(6) A language cannot live without practice. If there were no newspapers and television in Karelian, it would be very difficult. (Informant 5)

As for the sphere of education, the indigenous languages of Karelia are taught in many schools of the republic. They are taught not as core subjects, but as electives, and very few hours per week are allocated for their study. In addition, Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages are studied not as native, but as foreign languages. It is also worth noting that in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the republic, there is a Finno-Ugric school specializing in the national languages of the republic, where children have more hours to learn these languages.

In several kindergartens, children also have the opportunity to learn Karelian, Vepsian or Finnish with their parents' permission. In addition, it is worth noting the Karelian Language House (located in Vedlozero village) with a language nest system, where children spend the whole day completely immersed in the linguistic environment. Thus, educators speak and play with children in Karelian language all the time. Furthermore, in the House one can find signs for all subjects in Karelian — this helps children to get used to reading in Karelian language.

Considering the use of the national languages of the republic in higher educational institutions, it should be noted that in Petrozavodsk State University there is a separate department of Finno-Ugric Philology, where Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages and literature are taught. However, there is a considerable lack of Karelian and Vepsian language teachers.

As for the use of the national languages in everyday life, today it is almost impossible to hear Karelian or Vepsian speech in Karelia, perhaps except for in remote villages. The indigenous languages are usually spoken by the older generation; the younger generation considers Karelian and Vepsian languages to be not prestigious and inapplicable in everyday life. Thus, the youth prefers to study European languages such as English, German, French and others.

(7) An ordinary person who lives in a city has no reason to learn Karelian. Only if there is interest in culture. This would be a shame if Karelian becomes another Latin which is taught only in universities. (Informant 6)

Nevertheless the indigenous languages are becoming less stigmatized (Smirnova 2021). In addition, quite a few representatives of the younger generation study Finnish as well, due to the proximity of the border with Finland. Thus, the transmission of the language from generation to generation has stopped, with the exception of isolated cases.

Representatives of different sub-ethnic groups of the Karelians claim that they do not always understand the dialects of Karelian language, for example, the Livviks may not understand the Ludiks, and vice versa. Native speakers of the Karelian Proper dialect note the greatest similarity of their dialect with the Finnish language. The dialect issue is considerable. This

raises the question, which dialect to learn in school, which dialect is the official Karelian language to choose and so on.

In addition, the research also covered the topic of the connection between language and identity. Many informants believe that it is not necessary to speak Karelian language in order to consider themselves as true Karelians: the main thing is just “to feel like a Karelian”. For other informants a language represents an essential identity marker.

(8) If people won't learn the language, then... Well, I mean, a nationality is alive as long as there are people who speak this language. (Informant 7)

Discussion

As our field data shows, the Russian-Nordic borderlands are an important contact and cooperation area where linguistic and cultural diversity creates the unique landscape imbued with multilingualism and multiculturalism. Most residents of the region, even if not involved in cross-border cooperation and contact themselves, acknowledge the advantages of living in the borderland and perceive it as a set of extra opportunities. This makes the region unique in terms of contact frequency: it becomes an indispensable feature of the local landscape, defining its sociocultural image and acting as the strongest marker of the local residents' identity.

(9) You can't find a person without something Norwegian or Finnish in their life. (Informant 8)

Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the region remain two things apart: while the urban residents largely perceive cross-border cooperation as an economic and cultural activity where language plays a service role (being a mere tool of communication, however useful and broadening one's scope of the world), indigenous communities of the region largely rely on language and culture as the primary bridge that helps crossing borders and connecting to their long-estranged kinsmen abroad, thus making multilingualism the most important feature of the local landscape from their point of view. However, due to the low proportion of indigenous population in the studied area this strategy remains of limited use and gradually declining. Language shift seems to have taken place among all the indigenous communities as intergenerational transfer of ethnic linguistic codes is virtually non-existent presently. It is a complex phenomenon triggered and maintained by a whole set of sociocultural factors including Soviet post-war language and educational policies in the region, industrial development of the territories and related waves of migration and low prestige of local ethnic identities among the Soviet dominant groups in the borderlands.

The Karelian case (which might be roughly described as “soft assimilation”) is especially illustrative in this respect. The turning point in the language shift should be located somewhere in the 1960s – 1970s when in Karelian families developed a tendency not to pass the ethnic linguistic code to children due to expected problems with both learning Russian and maintaining relationship with non-indigenous majority whose attitude towards Karelian and Karelians was often disparaging. On the other hand, quite a few young Karelians grown

in post-Soviet Russia claim to retain Karelian identity without good command of the language. Two beliefs paradoxically paradoxically coexist (and are sometimes expressed by one and the same informant) in the modern Karelian communities:

(10) *You need to learn the language, how can you otherwise be Karelian?*
(Informant 9)

(11) *You can be Karelian by blood, if your parents are Karelian, you're Karelian too.*
(Informant 9)

Dialect diversity, which Karelians themselves are perfectly aware of, does not only influence the relationship between groups of Karelians themselves but plays a certain role in cross-border interaction. The Northern dialect of Karelian (so called Karelian Proper) is extremely close to and mutually comprehensible with Finnish (even more than with other Karelian variants) which often serves as one of the main explanations for especially active practices of cross-border interaction with Finland among Northern Karelians.

Cross-border interaction between “non-indigenous” groups in the Russian-Nordic borderlands is arguably the most typical since they form the majority on the territory. Interestingly, however, such communities often lack a mediator linguistic code for communication. Whereas Russian borderland residents generally believe English (and not one of the local Nordic languages) to be the most effective language for cross-border interactions, on the average the command of it is much lower than in Norway or Finland. There is definitely a bigger share of the population speaking Nordic languages than in most other Russian regions but such skills are most of the time associated with particular life strategies connected to the other side of the border – education, marriage, professional migration, close business contacts (Statistisk sentralbyrå). Moreover, representation of Nordic languages in linguistic landscapes of local settlements is mostly limited to very particular spheres such as cafes and tourist attractions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of all kinds of cross-border contact in the region: the sudden cessation of intensive contact was a severe blow for nearly all economic and cultural activities in the region, being a revolving topic in most interviews. It is clear that the legacy and experience of contact during the last decades remain strong and there is a powerful urge for continued contact and cooperation, based on and supporting the multilingual and multicultural landscape of the region.

Conclusion and Further Studies

Russian-Nordic borderlands continue to be the region of intense contacts between a multitude of actors. Such contacts include not only official programmes of cooperation between state and non-governmental organisations, major corporations and local enterprises (e. g. via the Barents Region initiatives), but also various practices of cross-border interaction between individuals and small groups of people living on the territory. The border becomes a channel through which goods, citizens, and communities move in both directions, at the same time transporting ideas, tendencies, and even lifestyles and discourses to new sociocultural environment.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and official restrictive measures aimed at reducing its spread have seriously affected virtually all types of cross-border interaction in the region, one cannot say that local contacts between Russia and Nordic countries have been completely frozen. Indeed, almost all offline events were cancelled, postponed or moved to online format. Digital platforms of communication, however, have started to play a vital role in sustaining and promoting cooperation in the borderlands on various levels and in diverse spheres – from entrepreneurship workshops to art festivals, from local municipal authorities meetings to children libraries reading sessions. Those inhabitants who are actively involved in such activities tend to say that new ways of interaction are likely to remain even after the pandemics – the factor that led to their introduction – is over. Interestingly, the new conditions highlight the necessity for improvement of linguistic skills of local inhabitants. While English is usually seen as the main neutral communicative code both by official organisations and individuals, command over it among borderland Russians is far from satisfactory (especially compared to that of Nordic citizens).

As it has been already mentioned, indigenous communities of the Russian side of the borderlands are currently undergoing a language shift. Indeed, there are a number of activist groups among Karelians, Sámi, and Veps who try to promote local languages and cultures and even establish them in new discursive spaces (mass culture, internet communication, etc.). Nevertheless, intergenerational language transfer seems to have stopped at least at the end of the previous century. Hardly ever do these languages function in daily family conversations which amounts to the virtual absence of a natural linguistic environment for younger community members trying to learn ethnic linguistic codes.

At the same time, local languages and cultures often serve as vital components of identity or at least “branding” of the borderland regions. One of the most obvious examples are toponyms of Finno-Ugric origin that are not only ubiquitous on the territory but also used in commercial strategies (e. g. to attract tourist attention with exoticised namings). Besides, especially in the case of Sámi and Karelians, ethnic languages might be a potential instrument of cross-border integration both pragmatically and symbolically. For instance, even passive knowledge of Karelian is often considered to facilitate cooperation with Finns or adaptation to Finnish sociocultural contexts.

There are certain, albeit relatively limited, opportunities to learn Nordic languages in the studied regions – Finnish is more relevant for Karelia while Norwegian is better represented in Murmansk Oblast. In general, however, Russian borderland inhabitants tend to consider English much more useful and very few of them speak any of the Nordic languages enough to maintain communication. Usually, good command of a neighbouring state’s language (and, of course, process of learning it) is associated with particular life trajectories connected to the Nordic countries such as cross-border entrepreneurship, marriage with its citizens, educational or professional migration. Intricacies of linguistic as well as sociocultural integration of people from the Russian part of the borderlands on “the other”, Nordic side of the region is one of the most natural potential extensions of our research.

The most important limitation of the study is its territorial scope: due to the ongoing pandemic, it was technically impossible to collect data from over the border, i. e. in the Nordic countries. Thus, the research outcomes largely apply to the “Russian side” of the region, while the situation in the Nordic countries remains relatively out of our scope. This is the most

important direction of future study development: collecting data in the communities across the border (in Finland and Norway) and comparing them to our current findings. Besides, such data is needed to address the question of how closely “cross-border communities” (for instance, Russian speaking dwellers in Sør-Varanger – Pechenga District, Nordic and Russian Sámi, etc.) are integrated. Obtaining data from the Nordic countries would also allow us to investigate the dynamics of cross-border relations in the times of the pandemic. In addition, comparing the Russian-Nordic contact area to other borderland regions, both in Russia and globally, would provide a useful perspective and context for this data. Finally, a diachronic study may be attempted, comparing current setup to other historical periods to gain a clearer understanding of the sociocultural and linguistic situation dynamics.

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Appendix 1. List of Mentioned Informants

Code	Sex	Age at the time of interview	Place of interview	Occupation
1	f	20	Zapolyarny	Student
2	m	16	Murmansk	Schooler
3	m	35	Zapolyarny	Economist
4	m	48	Zapolyarny	Mechanic
5	f	22	Petrozavodsk	Language activist
6	m	28	Petrozavodsk	Economist
7	m	34	Petrozavodsk	Graphic designer
8	m	55	Nikel	Teacher
9	f	32	Petrozavodsk	Editor

Appendix 2. Focal Points of the Research Trips

Nikel	Murmansk Oblast
Murmansk	Murmansk Oblast
Zapolyarny	Murmansk Oblast
Pechenga	Murmansk Oblast
Lovozero	Murmansk Oblast
Petrozavodsk	the Republic of Karelia
Kostomuksha	the Republic of Karelia
Sortavala	the Republic of Karelia
Pitkyaranta	the Republic of Karelia
Olonets	the Republic of Karelia
rural settlements	Pryazhinsky municipal districts, the Republic of Karelia
rural settlements	Olonetsky municipal districts, the Republic of Karelia

Appendix 3. Example of the Interview Guide

<i>Russian original</i>	<i>English translation</i>
Возраст, пол, уровень и тип образования, сфера профессиональной деятельности (респондента и его семьи), языки и уровень их владения	Informant's age and gender; type and highest acquired level of education; professional occupation (informant's and their family members'); languages spoken (list of languages with relevant proficiency level)
Где Вы родились? Где Вы прожили дольше всего? Где Вы проживаете на данный момент?	Where were you born? What place(s) have you lived the longest in? Where do you live now?
Какие страны Вы посещали до миграции? Как часто, с какой целью? Мигрировали ли / путешествовали ли Ваши родители и родственники?	Had you visited other countries before you decided to relocate? How often and for which purposes? Have your parents and relatives had similar experiences?
Были ли у Вас сложности с изучением языка? Какие? Что оказалось простым? Есть ли какие-то схожие элементы у русского и норвежского? В каких ситуациях вы используете языки, которые знаете? Какие языки важно знать сейчас, по Вашему мнению?	Was it difficult for you to study the [relevant] foreign language? What were the specific issues (if any)? Were there things that seemed easy or familiar to you? Are there any features shared by Russian and Norwegian? What specific situations do you use your spoken languages in? In your opinion, which languages are the most relevant and important to speak nowadays?
Что Вам нравится больше всего в посещении Норвегии / России? Что больше всего не нравится? Бывали ли у Вас какие-то сложности при пересечении границы?	What do you like most when visiting / living in Norway / Russia? What do you dislike most? Have you ever had any problems when crossing the border?

<p>Приобрели ли Вы какие-то черты «норвежской жизни»? Какие праздники Вы отмечаете и каким образом? Товары из каких стран вы предпочитаете покупать?</p>	<p>Have you adopted any specific habits of “Norwegian” lifestyle? What festivities do you celebrate and how? Goods of what origin do you prefer to purchase?</p>
<p>Остались ли у Вас какие-то привычки, связанные с родиной?</p>	<p>Have you kept any habits associated with your homeland?</p>
<p>Возвращаетесь ли Вы на родину? Как регулярно? Если нет, то почему? Планируете ли Вы вернуться насовсем?</p>	<p>Do you visit your homeland now? If yes, how often? If not, why? Do you have any plans of coming back?</p>