

Vlada Baranova

The Linguistic Socialisation of Migrant Children in Russia ¹

Fluency in a language is essential for anyone wishing to be part of life in a community; language is an initial barrier for recent migrants. As Min Zhou remarks, fluency in English is regarded as the single most important preliminary condition or prerequisite for assimilation into American society [Zhou 1997: 86]. On balance, this assertion can also be applied to the case of the Russian Federation and there are a whole host of problems linked to acquiring and using this attribute. How exactly do migrants gain access to the new language and master it? What is the Russian language competence level of first- and second-generation² migrants? What is the language distribution among migrant children in different domains? Which factors influence the relationship between the majority and dominant language? Do second-generation migrants experience problems with linguistic shift?

Vlada Baranova

National Research University,
The Higher School of Economics,
St Petersburg/Institute
of Linguistics, Russian Academy
of Sciences,
St Petersburg, Russia
vlada_b@mail.ru

¹ The project was partly supported by grants from the Higher School of Economics' Center for Fundamental Studies ('Schools Differentiation and the Social Environment of Students') and the Russian Humanitarian Scientific Foundation, 'Migration Factors and Ethnicity in Schools', 11-03-00538a.

² Henceforth 'second-generation' refers to all juvenile children of migrants, although a narrower interpretation suggests a stricter division into second generation (born in the host country), first generation (born in the country of origin) and sesquialteral generation — those taken from their country of origin in early childhood.

The main focus of this research is migrant children rather than adults, although the parents' experience of becoming fluent in a language is one factor that influences the linguistic competence of the second generation. At this point I would like to make the reservation that there is no one single scenario for the linguistic socialisation of all labour migrants, just as they are evidently not one single group. Below I will only discuss migrant families, who generally arrived some time ago (around five years or so) and who now live in the St Petersburg or Moscow Oblast. Access to this domain was therefore gained through schools and my informants were either school pupils or were the parents of children at high school. Due to the nature of organising the fieldwork, children of school age but not attending school necessarily remained outside of our field of vision. The work also considers data from schoolchildren surveyed by the Sociology of Education and Science Laboratory at the National Research University at the Higher School of Economics from 2009–2010 (around 7 500 surveys of high school pupils, continuous sampling in schools): the quantitative data is not discussed below (for some data, see: [Alexandrov, Baranova, Ivanyushina 2012]), although it did facilitate the formulation of some of my research questions.¹

The linguistic biography of migrants: the migration and transformation of the family as factors in linguistic socialisation

In order to describe bilingual migrants, especially second-generation migrants, we have at our disposal a convenient concept called linguistic biography (used, for example, in [Vershik 2002]). The linguistic socialisation of our respondents is intimately connected to the migrational story of the family, their experience of moving once or of a series of displacements, and the neighbourhood.

Migration is not the end point of moving home nor a one-off event, but rather a process. Among our respondents there were virtually no families who considered themselves as having a migrational story. Even those who were getting Russian Federation citizenship and obtaining a dwelling place perceived their position as fairly undefined; not infrequently respondents speak about their desire to return to their home country in their old age (although only two respondents considered the possibility of subsequent migration to Western Europe). As a general rule, families of reasonable means build homes

¹ I am exceedingly indebted to all my colleagues at the Sociology of Education and Science Laboratory at the National Research University at the Higher School of Economics who participated in the gathering and discussion of the material; separate thanks go to E. A. Varshaver, whose interviews in the Moscow Oblast I am using in this article, and to V. I. Ivanyushina, who analysed these surveys. At the end of the interview or field diary extract the (approximate) age, ethnicity and place of birth are indicated; the location of the surveys should be assumed to be St Petersburg unless otherwise indicated — towns in the Moscow Oblast (hereafter 'Moscow province').

in their country of origin, whilst concurrently attempting to gain the legal rights to live in Russia.

We built a house, we bought a plot of land [in Kyrgyzstan. — V. B.]. I went and bought a plot of land, hired some workers, we built a house. It was big — 11 by 17. We built a good brick house. We bought a car. We did everything in Mum's name. As they say, people are so... I thought that we would buy a house or something would happen for us — we'd all leave. But there's no way we can leave. <...> I started gathering bits of money. We put some by, and my husband put some by. We'd got citizenship by then. And I realised that it would take 18 000 roubles a year to get permission to work... I gave up my Kyrgyzstan citizenship. I wrote a notice: 'I wish to gain citizenship here'. I got it here and it's easy now... Now I want to get a residence permit. I've been offered one. Not here, of course. It's very expensive in Korolyov. I want to get a residence permit for Samara. A permanent one. I want a residence permit. Anyway my husband says, 'Gulya, what can I say? We will most probably stay here'. But I say to him, 'I don't want to' (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province).

Migrational stories are frequently presented as a series of spontaneous decisions and episodes of taking temporary measures to resolve complex problems concerning documents, work, housing, childcare or school for children. Piecing this patchwork together often goes against informants' concepts of duty and their desires. For example, in the above cited interview fragment the informant explains her change of citizenship (albeit continually emphasising her desire to return to her native land) as being the high price she had to pay to receive permission to work as a foreign citizen and she continually proposes registering to work in Samara because her friends will help her there, for the wife of someone she knows works at the Federal Migration Service (FMS). Olga Brednikova remarks that migrants do not generally formulate long-term plans [Brednikova 2012]. Furthermore, many decisions are made with a deficit of time for reflection, in pressurised circumstances, lacking complete information about the set-up of the receiving community or under the instruction of other migrants. The less established the new migrants, the less free they are in their choice and the more they rely on the support and experience of the migrant network. These social networks are quite limited, which also explains why migrants make certain decisions — which seem irrational to an external observer — and turn to people they barely know, who display no hostility, with requests of a personal nature (for example, a young man earning a living in the construction industry was asked, a few days after meeting some migrants, about finding a sexual partner and celebrating a birthday in his flat; similar situations are well known among researchers working in this field).

The process of moving home often takes place in many stages: the family moves home within Russia from one town to another, then return to their native country. Sometimes there is a temporary family rift, which has a significant impact on the linguistic socialisation of the children. A family moving to Russia frequently begins with the departure of the father or, more rarely, both parents without their children; in some cases the men enter into new marriages, while their previous family remains in the native country indefinitely.

My husband came to St Petersburg in 1995, then he returned in 1999 and in 2000 we moved together. At the time we had two children (now we have three), our eldest son was in class 2. We came in the spring and there were several months when he didn't attend school. In the autumn he started in class 2 again (a year behind) (from a field diary, Armenian woman).

Another widespread scenario is the temporary (or perceived as such) return to the native country by the whole family or part of it. Here are some personal stories of migrant children (retold according to interview material):

A Georgian boy, 15 years old, was born in Rostov-on-Don, then moved to Georgia (there were perhaps some short-term moves back and forth), he 'took a break from school' for a year then returned to Russia and the boy and his father came to St Petersburg while the mother and sister remained in Georgia. They say that they were about to come but they have already lived in this arrangement for some time, about 4–5 years (KK 2011-16).

The elder children were born in Azerbaijan and the youngest in Moscow — when he was two, the mother and children went back to their native country and returned two years later, the husband was living in Moscow (Azerbaijan woman, b. 1978, Kotelniki, Moscow province).

Quite often parents leave their children (sometimes only the older ones or just the young ones) with relatives (generally grandparents) during one of their visits to their native country or when moving from one Russian town to another until they have found their feet in the new location (this period can be drawn out over quite a long time). These kinds of moves influence a child's learning of Russian and their native language, whichever that might be.

I: *What was your first language, the one you learned as a child?*

R: *Well it was Azerbaijani.*

I: *And when did you start to learn Russian?*

R: *In '98, in Khabarovsk. Well, we went there to my uncle, basically I stayed living there. I learned to talk in two months in Khabarovsk. Then I went to Baku. I lived there for a whole year, then I unlearned*

it again, because they barely speak any Russian there. For myself, I know how to speak.

I: *And in what year did you eventually go to St Petersburg?*

R: *My parents came in '99, I was living with my uncles and aunts in Khabarovsk, then in Baku, while they had no children (Azerbaijani man, aged approximately 18–19, interview in a courtyard).*

[The elder son lived with his parents in Moscow province, the younger lived with his mother's parents in Kyrgyzstan until school.] And this child... I gave birth to him, he was 18 months old and we went away. He lived with his grandmother, with my parents. At home he mainly spoke Kyrgyz. That's why, I think, he had a hard time [at school] (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province).

In many similar situations a move or moves are accompanied by falling back a year at school (because of the new language and curriculum differences) or a temporary gap in the child's studies (see the life story recounted below). Informants generally give a whole complex of reasons to explain this position: insufficient knowledge of the language, the need to help in the family business, difficulties getting into a school without being registered in the area and others.

R: *Right, so for the first two years I didn't study... well now, I helped Dad in his work [the father worked at a car service centre].*

I: *And did your parents deliberately not send you to school because you spoke the language badly? Or was there another reason? Either way, two years is quite a significant length of time.*

R: *Well, it's just, I don't know... Dad didn't have any friends yet, and, I suppose... in those schools, there. And, well, hmm... I didn't know where to go for a school or what documents I needed. And so... well, then Dad got some friends, anyway...*

I: *And what difference do the friends make?*

R: *Well, in the sense that... the deputy head of the school came to his work, well, to get her car fixed. So, well, he fixed it and asked if I could go to her school. And so... well, it was agreed and I go to school now (Uzbek boy, aged 15, pupil in class 7).*

Sometimes the principal reason given by adolescents is an unwillingness to study. In uncertain situations, secondary education is not perceived as the only life strategy, meanwhile parents in new conditions not infrequently heed the desires of their child.

R: *In Georgia I started going to school in class 1, then after a month I came here. I skipped school here for two years, then finally I went to school when I was nine, in class 1 again.*

I: *Tell me, why did you fall behind by two years?*

R: *Well, I don't know, but for one thing I didn't know Russian very well. The second thing was that I didn't want to study subjects and go to school, but then I came to my senses and Mum said 'Let's get you to school' so I started going. No big deal. But then I didn't want to start studying back at the beginning. But then I liked it (Azerbaijani pupil, born in Georgia, aged 18, pupil in class 10).*

An intrinsic consequence of migration is the transformation of families that arises when moving home and in the unstable position where labour migrants find themselves. The hierarchy and values within the family change. In new conditions, age and gender restrictions that apply in the country of origin are less strictly adhered to and ideas about linguistic choice as well as educational and professional strategies are altered. Quite often adult informants remark that their children feel more confident in the new surroundings than their parents, know Russian better than them and help the adults or even, as some of our informants said, teach them about life in Russia.

First-generation migrants: Russian language knowledge and methods of assimilation

Knowledge of the Russian language before arriving in the country is highly valued by informants, since this affords the speaker additional opportunities, both in formal affairs and informal practices.

We came on the train, with no tickets. We were fare-dodgers. But somehow we didn't get pulled in. Because, I've noticed that if you know Russian, even somewhere... We speak Russian and people looked at us like: 'How did you learn to speak Russian like that?' I already had a work permit then. I'd been given permission to work. Because I spoke Russian well and actually at the same time I was a translator. Because some of our lot were a bit — gobbledegook. They couldn't speak a word (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province).

Many migrants learned Russian at school but the majority of them comment that this teaching did not provide them with the opportunity to speak Russian. The ease with which one can shift from a passive command of the Russian language to its active use depends greatly on an individual's capabilities. For some, the source of their knowledge of Russian before migrating was their neighbours in multicultural communities. No one mentioned attending courses, hiring tutors or other similar methods of studying language and the majority of informants had never had recourse to the aid of dictionaries or grammar guides.

In school I knew how to read and write. I understood everything. They even showed films on the television. I understood everything, but it was

hard to speak. Because [where I'm from] they didn't talk like that, no one spoke in Russian. I came to Moscow and, to be honest, I didn't find it difficult to study. Now I also don't speak so well. But all the same, wherever I went I understood everything and could explain myself. I had no difficulties (Armenian woman, b. 1978, Kotelniki, Moscow province).

Men usually speak Russian better than woman because mostly their work requires at least partial mastery of the language. Those of an older generation know Russian better, but the majority of migrants are too young to have attended Soviet socialising institutions (such as the army). Woman not in work aged between 20–35 often know very little Russian at all, though they may have lived in St Petersburg for as long as 8–12 years. Their poor knowledge of Russian has hindered communication to such an extent in some cases that in order to survey the most numerous group of migrants — Azerbaijanis — interviewers who spoke fluent Azerbaijani were required.

The Russian language spoken by migrants has a series of peculiarities linked to interference with their native language (for example, lacking the grammatical opposition between masculine and feminine genders, which leads to the two being combined, as well as the tendency to use masculine endings, e.g. *dlinnyi shkol* instead of the grammatically correct *dlinnaya shkola*) or peculiarities caused by the situation of using a non-native language with an insufficient vocabulary.

It was OK. Not too bad, not too bad. Middling. A big school building. Alright. It was just big — I didn't like that. Really incredible big. They had gruel mush there, as they say. When you get there you don't find anything. Such a five-storey, big, very long school,¹ with I don't know how many children! (female Azerbaijan, living in St Petersburg for 12 years).

Many migrants assimilate Russian language through socialising with those for whom Russian is not a native language either and rarely have contact with native speakers. For example, one female informant told us that there were lots of Uzbeks in a hotel (working in the laundry and cleaning departments or as chambermaids), but the management required them to speak to one another in Russian (Uzbek woman, aged 28, born in Uzbekistan). Not infrequently, those who have recently arrived in the country asked their relatives or neighbours who already know the language to translate things or teach them simple phrases and so on. In this way, migrants do not assimilate Russian as such, but rather its pidginised form, which is widespread among migrants.

¹ The phrase used here mixes gender endings: *pyatietazhnaya, bolshoi ochen, dlinny shkol* instead of *pyatietazhnaya, bolshaya ochen dlinnaya shkola*. The English rendering replaces this by characteristic mistakes of non-native speakers. [Transl.].

The lack of specialised arrangements for studying the language, the fact that migrants are trying to learn as adults, their communication in Russian being with other migrants or with native speakers but only using a limited array of formulae on defined terms (such as buying things at a market) all lead to the formation of a specific variety of the language. It can be interpreted as *interlanguage* [Selinker 1972], which refers to the specific linguistic system in the brain that differs for native languages and those learned later in life. Despite its proximity to the system of the language being studied, *interlanguage* can be preserved for a surprisingly long time. Research shows that the length of time spent in a new country is only a significant circumstance in the first two years; subsequently this is overtaken by other factors (see the discussion on the grammatical changes of the ‘language goals’ of migrants after 6, 12, 24, 48 and 96 months of living in a country in correlation with other variables in: [Klein 1977]). Interestingly, in some interviews informants also remark on this period — two years — as being required for linguistic adaptation:

[Informant came to Moscow not knowing the language. — *V. B.*] *After two years I started to find it interesting because I could understand people at last. They just look at me, like... And I think... [laughs] They give me such a look as if to say, I don't know, that I can't understand Russian* (Azerbaijan woman, aged approx. 35, Baku, living here for 14 years, Shcherbinka, Moscow province).

Let us compare this to an interview with an Azerbaijan woman who has been living in St Petersburg for 11 years, which is to say a long enough period of time for the language variant she uses to communicate with the majority of native speakers to have stabilised:

So here are my children. Well, they like it here. Lots friends, many friends and my own husband here. I love here it. <...> There lots of money going round. Every month I say, 'I'm going home, I'm going home', but it never does. Because it's expensive, but the train is OK, a bit through the ravine. We wanted, if we did went, go on the train (Azerbaijan woman, b. 1980, born in Baku).¹

Among the parents of pupils in one school in St Petersburg she is considered an expert on matters of Russian language and interprets for conversations between mothers and pupils and so on. Indeed, she speaks fluently if not correctly, and comprehends quite complex linguistic material.²

¹ The English translation here mimics the ungrammatical effects of the original (e.g. *mnogo družei* rather than the correct *mnogo družei*). [Eds.].

² Or, at least her communicative skills are sufficient to discern the intentions of the interlocutor even if she is unaware of particular words or constructions.

Mastery of Russian among second-generation migrants

Children from the families of labour migrants know Russian better than their parents. Parents often talk about their children speaking with no accent and correcting their parents' Russian:

How can... there not be a, what's it called, a barrier? I start making mistakes with masculine and feminine words and they [the children], what's it called... they correct me, 'you have to say such and such'. 'Whose bag is that?' Or I don't know... [laughs] They correct me so much! I'm not even worry, I say, 'Good for you! Teach me!' Well, I don't know (Armenian woman, aged approx. 35).

The differences in language fluency between first- and second-generation migrants are not just a matter of vocabulary size, mastery of grammar, and a lack of accent, but also the command of linguistic registers, since children assimilate Russian while socialising with peers for whom it is their native language. The equilibrium between both languages is displayed in children's ability to freely express themselves about different issues in their native language and Russian, so that their choice of language is determined in each specific case by habit, the linguistic environment and the subject but not by ability; theoretically a child can hold a conversation about politics, space exploration, or religious preferences in either of their two languages, albeit ordinarily preferring one, since adult migrants who have a poor command of Russian may not have a sufficient lexicon for these kinds of discussions.

The completeness of migrant children's mastery of Russian depends, however, on the age at which they gained access to the language. The most natural adaptation happens in cases where a child attends a Russian-speaking nursery and begins to speak Russian and their native language at virtually the same time. In their interviews, these children remark that they experienced no difficulties with Russian and often do not remember when or how they began speaking Russian.

In exceptional cases some knowledge of Russian has been acquired in the country of origin rather than Russia:

Well, I knew Russian before I started school. I was six, but I already knew it, I understood all the words and what to say, what every word means. Well, I learned from my dad. Just because my dad was always watching Russian TV channels in Armenia, he never let us watch the Armenian ones. Well, I suppose, we had to sit and watch the Russian channels too with him and that's why I learned Russian quite quickly, much more quickly than all the other Armenians. Because I'd known it from the age of six and I could already speak Russian by the time we started learning it in school.

This is one of a small number of stories about consciously preparing children for migration. Generally, learning the language has the air of being a temporary measure, like many other practices linked to migration (see above the breaks in school education, moves and housing in a new linguistic environment, sometimes accompanied by a temporary separation from their parents). When studying a language and doing homework, migrant school pupils are helped by other children or adult neighbours; in unusual cases tutors are employed. Many children emphasise the independent nature of their language learning. A boy who picked up Russian at the age of ten recalls that in the beginning he simply listened to how others spoke and gradually assimilated Russian:

R: *Well, I used to have a bicycle, I did, my dad bought it. So when I moved out, yes, when I went, and just rode around, I heard how other people talked. And at first, well, I used to misunderstand, but then I started to understand, so, just a little at a time. <...> I just, well, I just rode past, I heard how they were talking, at first I was learning. Then, well, I went up to them. They would ask, like, 'What's your name?' That kind of thing. Er, then I started learning. Er, learning Russian.*

I: *How did you start learning? Using textbooks? How did you learn?*

R: *No, I just... so I'd go out into the street, right, and people are talking. So I just hear them. Then I come home and I think. So just, I think about what they were saying. Sometimes... well, I used to understand a little bit, but not really everything. Well, even now not really, well, I don't know some words. So...well I know how to speak quite well... it's OK (Tadzhik boy, pupil in class 7, aged 15).*

Children who find themselves in Russia shortly before starting school recollect that they experienced difficulties with the language:

In first class I didn't speak [in Russian. — V. B.] and I didn't even understand my friend. Later, in class 2 I could speak a few words. Now I speak a bit good (Azerbaijan girl, aged 9, born in Georgia, Korolyov, Moscow province).

R: *Yes I had huge difficulties. I absolutely couldn't string two words together to speak to anyone. Only 'hi', 'bye', 'grandma' and 'grandpa'. That was it.*

I: *And you were in class 1...*

R: *I was in class 1, and my classmates helped to do all that, they helped me in Russian. They still help me now. The teachers used to help (Azerbaijan girl, pupil in class 9).*

The older the child, the higher the probability of difficulties arising with learning a new language and they are more likely to maintain their accent. Literature on this topic highlights a critical or sensitive

period in mastering a language from the ages of four to seven [Johnson, Newport 1991]; according to some data, before the age of six there is no correlation between the age of arrival and the degree of language assimilation, which means that children are equally close to native language speech whatever age they were when they got to Russia, but as their age increases their linguistic opportunities lessen, up to the threshold age of fifteen [Esser 2008].

Use of Russian and native languages, the possibility of linguistic shift

Is there a threat of linguistic shift for the children of labour migrants? The processes of assimilation and linguistic shift proceed with differing speed among different groups of migrants. Do second- and third-generation migrants use the language of their ethnic origins¹ or do they renounce it? To what extent do they understand this language? Amongst our informants first- and second-generation migrants alike there were virtually no children or adolescents who did not speak the language of their ethnic origins, although the principles of using the language were shaped by the dominance of Russian.

The majority of adolescents described their level of their native language as being fluent. A partial limitation on the native language was reported by children who started learning Russian relatively late; they experienced difficulties mastering the new language but now Russian is partially supplanting their native language:

As soon as I came here for the very first time, I was in fourth class, about five years ago, and I answered every question with: 'How are you, I no speak good Russian'. That's right. To be honest, that's how it was. They would ask me something and I'd say, 'Yes, how are you?' It took me something like five months to speak OK Russian. <...> Well, I know Azerbaijani, it's my native language, but I struggle to find some words in my native language. Yes, it's as though, I can be thinking for half an hour, and I know it in Russian, I could say it right away, that's right (Azerbaijan boy, pupil in class 10).

The migrant parents that we interviewed almost never put conscious effort into maintaining their native language. This situation is quite typical for other immigrant communities too: 'Surveys often find that immigrant parents place considerable importance on their children continuing to speak the languages of their homelands, but do little to ensure such a result' [Glenn, de Jong 1996: 251]. Several people remarked that they would like to work on teaching their children their native (Armenian) language, but the majority of

¹ In Russian, *titulnyi yazyk* — literally, 'titular language', or official language of the given state (formerly, constituent republic of the USSR). [Eds.].

migrants expend all their efforts on learning Russian, so the dominant idiom ‘is inherited’ by default: ‘It’s our native language, right?’ Rare exceptions are linked to external necessity: one boy, who studied from class 1 to class 4 in St Petersburg, spent class 5 in Georgia in a Georgian-language school, then was educated from classes 6 to 9 in St Petersburg again, mentioned that he deliberately studied Georgian (written language before fifth class) when it became clear that his family, who planned to stay in Georgia for several months, were delayed there for a year and he had to attend a school taught in the Georgian language (the school taught in Russian was a long way from the village where they lived).

The practice of maintaining literacy in one’s native language is especially relevant in cases where the writing systems differ significantly (Georgian or Armenian vs. Cyrillic), although this can also present certain difficulties with languages written in the Roman alphabet (Azerbaijani). Learning to write in one’s native language depends on the cultural capital of the group. Studies on Chinese families in Canada show that families either maintain literacy in both Chinese and English at home (through recitation, doing exercises and copying out stories), or they do not engage with languages at all; the choice of behaviour depends not on their material prosperity (none of the families in the sample were self-supporting) but on the education of the parents and their involvement in the local university Chinese community [Li 2002]. Only a few of our respondents had achieved higher education qualifications, but those who had followed this trend and encouraged their children to maintain fluency in the written form of their native language: ‘My children speak and write Armenian as well as they do Russian’ (informant from an Armenian family, the father has higher education — he is a qualified lawyer, though he now works as an electrician; the mother is a candidate of chemical science, working on a post-graduate degree).

The dominance of Russian encourages the concept of using Russian language in the public realm and the ‘permeation’ of this public realm into inter-familial communication. Let me now turn to an examination of how languages are distributed among bilingual migrants.

Choice of language for communication: language control

According to data from a survey of St Petersburg school pupils, more than half (55 %) of migrant families of other ethnicities speak two languages at home, with only 34 % of families using only Russian.¹ It would be interesting to depict the distribution of these languages in intra-familial communication, but the interviews allow only a broad

¹ Perhaps these responses were influenced by the attitude towards language described subsequently.

sketch of the general features. Comments regarding when to choose which language within the family were quite predictable: the interlocutor (a family member or child) changes the language of communication depending on the choice of topic (even parents who have little knowledge of the dominant language help their children with their Russian homework and discuss school matters in Russian). Circumstance prompts switching to another language; the most interesting commentaries in the interviews were linked to the boundaries of public and private life among migrants and ideas about the right of those around to control the linguistic behaviour of migrants.

Here are some examples of certain situations where people around restrict the use of migrants' native language:

Because our landlord, the owner of this shop, he doesn't like it when people talk in their own native language. I agree with that. I came to Russia — please speak in Russian. In Kyrgyzstan you can speak Kyrgyz (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province).

[The informant works as a cloakroom attendant in the school her sons attend. — V. B.] *The teachers tell me off too, they make remarks: '[Name], in the corridors or... with children you shouldn't speak in Armenian, always in Russian, in Russian'. But it happens. I want to as well, I do understand. I'm not that ignorant, I understand that it's not nice, when there are Russians all around you should speak Russian. It's rude. But... it happens. When I swear — I can't swear in Russian. I start shouting in Armenian, what's going on!*

Her conversations with her sons in school are reckoned by teachers not to be an intra-familial matter but a part of general school communication and as such should be intelligible to those around (or should not evoke negative emotions, cf. 'not nice'). The informant accepts these ideas.

The interdiction against using one's native language at work is mentioned very frequently, but only the employer actually has the right to dictate someone's choice of language. When interviewed, teachers mention that they 'request' and 'force' migrant parents, even those who speak Russian very badly, to speak in Russian at home with their child and 'forbid' the use of their native language. In similar cases limitations on dominant language use are linked to ideas about mastering a second language: teachers usually believe that children will study Russian more effectively if they do not hear their native language.

The shift to Russian language is defined as both external control and self-restraint on the part of migrants striving to avoid drawing attention to themselves. Informants reported warning children about

the need to use Russian outside of the home when conversing with them:

[Speaking in Russian with her children on public transport] *Because when you speak your native language — people look at you. They don't understand and they think we're saying something...* (Armenian woman, b. 1971, born in Georgia, Kotelniki, Moscow province).

He [her son, aged 7. — V. B.] was in hospital for three weeks. He fought with everyones. He swore at everyones. The doctor said, 'He's doing very well. He's been speaking in Russian'. <...> He spoke Russian on the telephone there. I used to tell him, 'You mustn't. See you, there is Russians there. If you start saying 'gobble-gobble' you'll be getting funny looks'. He called us a hundred times on the phone, a hundred times he ringed us and chatted in Russian (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province).

It is significant that in this last example the doctor evaluated the linguistic behaviour of the child: those who form the majority generally consider themselves to have the right to control migrants' choice of language. This is particularly noticeable where there is an inequality of status (employer and worker), but any representative of an 'institute' (a teacher or doctor) or even simply local Russian-speaking inhabitants perceive themselves and are perceived by migrants as superior.¹ The interpretation of these conversations by relatives or friends in public places as part of the public realm, the negative attitude of members of the host community and the directions from parents to 'conceal' their native language all contribute to lowering the prestige of native languages among second-generation migrants who speak fluent Russian. At the same time, it increases the number of situations that require communication in Russian.

Conclusion

This analysis of the linguistic biographies of first- and second-generation migrants demonstrates that in the present day the official channels for learning Russian before moving to Russia are almost non-functioning. The majority of migrants are young people whose schooling was in the post-Soviet period and not infrequently migrants are natives of regions from which Russian-speaking neighbours moved in the 1990s (Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan and others). Knowledge of Russian depends on biographical circumstances,

¹ Let us recall the two types of bilingualism in Oberwart described by Susan Gal: the parallel existence of language and a relationship between groups speaking different languages where representatives of the less prestigious smaller linguistic community were part of the larger group and were obliged to switch to the dominant language in the presence of their monolingual fellow citizens [Gal 1979]. The second type of language distribution bears witness to the beginnings of linguistic shift.

explanation of which moreover requires fluency in the language, and affords the individual with additional opportunities in the host community and within migrant groups. Moving home and the length of stay are rarely planned, so studying Russian and teaching children a new language almost always happens spontaneously, generally without the participation of specialist assistance and often without the involvement of native speakers of the new language. For younger children the process of assimilating language among neighbours and peers takes place naturally, whereas adults and adolescents establish an ‘interlanguage’ which can, in some cases, fossilise in the form of a pidginised variant of the language, which they use to communicate with members of the host community and migrants of other ethnicities.

The beginning of this loss of language is primarily characteristic of young people brought to Russia when of school age and encountering significant difficulties with mastering the Russian language. Generally the families of labour migrants do not engage in practices for maintaining their native language, while limited resources to help migrants adapt to Russian — which is recognised as a valuable asset — are available in complex cases. Against a backdrop of monolingual or partially bilingual parents who are unafraid of linguistic shift, the loss of their dominant language is becoming extraordinarily likely scenario among second-generation migrants. An additional factor in this process is the control of host society members over the language of migrants.

References

- Aleksandrov D. A., Baranova V. V., Ivanyushina V. A. ‘Deti i roditeli — migranty vo vzaimodeistvii s rossiiskoi shkoloj [Children and Parents — Migrant Interactions with Russian Schools]’ // *Voprosy obrazovaniya*. 2012. No. 1. Pp. 176–99.
- Brednikova O. E. ‘Seks “vdali ot rodiny”’: intimnye zhizni trudovykh migrantov iz Srednei Azii, sluchai Sankt-Peterburga. [Sex “Far From Home”: The Intimate Lives of Labour Migrants from Central Asia, the Case of St Petersburg]’. Report for the Anniversary Conference of the Sociology Faculty at the National Research University, Higher School of Economics, St Petersburg: ‘Sociology in Action’, 2–3 March 2012.
- Esser H. ‘Language Acquisition and Age at Immigration: The Difficult Conditions for Bilingualism’ // IZA Discussion Papers. 2008. <http://www.iza.org/conference_files/ANM_2008/esser_h1665.pdf>.
- Gal S. *Language Shift — Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria*. N.Y.: Academic Press, 1979.
- Glenn Ch. L., de Jong E. J. *Education Immigrant Children: Schools and Language Minorities in Twelve Nations*. N.Y.: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

- Johnson J. S., Newport E. L. 'Critical Period Effects on Universal Properties of Language: the Status of Subjacency in a Second Language' // *Cognition*. 1991. Vol. 39. Pp. 215–58.
- Klein W. 'Transitional Grammars in the Acquisition of German by Spanish and Italian Workers' // Meisel J. (ed.). *Langues en contact — Pidgins — Creoles — Languages in Contact*. Tübingen: Narr, 1977. Pp. 167–83.
- Li G. *East Is East, West Is West: Home Literacy, Culture and Schooling*. N.Y.: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Selinker L. 'Interlanguage' // *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. 1972. Vol. 10. No. 3. Pp. 209–41.
- Verschik A. 'Linguistic Biographies of Yiddish Speakers in Estonia' // *Folklore*. 2002. Vol. 20. Pp. 38–52. <<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol20/index.html>>.
- Zhou M. 'Growing Up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants' // *Annual Review of Sociology*. 1997. Vol. 23. Pp. 63–95.

Translated by Rosie Tweddle