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From a restricted to full linguistic space: an ‘affirmative action’ strategy for the Udmurt language¹

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This study analyzes the long-term reasons why Udmurt occupies a restricted linguistic space in the post-Soviet state – the low status of Udmurt, due to Soviet language and other policies; urbanization; population shifts; myths and stereotypes about Udmurts; making Russian compulsory after 1938 – and the consequences of this for the fate of the Udmurt language today (relatively few native speakers). The central argument is that Udmurts have not overcome the Stalinist legacy, which led to the reversal of Lenin’s ‘affirmative action’ policy on non-Russian languages. This stems from the failure of the elites in the Udmurt Republic to pursue an ethnic mobilization strategy to promote the Udmurt language in contemporary Russia. Drawing upon language planning and ethnic policy elsewhere in Russia (Tatarstan) and in the UK (Wales), this article outlines ways to raise the status of Udmurt without generating inter-ethnic conflict, thereby creating a ‘space for all’.

Keywords: ‘Russia’, ‘Udmurtia’, ‘Lenin’, ‘Stalin’, ‘linguistic landscape’, ‘language shift’, ‘ethnic mobilization’, ‘Tatarstan’, ‘Wales’.

Introduction

This article presents a case study of Udmurtia, a small Finno-Ugric republic of the Russian Federation with a population of approximately 1.7 million, consisting of 60.1% Russian, 29.3%

¹ Some of the results outlined here are based on an INTAS-funded project (No. 05-1000006-8374), “Linguistic and Ethnic Revival in Russia: From policy to cultural diversity”, which enabled the collection and analysis of material on Udmurt language use and policy, surveys, and interviews with government officials between October 2006 and September 2008. As project coordinator, the author would like to thank all project participants from the UK (Preston), Finland (Joensuu) and Udmurt State University (Izhevsk), Russia; INTAS for funding this work; and the staff of the European Reading Room of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC for their help in locating some of the sources used here.

Udmurt, 6.9% Tatar, 0.6% Mari and 3% other (Itogi 2002 and National'nyi sostav 2004: 156–157). The fate of the Udmurt language depends on several factors, the key variables being its status, demography and institutional support (Giles et al. 1977: 307–348). Status refers to the social, economic and the socio-historical status of the language-speaking group or the symbolic value of the Udmurt language, as well as internal and external evaluations of its condition and status. The second, demographic variable includes the relationship between the Udmurt language, the territory of Udmurtia and the Russian Federation. More specifically, it includes population change, birth and death rates, marriages, in and out-migration and how these factors impact upon language shifts and on the number of Udmurt speakers. Also important here is second-language learning (in particular Russian) and its impact on Udmurt language loss. The final, third, set of variables relate to the level (and changes in the degree) of institutional support for Udmurt and its maintenance within the Russian Federation in general, and in the Udmurt Republic in particular. This includes the Soviet legacy as well as the role of the federal and republican government, mass media, education system, religious and other organizations, such as pressure groups. Glyn Williams has argued that the rise of the market, changing political discourses, education, family and so on are also very influential in language production, reproduction and non-reproduction (G. Williams 2005: 29).

Using Terry Martin's interpretation of Soviet language and nationality policy as 'affirmative action' (*polozhitel'naia deitel'nost'*) (Martin 2001) and applying this idea to the situation in modern Udmurtia, this article argues that the reversal of this policy since the 1930s, coupled with the failure of Udmurts to fight for its restoration, and Russians' reluctance to pursue it in the post-Soviet space, is the main reason for the low status of the Udmurt language in the early 21st century. We conclude that the other factors mentioned above are only contributory variables in explaining the restricted space that Udmurt occupies in both Russia and the Udmurt Republic.

Udmurts and their language

Linguistically, the Udmurt language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family (Collander 1957; Winkler 2001). Udmurt can be found in written form (Suihkonen with Zagulyaeva 1995) and is promoted through the use of music (Nurieva 1999), art (Atamanov 1989; Klimov 1988),

folklore, myths and legends (Vladykin and Khristoliubova 2008), and via stories, narratives, poems and literature (Arekeeva et al 2002, Emikov 1987, Fedorova 2008, Gippius 1989).

One of the major problems with statistics relating to Udmurts and their language is that a variety of terminology and ways of measuring nationality and language have been used in Soviet census data. With regards to nationality, the term *narodnost'* (national origin) was used in 1926, *natsional'nost'* (nationality) between 1939 and 1979, and *rodnoi iazyk* (native language) from 1926 to 1979 (see Silver 1986: 70–97). This means that the figures given in Table 1 below must be treated with caution.

Nationality was determined by the official Soviet classification or hierarchy of ethnic groups, while the term *rodnoi iazyk* can refer to many things, including language of childhood, language of fluency, language of daily or family communication, or ethnic or heritage language. Another problem is that Russian estimates of the number of Udmurts, and those able to speak Udmurt and Russian, vary greatly. Table 1 shows that although the population of the Udmurt Republic has increased by 53.5% since 1926, the number of ethnic Udmurts has declined by 30% over the same period. Most Udmurts spoke their native language at the time of the 1926 census, but by 2002, the last census date, only one in five did so and a large proportion (90%) spoke Russian instead.

 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

As a consequence, Vaba and Viikberg have concluded that “the sphere of usage of the Udmurt language is narrow and its status is low” (Vaba and Viikberg 2002), while Bernhardt argues that “the position of the Udmurt language today is precarious” (Bernhardt 2002: 14). Finally, the Finnish expert Seppo Lallukka suggests that the Finno-Ugrians might be a “vanishing cultural community” (Lallukka 2001: 9). The rest of this article will analyze why this situation has arisen, concluding by outlining ways how it might be reversed.

The absence of language and ethnic revival in Udmurtia

Towards the end of the Soviet regime there was a push for language revitalization in many parts of Russia (see Beissinger 2002, Gorenburg 2003; Grenoble 2003: 204–209; Sulyemanova 2010a, 2010b: 43–56 and C. Williams 2011: 94–123). Udmurtia introduced its own language law in 1994, which meant that, in theory, Russian and Udmurt now had equal status and both were official, government languages (Neroznak 2002: 9–10, 18). The ethnic revival of the 1990s, however, had less of an impact in the Udmurt Republic than elsewhere in the Russian Federation, because most inhabitants of the Udmurt Republic, including Udmurts, see themselves as part of the Russian Federation. Consequently there has been no significant promotion of the Udmurt language in the public sphere; no major expansion of Udmurt language education and no sustained propaganda for Udmurt culture in the Udmurt Republic. This is the reverse of what has occurred elsewhere, such as Tatarstan, which actively pursues a policy of ‘affirmative action’ with regard to the Tatar language (see Kondrashov 2000, Alvarez-Veinguer 2009).²

Udmurt passivity on this issue is the product of the legacy of the reversal of 1920s Soviet ‘affirmative action’ policy which led in the long term to a high level of Russified Udmurts and a major Russian presence in the Udmurt Republic. This in turn seems to have resulted in a reduced desire for separation (witness the recent celebrations of Udmurtia’s 450-year-old link with Russia; see Zagrebin et al. 2008). As a result, despite the 1994 law mentioned above, Russian remains the main oral and written language of officialdom in the Udmurt Republic, giving it political, economic and social status, whilst other languages, most notably Udmurt, are considered to be of minor significance or less prestigious. A move to require the president of the Udmurt Republic, Alexander Volkov, to speak Udmurt did not succeed, reinforcing this perception.

² This process of language and ethnic revival is viewed as a vital part of the Volga Tatar renaissance (see Sakhapov 2004). It led to a number of important books on Volga Tatars’ attitudes towards their language (Khabenskaia, 2002) and to an exploration of the inter-relationship between language and identity in the Republic of Tatarstan (see Isakova et al 2002). As a result, Tatar has a much stronger presence and visibility in Russia (see Gorenburg, 2005: 1–28 and C. Williams, 2011: 94–123). Tatar-language newspapers and journals are readily available in Tatarstan, while a major socio-political journal, *Tatarstan*, is published each month in Russian and Tatar. The president and government in Tatarstan are playing an important positive role in influencing ethnic identities in the Republic, whereas I would argue that the reverse is currently true in Udmurtia, where this process barely got off the ground.

Our INTAS research shows that, although language is an ethnic marker in the Udmurt Republic and language and national identity are linked, Udmurts tend not to stand up for their own language. Nevertheless ethnic conflict in the Udmurt Republic is minimal.³ This may be partly because some schools in the republic (such as school No. 97 in Izhevsk) are successfully run on the principle of ‘learning to live together’, i.e. promoting tolerance and co-operation between different nationalities within the Republic.⁴ Despite this, discrimination against Udmurts still takes place. Our 2006–7 INTAS survey found that 8% of Udmurts suffered discrimination at work and 12.3% at school, while 12.3% were insulted/humiliated while travelling on public transport and 23.9% in other places (in the street, shops or hospitals, for example).⁵ Our INTAS project findings show that ‘framing’ occurs, by which we mean that Udmurt identity is constructed by others (Russians), and this leads to low levels of self-esteem and to myths about and the stereotyping of Udmurts – as obedient⁶ – with a failure to stress other positive qualities, for example, kindness, hospitality, tolerance of others, a propensity for hard work, strong ties to birthplace and community and so on. Furthermore, there seems to be a widespread false perception of urbanites (largely Russian) as ‘well-educated’ and ‘skilled’ and of rural inhabitants (many Udmurts) as ‘backward’. Unfortunately, some sections of the Udmurt population seem to have accepted their supposedly inferior status and by so doing, indirectly confirmed the established social and cultural order in the Republic, which might also explain the lack of ethnic tension between Udmurts and others (Russians, Tatars and so on) and the reluctance of Udmurts to fight for their language and Udmurtian ethnic revival.⁷ Mastyugina and Perepelkin (1996: 137) conclude: “Relations between Russians and Udmurts are peaceful enough, and yet no observer can fail to notice the slight air of contempt with which a good many Russians regard their Udmurtian fellows.”

³ INTAS project No. 05-100006-8374, “Linguistic and Ethnic Revival in Russia: from policy to cultural diversity”.

⁴ Author visit with Paul Fryer to School No. 97, Izhevsk, Russia, 26 May 2008.

⁵ INTAS Survey

⁶ In the one village school in Bigrash-Bigra, teachers told the author that Udmurts are shy, modest, hardworking, prefer to marry their own people, have strong ties to their birthplace and a strong sense of community, are very tolerant and without their language they don’t feel Udmurt (visit to village school in Bigrash-Bigra, Udmurtia, 23 May 2008). On the character of Udmurts, see Kardinskaya 2005.

⁷ INTAS project preliminary results.

The reasons for the low status of the Udmurt language

The historical analysis offered here demonstrates that the Stalinist legacy and the reversal of earlier Leninist ‘affirmative action’ nationalities and language policy are the main factors in Udmurt’s low status. However, a number of other factors – demography, Udmurt psychology and assimilation – are also important, and we shall discuss each factor in turn.

Language policy from Lenin to Putin: The reversal of ‘affirmative action’ for Udmurt

The nature and evolution of Soviet language policy, which was constructed by mostly urban, Russian-speaking Bolsheviks, is the main explanation. Much of the Soviet population was illiterate and half the population was non-Russian after 1917. There was also a massive gap between the centre (Moscow) and the periphery (Udmurtia), with a general belief – which to some extent still exists today – that cities were civilized and the villages backward. Despite the initial difficulties following the October 1917 revolution and Russian civil war (1918–20), Lenin was in favour of giving all languages equal status as a means of undermining the class basis of nationalism, and he attempted to preserve and foster the culture of different nationalities via literacy campaigns, the promotion of traditional costumes and cultures, and the elevation of national elites into the party, government, different sectors of the economy and the education system (Kreindler 1979: 3). This move was part of Lenin’s strategy of seeking to legitimize Soviet power through the promotion of Udmurt language, culture and elites. This was achieved during the New Economic Policy period (1921–27) through a policy of ‘affirmative action’ designed to enhance the position of non-Russians, such as Udmurts, by promotion (*vydvizhenie*) into leading positions (Kulikova 2005, chapter 2; Martin 2001). This *korenizatsiia* (nativization or indigenization) policy led to Udmurtia being run by Udmurt elites able to speak their own national language. In the 1920s, Moscow also sponsored “symbolic markers of national identity” (Martin 2001: 13), such as national folklore, museums, press, food, costumes, opera, poetry, literature and so on. (Aspects of this tradition still survive to this day in standing exhibits on Udmurt costumes and traditions at the Arsenal Museum in the capital Izhevsk, and in the nearby Ludervai architectural and ethnographic museum).

This ‘affirmative action’ policy led to the rise of Udmurt intellectual elites (Vasileva 1999) and Udmurt-language national schools under the jurisdiction of Narkompros.⁸ Other major developments followed, including the development of literary Udmurt⁹ and a major native-language publishing programme. Thus by 1929, Soviet school textbooks were published in 56 languages, including Udmurt (Kreindler 1979: 4). The overall aim of these strategies was to eradicate illiteracy, economic and cultural inequality, and to reduce nationalism. In relation to the first goal, this ‘affirmative action’ strategy succeeded, as literacy levels increased from 28.4% in 1897 to 56.6% by 1926 (Comrie 1981: 28). But the Soviet state was less successful in relation to the other goals. Comrie points out that Russian was used in the education system, required for military service, vital for one’s career and strongly prevalent in urban areas (Comrie 1981: 32–36). As a result, Russian effectively became the first among equals from the 1930s onwards. Furthermore, Kreindler shows that this ‘affirmative action’ policy assumed that it was the Russians who were supposed to be bilingual in a non-Russian area (Kreindler 1979: 3). However, the reverse actually happened from the 1930s onwards. Thus Udmurts increasingly became bilingual and this has remained the case today. The Soviet state might have dressed this process up in socialist rhetoric, arguing that ‘affirmative action’ policy was a sign of Moscow’s commitment to minority rights and identities, but it was still cynically manipulating Udmurts for its own ends up to the late 1920s, by only giving the Udmurts superficial forms of nationhood.

As the political situation changed in the Stalin era, however, some Udmurt figures, including the legendary Kuzebai Gerd, were falsely accused of using Udmurt as a means of nationalist expression and Gerd, alongside many Udmurts, was subsequently arrested and died in Stalin’s Great Terror of the mid-to-late 1930s. This hindered the development of the indigenous Udmurt intelligentsia, Udmurt language, literature, culture and society – and, of course, the participation of Udmurts in the Soviet economic and political system under Stalin.¹⁰ Shklyiev and Toulouze point out that this imposition of limits on the degree of ‘Udmurtization’ has left a lasting mark on both the Udmurts and the Russians (in the Udmurt Republic) well into the late and post-Soviet phase:

⁸ For a useful overview of the role of national schools in Russian education and nationality policy, see Kuzmin 1997.

⁹ See Fedorova 2008.

¹⁰ On this tragedy, see Kuznetsov, *Iz Mraka...* 1994, Martynova 1993 and Kulikova 2005, chapter 3.

This episode and others like it have left a very deep wound in the conscience of the non-Russian population: fear has characterised their approach to ethnic issues, not only in terms of a concrete fear of punishment, but also simply in the feeling that such questions were dangerous and even taboo.

(Shklier and Toulouze 2001: 99)

Shklier and Toulouze also believe that senior political figures and ethnic Udmurts in high society still actively opposed Gerd's rehabilitation (as a powerful symbol of Udmurt national identity) in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, when ethnic mobilization was widespread in Russia. It seems that the Stalinist legacy is preventing an open and objective discussion of the national question in contemporary Udmurtia (Shklier and Toulouze 2001: 99–100).

As we shall see below, Stalin and post-Stalin nationality and language policies allowed the re-emergence of Imperial (in its USSR or Soviet Empire variety) Russian nationalism, which in turn led to the demise of nativization/indigenization and the gradual criticism of pro-Udmurt policies after Lenin's death. This might be best characterized as 'affirmative exclusion'.¹¹ As a result, Russian eventually became the language of administration, the army, state and social institutions, with campaigns to promote Russian starting as early as 1925, only two years after *korenizatsiia* was introduced. Not surprisingly, non-Russians were slow to master the Udmurt language. Furthermore in some schools, Russian teachers refused to teach native languages, which Smith attributes to disrespect, chauvinism, ethnic prejudice and possible racism (Smith 1998: 57). Under the influence of N. Ia. Marr, who rejected the notion of a plurality of languages and pushed for one language in the USSR (see Slezkine 1996: 826–862), Stalin advocated a shift from the Latin to Cyrillic alphabet. Politically loyal Udmurts already had a modified Russian script at this point (Blitstein 2001: 254). Consequently by 1932, native languages were taught from first form, and a second language, mostly Russian, from third form. However, there were

¹¹ This notion comes from Jean-Loup Amselle's 2003 book, *Affirmative Exclusion: cultural pluralism and the rise of custom in France*. However I use the term 'affirmative exclusion' in a different sense to Amselle to suggest that since Stalin, the Soviet state has pursued an 'affirmative' strategy on paper in relation to the Udmurts, but in practice it has led to exclusion and denied Udmurts and their language a substantial space in their own nation (Udmurtia) within a nation (Russian Federation). It is only 'affirmative' because current Udmurt elites agree to remain part of the Russian Federation. This means the space for Udmurts will remain 'restricted' as long as Russian anxieties about their place and role in a post-Soviet space remain, and providing that Udmurts don't push – as have their Volga Tatar counterparts in Tatarstan – for 'positive' or 'affirmative action' on their language status as part of a broad sovereignty project.

still some difficulties teaching Russian in non-Russian schools due to poorly-trained teachers, a shortage of textbooks and so on (Smith 1998: 139). Throughout the 1930s, when the new Udmurt Autonomous Republic came into being (1934), the push for Russification continued, mass radio was developed and then finally, in March 1938, a government decree made Russian compulsory in all schools of the USSR, including the Udmurt Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR).

These changes occurred because of a widespread fear that the Russian language had been weakened – literacy levels were now allegedly below that of the Tsarist era (Blitstein 2001: 257–258) – and, against the backdrop of Stalin’s purges, which clamped down on nationalists and alleged Trotskyists (Kreindler 1979: 7). This new law, which was implemented in September 1938, meant that “[Udmurt] students were required to enter secondary school with basic reading, speaking and writing skills in Russian to carry out a conversation and conduct work in an office setting” (Smith 1998: 159).

Growing Russification led to codification (the production of descriptive grammars, dictionaries, rules for spelling and pronunciation, alphabets and so on), which in turn gradually paved the way for standardization of dialect(s) and the setting of norms of usage (Blitstein 2001: 262–263). This trend impacted upon Udmurt-language modernization, corpus and status planning. The influx of Russian words and grammatical constructions into Udmurt and Russian borrowing now took place. Such a situation made it extremely difficult for Udmurts to opt for their native language, as it was lower in prestige and status and poorer in corpus, but more importantly Russian was now increasingly used in government, industry, commerce, defence and so on.

During the Great Patriotic War, money and textbook shortages were compounded by the drafting of teachers for military service, leading to a decline in teaching quality and knowledge of Russian (Blitstein 2001: 264–265). As a consequence, Smith points out, “Udmurt children were unable to speak communicable Russian because they spoke their native tongue at home, while Russian language teaching methods were ‘primitive’ and their teachers illiterate in Russian” (Smith 1998: 166). These failures led to the reorganization of Russian-language teaching in schools, changes in methodology¹² and to an increase in the number of hours of Russian from ten to seventeen hours per week. Smith concludes that by the end of the Stalin era

¹² See Sovetkina 1953. On the problem of teaching Russian to non-Russians including Udmurts, see Sovetkina 1956.

(1953), “new generations of non-Russians became bilingual, mixing and matching their native and adopted Russian tongues at will, depending on the moment and desired meaning” (Smith 1998: 177).

Khrushchev’s 1958 Educational Reform completed the reversal of Leninist ‘affirmative action’ language and nationality policy, as parents now had the opportunity to send their children to Russian-language schools (Kreindler 1979: 27–31). From 1958 onwards, there was a decline in national languages and an expansion in Russian teaching (Kreindler 1979: 24). This situation gradually led to fewer resources for non-Russian languages and a growing emphasis on Russian, leading in turn to increasing bilingualism among non-Russians. Thus, in the period 1970–1989, two-thirds of Udmurts declared that they were fluent in Russian (Grenoble 2003: 195).

This non-affirmative action policy was implemented in the education system, the press, radio and television. In the process, the number of Udmurt-language books and other publications and the number of hours broadcast each week in Udmurt were closely monitored and controlled. Our recent interviews with government officials and journalists in the Udmurt Republic show the long-term impact of Soviet neglect, namely a shortage of children’s literature in Udmurt. Staff from the children’s newspaper *Zechbur* informed us that it had a weekly circulation of 2,000. All schools received it, but most subscribers were rural. Although they acknowledged the value of government support, there was still not enough money to send copies of *Zechbur* to libraries in the Udmurt Republic. Udmurt journalists also emphasized that many young people in Udmurtia had no interest in their mother tongue (Udmurt) and identify instead with Russian, with Udmurt being largely used at home.¹³ Regarding Udmurt books, staff at the “Udmurtia” publishing house declared that 40–70 books were published annually, with a print-run ranging from 500 to 5,000, depending upon the topic. Only 30% of these books were in the Udmurt language. These books were published via sponsorship from the Ministries of Education and Nationalities in Udmurtia. Whilst this indicates a degree of government support, a chief editor at the “Udmurtia” publishing house added that, due to financial constraints, there was still a great shortage of works in Udmurt; he also highlighted the need to translate key Udmurt works into Russian.¹⁴ The Minister for the Press and Information in the Udmurt Republic, Sergei Vasilev, was fully aware of these

¹³ Interviews with the journalists and staff from the Udmurt-language children’s newspaper *Zechbur*, Izhevsk, Russia, 26 May 2008.

¹⁴ Interview with chief editor, “Udmurtia” publishers, Izhevsk, Russia, 26 May 2008.

difficulties and informed us that there was a new book-publishing programme starting in late 2008, which would run for five years, at a cost of 16m roubles (\$2m).¹⁵

Our INTAS research revealed that Udmurt-language programmes are transmitted between 3 and 5pm, when people are at school, university or work, and consist of one hour of “*Moya Udmurtiya*” per day. Furthermore, there are no Udmurt-language TV programmes after 6pm; no Udmurt-language radio programmes after 7pm; and no Udmurt-language TV programmes geared towards different age-groups. Only a limited number of Udmurt-language newspapers exist, such as *Udmurt Dunne* (see Tanczos 2011). There is a demand for Russian songs in Udmurt, screening of Udmurt theatre performances, quizzes or coverage of parliamentary debates and so on, but in areas where the Udmurt language is thriving, such as the countryside, TV reception is poor. The Minister for the Press and Information in the Udmurt Republic, Sergei Vasilev, acknowledged that these problems existed and stated that the REN TV channel had introduced a new schedule from September 2008. News programmes in Udmurt would now be broadcast in the mornings and evenings, and visits to assess how the Finns, Estonians and Hungarians address these issues had been made to improve the quality of Udmurt-language programming. Vasilev also thought access to Udmurt TV would improve after digitalization and said that his Ministry was willing to use subtitles and produce more programmes if demand existed.¹⁶

The demographic factor

Another key factor is the size of the Udmurt-speaking population and their geographical distribution. The numerical strength of the Udmurt ethnic group depends on the level of natural and compulsory migration, assimilation processes, the degree of consolidation, border changes and losses of population. By 2002, out of 636,900 Udmurts in the Russian Federation, 460,600 (72.3%) lived in the Udmurt Republic, 24,200 (3.8%) in Tatarstan, 22,600 (3.5%) in Bashkortostan, 26,300 (4.1%) in Perm oblast, 18,000 (2.8%) in Kirov oblast and 17,900 (2.8%) in Sverdlovsk oblast (Itogi 2002). This wide dispersal of Udmurts is the product of rapid industrialization, urbanization and the mass influx of Russian speakers to work in the Udmurt Republic (whose economy was dominated by a military-industrial complex in the Soviet era).

¹⁵ Interview with Sergei Vasilev, Minister for the Press and Information in the Udmurt Republic, Izhevsk, Russia, 26 May 2008

¹⁶ Interview with Sergei Vasilev, 26 May 2008 (as above)

Although the level of urbanization among the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia (including Udmurts) increased from 3.4% to 27.4% (Lewis et al 1976: 136), many Udmurts still reside in rural areas and their level of urbanization is lower than the national average, with the exception of the capital city of Udmurtia, Izhevsk (Lewis et al 1976: 180). Lewis, Rowland and Clem (1976: 157) conclude: “The substantial presence of Russians in cities of non-Russian areas has been a major force for the Russification of non-Russian peoples.”

One of the problems has been the slow rate of population growth: the proportion of Udmurts only grew by 14% between 1926 and 1937, 4% between 1937 and 1959 and by 14% between 1959 and 1970 (Lewis et al. 1976: 307). According to Mastyugina and Perepelkin, the degree of urbanization among Udmurts increased between 1970 and 1989, as did their educational level, but population growth in Udmurtia was still relatively low, at only 4.2% between 1979 and 1989, compared to the 7% for the RSFSR and 9% for the USSR as a whole (Mastyugina and Perepelkin 1996: 63, 72). By 2007, the majority of Udmurt speakers lived in rural (55.7%) rather than urban areas (44.3%) (Shirobokva 2011: 299). Most Udmurts (78%) live in Central and Northern Udmurtia, and the majority of Udmurt speakers are over twenty years of age (Itogi 2002; *Natsional’nyi sostav* 2004: 156–157). The majority of Udmurts are bilingual, with 96.9% of rural and 99.7% of urban Udmurts speaking Russian (Shirobokova 2011: 299).

Udmurt psychology

Socio-psychological factors, such as prestige, ethnic self-esteem, cultural and economic dominance, also play a role in language shift and maintenance. In the Udmurt Republic, Russian gradually became the first, and Udmurt the second language. This was partly due to some reluctance among young Udmurts to learn their native language, because Russian was viewed as more useful for future study, careers and participation in society.¹⁷ This situation has facilitated assimilation. Gorenburg argues that the Udmurts, as inhabitants of an autonomous republic (ASSR), were more vulnerable to assimilation than inhabitants of Union Republics (UR) (Gorenburg 2006: 274). When the author visited numerous Udmurt- and non-Udmurt-speaking secondary schools in both Izhevsk (for example, K. Gerd gymnasium, School No. 97) and rural

¹⁷ In an interview, Natalya Sudanova, of the Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Youth, Udmurt Republic told us: “Parents don’t see the point of teaching more subjects in Udmurt”; and that for some: “Russian is regarded as more prestigious” (INTAS project interview by author and Paul Fryer, Izhevsk, Russia, 21 May 2008).

areas (such as Bagrash Bigra, Nor'ya) in May 2008, he discovered that attitudes to the Udmurt language among pupils, teachers and heads varied, although in one school in Bagrash Bigra, parents, teachers and heads were very supportive of the Udmurt language and treated it as equal to other subjects.¹⁸

Udmurt assimilation

Finally, there is, of course, the political factor, namely the ever-increasing promotion of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication within the USSR in general and the Udmurt Republic in particular. A major aim of Soviet language policy was assimilation, and this was partly achieved by the changing emphasis on drawing together (*sblizhenie*) and to merging (*sliianie*) nations, which led to a change of ethnic identity, in this case from Udmurt to Russian. In some instances, this resulted in a shift in language use ('linguistic assimilation'), as well as a change in language identity ('linguistic re-identification') (Gorenburg 2006: 279). This was a consequence of urbanization, greater exposure to Russian language and culture, especially in the towns, a reduction in native-language education and the relatively higher prestige of Russian and low status of Udmurt. This changing pattern of ethnic identity demonstrates how successful the Soviet state was in assimilating part of the non-Russian population, in this case in Udmurtia.

This relates to the key issue of the degree of institutional support, which has varied over time. Vasileva's research on the role of national schools highlights the importance of education for the emergence of an Udmurt national identity and preserving the language.¹⁹ In the post-Soviet era, a new law on national languages in the Udmurt Republic (2001) was followed by another on national languages in education (2004). Limited state support for a number of Udmurt-language periodicals, as well as radio and TV programmes was also granted. However, a corresponding shift away from Russian to Udmurt has not occurred. Nevertheless, there is still a growing awareness of the importance of the national language and its decline, and of the relationship between language and identity, national symbols and festivals. Modest steps have been taken to promote Udmurt in the Ministries of Education, Press and Nationalities since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, but the prevailing mood of post-Soviet elites in Udmurtia has not been to create a new post-Russian identity in Udmurtia, but rather to retain a close connection with Russia, as the

¹⁸ Statements made during visit to village school in Bigrash-Bigra, Udmurtia, Russia, 23 May 2008.

¹⁹ See Vasileva 2008

title of the book *Udmurtia – Forever with Russia* suggests.²⁰ In this sense, they have maintained the old Soviet assimilationist stance.

Restoring ‘affirmative action’: Strategies to reverse the low status of the Udmurt language

“The efforts that have been made in Wales to reverse language shift are now seen as a model endeavour and have been widely acclaimed.”
(Aitchinson and Carter 2000: 139)

My earlier research analyzed the strategies used to reverse language shift and revitalize the Welsh language since the mid-1960s, such as the introduction of Welsh-medium primary and secondary schools, legislation to elevate Welsh language status and a Welsh presence in the mass-media, such as *Radio Cymru* since 1978 and *S4C* since 1982 (C. Williams 2008a: 185–217, C. Williams 2008b: 345–349).

To reverse language shift and revitalize the Udmurt language, and above all to create a full linguistic space for it in present-day Russia, the following steps need to be taken. The Udmurt government needs to take a lead by promoting the value of the Udmurt language via the recruitment of Udmurt speakers into local and republican government posts and by more Udmurt speakers becoming MPs, thereby promoting Udmurt in public life. This involves using a 1920s style ‘affirmative action’ policy. It is absolutely vital that Udmurt language policy is driven and supported at a senior level in the Udmurt Republic itself, as well as at a federal level in the Russian Federation. The Udmurt government also needs to provide the necessary finance and other support to introduce at least dual-language signs (Udmurt and Russian) throughout Udmurtia, in order to keep the language visible. There is a need to stress the importance of Udmurt in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools by making Udmurt a core subject in the National Curriculum for all schoolchildren, or at least as a foundation subject in Russian-medium schools. In line with this, it is essential that there are sufficient Udmurt-speaking teachers trained to work in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools and universities, thereby promoting the number of people able to speak, read and write the Udmurt language from the earliest age and then throughout the education system. An Udmurt Books Council should be created to promote the publication of books of different genres in the Udmurt language, as well as Udmurt book

²⁰ *Udmurtiia – Naveki s Rossiei* (Izhevsk: “Udmurtia” 2008). This book for kindergarten and primary school children is analyzed in Archer and Williams’ article in this issue.

sales-outlets, possibly with private sector support, to combat the low status of the Udmurt language. There should be an increase in the number of hours of Udmurt-language programming on radio and TV and an improvement in its quality and timing so that it meets the needs of Udmurt-speaking listeners and viewers of all ages. This will help save the Udmurt language from the ghetto of folk culture. As Udmurt language use is highest in the villages, the government needs to ensure that rural schools, heads and teachers have adequate resources to maintain the Udmurt language, culture and traditions. The production, marketing and selling of music and computer games in the Udmurt language is essential to promote Udmurt amongst youth. In this respect, Shirobokova (2011: 313) sees the Internet as crucial to revitalizing the Udmurt language. The Udmurt government must provide the qualified staff necessary to mark university-entrance exams in Udmurt, so that those who have been educated in Udmurt are not discriminated against when going to university. The Ministries of Education and Nationalities in Udmurtia must maintain and expand national schools promoting the Udmurt language. In this regard, Udmurt language plans should be developed in line with levels of language use in the communities served, but must also seek to increase use of Udmurt beyond a village setting. It is particularly important that the government in Udmurtia investigate parental attitudes towards Udmurt language learning, and if negative views prevail, then policies need developing to overcome these obstacles. For Udmurt to have higher esteem and status it needs role models, so the Udmurt government and the relevant Ministries must take steps to prevent the Udmurt brain drain and the loss of talented Udmurts from the Republic. The Udmurt government must work with IT leaders, such as Microsoft, to develop Microsoft Office and XP packages in the Udmurt language, as well as with mobile-phone providers (Beeline, Tele 2 and so on) to provide services and phones with an Udmurt-language capability. Apart from the state, small, medium and large-sized enterprises must also start to meet the needs of their Udmurt-speaking consumers, workers and employers – these companies must learn to operate bilingually in terms of signs, communication, store layout, bills, customer relations and staff. Finally, the relevant government ministries in Udmurtia must undertake regular Udmurt-language audits and collect and analyze data on the Udmurt language – its condition, status, use in different situations (at home, with friends or neighbours, whilst shopping or travelling on a bus, whilst working in the public or the private sector and so on), so that we know who the Udmurt speakers are, in terms of their age, gender and occupation, and

where they live (city, village, region). Better long-term planning in relation to the Udmurt language is required to identify issues and resolve them.

Conclusion

Of course, none of the above strategies will work or be implemented unless there is the political will at federal and republican level, or unless Udmurts start to campaign for their own language and culture. As argued above, the Stalinist legacy has played a major part in undermining Lenin's original 'affirmative action' strategy and the failure to reverse this situation since the 1930s has meant that Udmurt culture is invisible in the cities of the Udmurt Republic today. Even the capital, Izhevsk, remains in 2011 a Russian centre, not an Udmurt cultural space. The Udmurt President and his government advisors have a key role to play in reversing this situation. These actors should follow the positive example set in Tatarstan, where Tatar language has higher visibility and ethnic conflict with Russians is low (C. Williams 2011).

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Table 1: The fate of the Udmurts in the Udmurt Republic, 1926–2002

Census Year	Size of Population	Udmurt nationality	Number of Udmurt speakers
1926	1,023,300	504,187	456,801
1937	930,800	563,268	475,913
1959	1,336,900	615,647	581,175
1970	1,418,000	704,328	395,002
1979	1,492,000	713,696	375,659
1989	1,605,663	496,522	330,801
2002	1,570,316	354,824	236,313

Sources:

1926 – *Udmurtskaya ASSR* 1960, 20

1937 - *Vsesoiuznaia perepis'* 1991, 26, 93, 97

1959 – *Udmurtskaya ASSR* 1960, 206; *Vsesoiuznaia perepis'* 1963, 300; *Chislennost'*, 1971, 7, 27; *Shto natsii i* 1985, 99

1970 – *Chislennost'* 1971, 7, 27 and *Shto natsii* 1985, 99

1979 *Chislennost'* 1984, 80 and *Shto natsii* 1985, 95, 99

1989 – *Itogi* 1993, 23; Grenoble 2003, 22, 195 and Olson et al 1994, 666, 751, 789.

2002 - *Itogi* 2004, 156-157