BRIAN SILVER

# Bilingualism and Maintenance of the Mother Tongue in Soviet Central Asia

The linguistic behavior of the titular nationalities of the five Central Asian union republics of the Soviet Union illustrates that when groups with distinctive languages and cultural traditions come into contact with one another, very complex linguistic adjustments can occur.[1] This essay examines the relationship between the continued use of the non-Russian languages as mother tongues and the spread of Russian as a second language among Central Asians. Central Asians display an interesting response to the conflicting pressures to learn Russian as an aid to upward social mobility and to maintain traditional languages as a sign of identity with the ethnic group. While remaining strongly attached to their national languages, they are simultaneously moderately attracted to Russian as a second language.

My central thesis is that the advent of widespread bilingualism does not herald the eventual abandonment of the national languages for Russian, but may be viewed instead as a stable form of accommodation between ethnic groups. To explore this thesis I shall rely upon Soviet census data to examine patterns of language use within broad social categories defined by urban-rural residence, age, sex, and levels of interethnic contact of the local populations. I shall examine the extent to which segments of the Central Asian nationalities nominate Russian or their traditional national languages as "native language" and "second language."

All Soviet censuses have asked the respondent to designate which language he considers to be "native" (*rodnoi iazyk*). The meaning of the term "native language" has been questioned by some Soviet scholars; and there has been some change over time in how census officials have interpreted it. In keeping with the most common Soviet interpretations, I shall assume here that the census respondent's "native language" is the language that he prefers or uses most frequently.[2] Unlike earlier censuses, the 1970 Soviet census asked

[1] For purposes of this essay, Kazakhstan is included with the four Central Asian republics of Kirghizia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the five republics are referred to collectively as the "Central Asian republics."

[2] For a fuller discussion of the meaning (and ambiguities) of the census measures on language, see Brian Silver, "Social Mobilization and the Russification of Soviet Nationalities," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (March 1974): 45-66; and Brian Silver, "Methods of Deriving Data on Bilingualism from the 1970 Soviet Census," *Soviet Studies*, 27 (October 1975): 574-97.

respondents to name not only a native language but also any (but only one) other language of the peoples of the USSR that they could command freely (*svobodno vladet'*). Although the validity of this measure has been debated by Soviet social scientists, I shall assume here that respondents who claimed free command of a second language actually were fluent in the language. Respondents who claimed command of a second language (in addition to a native language) will be termed bilinguals and are here assumed to be fluent in both languages but to prefer or to use more frequently the native language. One should bear in mind, however, that the available measures of language use in the census do not indicate how actively or in which social contexts the various languages are employed. Nonetheless, careful analysis of patterns of bilingualism and mother tongue preferences among segments of the Central Asian population does allow reasonable inferences to be drawn about the link between the learning of Russian and the maintenance of traditional national languages.

In understanding how patterns of adoption of Russian as a second or a native language may register interethnic accommodation, it is useful to distinguish two functions of language in a contact setting: language is first a *vehicle of communication* and second a potential *symbol of ethnic or cultural identity*. As a vehicle of communication, language may be viewed in instrumental terms. Both the internal structure and the use of a language reflect social needs. As a society changes, its language or languages may change in lexicon, writing system, syntax, semantics, or other characteristics. The development of bilingualism or the switching of languages over time or in different domains of social behavior (for example, family, work, school, religious practice), may largely reflect variations in a language's usefulness.

Of course, in viewing language forms and uses as instrumental one must avoid accepting a simple deterministic or functional explanation for changes in language use. Not all changes in the structure or use of languages automatically or naturally follow from changes in the social composition or settings of language users. In the Soviet Union, in particular, both the internal structure and the uses of various languages have long been subjected to conscious planning. Those who are formally charged with the development, teaching, or employment of languages may encourage or discourage the use of particular languages (or language forms) to achieve a great variety of social, economic, and political aims. In recent years, Soviet language planners have identified different roles and predicted different futures for various Soviet languages. Russian now serves and will continue to develop as both the national literary language of the Russian people and as the "language of inter-nationality communication" in the USSR. Certain other Soviet languages have been recognized as having less comprehensive roles as the literary languages of particular non-Russian nationalities and as having varying prospects for future development. Others still are unwritten languages with limited prospects for future development.[3]

It would be a mistake to conclude that language planning in the Soviet Union has exclusively favored Russian at the expense of non-Russian languages. If one accepts the generalization that "the language of the school is the language of the future," one would have to conclude that Soviet language policy has provided a strong basis for the maintenance of a large number of languages.[4] For the five Central Asian nationalities examined here, schools where the national language is the principal medium of instruction have been provided through complete secondary education.[5] Moreover, there is evidence that the overwhelming majority of the local populations attend school conducted in their national languages.[6] In addition, in some subjects students may attend advanced institutes and universities where national languages continue to be the media of instruction. Hence, even though non-Russian pupils study Russian as a separate subject in the non-Russian schools from the first or second school year, for most Central Asian pupils the national language schools play the dominant role through secondary education.[7]

How Soviet language policy has affected the non-Russian languages is partly determined, however, by the second function of language in a contact setting. When one values a language in itself as a symbol of ethnic identity or as the bearer of a common literary or cultural tradition, the choice of language may well register more than an impartial weighing of the personal advantages of learning or of using a particular language. Mother tongues have occasionally become the focal points for nationalist movements. They have sometimes assumed a revered, almost sacred stature. Short of that, however, use of one's mother tongue may not only facilitate contact with the basic nucleus of the ethnic group or with the group's cultural traditions but may also signal present attachment to or identity with the group.[8] Although language is not the only important symbol of ethnic identity among Central Asians, the very persistence of attachment to the mother tongue suggests that it is certainly a significant symbol of ethnic identity.

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[3] A classification of the varying social roles of Soviet languages has been worked out by Iu. D. Desheriev and his associates in a number of works. See, for example, Iu. D. Desheriev, *Zakonomernosti razvitiia i vzaimodeistviia iazykov v sovetskom obshchestve* (Moscow, 1966); Iu. D. Desheriev and I. F. Protchenko, *Razvitie iazykov narodov SSSR v sovetskuiu epokhu* (Moscow, 1968); and M. I. Isaev, *Sto tridtsat' ravnopravnykh* (Moscow, 1970).

[4] Jan Knappert, "The Function of Language in a Political Situation," *Linguistics*, no. 39 (May 1968), p. 63.

[5] The extent to which such native language schools have been provided varies considerably from one nationality to the next. On this point see Harry Lipset, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education," *Soviet Studies*, 19 (October 1967): 181–89; Brian Silver, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education," *Soviet Studies*, 26 (January 1974): 28–40; and Paul R. Hall, "Language Contact in the USSR: Some Prospects for Language Maintenance Among Soviet Minority Language Groups" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1974), chapter 5.

[6] See, for example, K. Kh. Khanazarov, *Sblizhenie natsii i natsional'nye iazyki v SSSR* (Tashkent, 1963), p. 178; Rafik Nishanov, *Internatsionalizm—Znamia nashikh pobed* (Tashkent, 1970), pp. 103–4; and N. Bitenova, "Vzaimoobogashchenie i sblizhenie natsional'nykh kul'tur narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana v protsesse stroitel'stva kommunizma (1959–1965 gg.)," in R. S. Ivanova, ed., *Iz istorii natsional'nogo stroitel'stva v SSSR* (Moscow, 1967), p. 85.

[7] Note, however, that the provision of native language schools is largely confined to residents within their respective official national republics or provinces or to persons residing outside their official national areas who live in longstanding regions of settle-

Examination of the proportions of each Central Asian nationality that claim traditional national languages as native languages (mother tongues) suggests the strong attachment of these groups to their national tongues.[9] Looking only at the population of each nationality residing within its respective national republic, one finds that, in 1970, 98.9 percent or more of the population claimed the national language as native language. In contrast, 87.0 percent of the *entire* non-Russian population of the Soviet Union claimed their national language as native in 1970. Moreover, the changes in the percentages of Central Asians claiming their national languages as native have been negligible during the Soviet era.[10]

This leaves only small fractions of the Central Asian population to claim the language of another nationality as native. In 1970, at maximum, only 1.1 percent of the population of any of the five groups claimed Russian as a native language. By comparison, 11.6 percent of the *entire* non-Russian population of the USSR claimed Russian as native in 1970. These particularly low levels of adoption of Russian as a native language among Central Asians are accompanied by moderate to low levels of fluency in Russian as a *second* language. Except for the Kazakhs, 41.6 percent of whom claimed fluency in Russian as a second language in 1970, the percentages of Central Asians who claimed Russian as a second language fell well below the 37.0 percent of the *total* non-

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ment of their nationality. Moreover, the provision of native language schools in a republic does not mean that all pupils will attend schools in their national language; pupils may enroll (by law, according to their parents' wishes) in schools where Russian or another non-national language is the principal medium of instruction.

[8] For a discussion of Soviet and Western literature on the link between mother tongue and national identity, see Silver, "Social Mobilization." For a discussion of the connection between language and national consciousness among Soviet Muslim nationalities, see Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, trans. Geoffrey E. Wheeler and Hubert Evans (New York, 1967), chapter 14.

[9] The analysis is restricted to segments of the population of each nationality that reside within their respective official national republics, and only adoption of the Russian language is examined here. Also, only the large Central Asian groups are considered.

[10] Figures for 1970 are derived from TsSU, *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1972–73).

Russian population that claimed such fluency in 1970.[11] Not more than 19.8 percent of the population of the other four Central Asian nationalities claimed Russian as a second language in 1970.

One should not conclude from this, however, that Central Asians are inherently more resistant than other Soviet nationalities to learning Russian. A group's propensity to learn Russian is not unvarying but is highly dependent on the incentives and opportunities to learn Russian. The low level of linguistic Russification of Central Asians may largely reflect a relatively limited contact with Russians or a comparatively low level of urbanization and educational attainment. Although shortages of systematic information preclude an analysis of the impact of many of the factors affecting linguistic Russification, it is possible to control for the effects of two important ones: interethnic contact and urbanization. If one can show that Central Asians display much less attraction to Russian than do other Soviet nationalities under similar conditions of interethnic contact and urbanization one might justifiably conclude that Central Asians are especially resistant to linguistic Russification.

Rather than present an elaborate comparative analysis of the levels of knowledge of Russian among various Soviet nationalities, I shall draw upon evidence from previous research to shed light on the behavior of Central Asians. Data on the Central Asians in particular will be introduced chiefly to illustrate, rather than to test for, the patterns of language use among these groups. In reviewing previous research results, I shall make an important assumption that the patterns of linguistic Russification among Central Asians are not unique to these five nationalities but are typical of the larger set of Soviet Muslim nationalities. It is true that, as large union republic nationalities, the five groups have had fuller access to native language schools and other cultural facilities, and therefore have had more support for their national languages than have most other Soviet Muslim nationalities.[12] But I shall assume that apart from the effects of such differences in cultural facilities, the linguistic behavior of Central Asian nationalities is typical of Soviet Muslims as a whole. I shall assume further that the key feature linking the linguistic behavior of the Muslim nationalities is their shared "ethnic ideology": a set of beliefs, perhaps no longer strictly religious in nature, in the common kinship, history, and values of the "community of believers" in Islam; and a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness from Russians and other non-Muslims.[13]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] See, for example, Silver, "The Status of National Minority Languages," and Hall, "Language Contact in the USSR," chapter 5.

[13] For a discussion of the concept of ethnic ideology in relation to Soviet Muslim nationalities, see Silver, "Social Mobilization," especially pp. 52–53. See also John A. Armstrong, "The Ethnic Scene in the Soviet Union," in Erich Goldhagen, ed., *Ethnic Minorities in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1968), pp. 3–49.

Interethnic contact and urbanization were shown to be positively and independently related to knowledge of Russian by non-Russians in an analysis of 1959 census data on the linguistic behavior of forty-six Soviet nationalities.[14] Focusing on evidence of the adoption of Russian as a native language among the segment of the population of each nationality that resided within its own union or autonomous republic or autonomous province, this research revealed a moderately strong correlation between the Russian percentage of the population of the republic or province and the percentage of the titular indigenous nationality that claimed Russian as a *native* tongue. This positive relation between Russian presence and the linguistic Russification of locals held true for both urban and rural populations, but at comparable levels of interethnic contact (presence of Russians) urban non-Russians were more than twice as likely as rural non-Russians to claim Russian as a native language. In addition, this research revealed that at comparable levels of contact and of urbanization, Muslim nationalities were much less likely to adopt Russian as a native language than were other non-Russian nationalities.

The relative effects of interethnic contact, urbanization, and traditional religion on the adoption of Russian may be illustrated on the basis of 1970 census data. The same forty-six non-Russian groups studied in the earlier research are represented in this example. By relying on a statistical technique known as least-squares regression analysis to estimate the average effect of the percentage of Russians in the population on the percentage of the titular non-Russian nationality claiming Russian as a native language, one can compare the relative impacts of interethnic contact, urbanization, and traditional religion on adoption of Russian.

Table 1a shows that, under demographic conditions comparable to those of other nationalities, Muslim groups trail behind others in adopting Russian as a native language. For example, where Russians comprise 30 percent of the rural population of the republic, 3.2 percent of rural non-Muslims, as opposed to only 0.2 percent of rural Muslims, claim Russian as a native language. Moreover, the larger the Russian proportion of the republic's population, the farther the Muslim groups lag behind other non-Russian nationalities in claiming Russian as a native tongue. The lag is especially noticeable in the comparison of urban populations. Of course these figures are averages, and there is considerable variation, but the association is strong enough to justify generalization about linguistic Russification and the presence of Russians.

Given that Muslim groups lag behind others in switching to Russian as a native language, despite favorable demographic conditions, it seems reasonable to conclude that the attachment of Muslims to their traditional languages is especially strong. Low levels of adoption of Russian as a native

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[14] Silver, "Social Mobilization."

Table 1. ***Estimated Percentages of Non-Russians Who Claimed Fluency in Russian in 1970, for Forty-six Nationalities Residing in Their Basic National Areas***[a]

| Russian Percentage of Rural or Urban Population of Region | 1a. Percent Claiming Russian as A Native Language | | | | 1b. Percent Claiming Russian as A Second Language | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Place of Residence and Traditional Religion | | | | Place of Residence and Traditional Religion | | | |
| | Rural | | Urban | | Rural | | Urban | |
| | Muslims | Non-Muslims | Muslims | Non-Muslims | Muslims | Non-Muslims | Muslims | Non-Muslims |
| 10 | 0.1 | 0.8 | — | — | 43.4 | 42.1 | — | — |
| 20 | 0.2 | 2.0 | — | 6.2 | 52.5 | 53.4 | — | 50.2 |
| 30 | 0.2 | 3.2 | 2.0 | 8.8 | 57.7 | 60.0 | 56.5 | 55.8 |
| 40 | — | 4.4 | 2.4 | 11.3 | — | 64.7 | 62.4 | 60.1 |
| 50 | — | 5.6 | 2.8 | 13.9 | — | 68.3 | 68.2 | 63.6 |
| 60 | — | — | 3.2 | 16.5 | — | — | 74.0 | 66.0 |

*Notes and Sources for Table 1:*

[a] The number of nationalities included with a traditionally Islamic religion is twenty-two; the number of non-Muslim nationalities is twenty-four. A complete list of the nationalities included is presented in Brian Silver, "Social Mobilization and the Russification of Soviet Nationalities," *American Political Science Review,* 68 (March 1974): 55.

Cell entries are the estimated mean percentages of the titular nationality of the national republics and provinces that claimed Russian as a native or a second language in 1970. Estimates are derived separately for each urban-rural by traditional religion combination and are based on the best-fitting least-squares regression equation calculated for each such combination, with the "percent of the urban (or rural) indigenous population claiming Russian as a native (second) language" as the dependent variable, and "percent of the total urban (or rural) population of the national area that is Russian" as the independent variable. The estimating equations are given below. A dash indicates that there are too few cases where the Russian percentage of the population reaches the given level to permit reliable estimates of the knowledge of Russian among the indigenous population.

Table 1. *(Continued)*

| | 1a. *Percent Claiming Russian as Native* | | 1b. *Percent Claiming Russian as a Second Language* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural Muslims | $R_{nat} = 0.07 + .0054C$ | $R^2 = .44$ | $R_{sec} = 13.28 + 30.071(\log_{10}C)$ | $R^2 = .56$ |
| Rural Non-Muslims | $R_{nat} = -0.35 + .1187C$ | $R^2 = .43$ | $R_{sec} = 4.69 + 37.434(\log_{10}C)$ | $R^2 = .69$ |
| Urban Muslims | $R_{nat} = 0.81 + .0396C$ | $R^2 = .36$ | $R_{sec} = 39.00 + .584C$ | $R^2 = .38$ |
| Urban Non-Muslims | $R_{nat} = 1.04 + .2571C$ | $R^2 = .31$ | $\log_{10}(R_{sec}) = 1.365 + .258(\log_{10}C)$ | $R^2 = .53$ |

*Symbols*

$R_{nat}$ = Percentage of the indigenous urban (or rural) population of the republic or province that claimed Russian as a *native* language

$R_{sec}$ = Percentage of the indigenous urban (or rural) population of the republic or province that claimed Russian as a *second* language

C = Contact: Percentage of the urban (or rural) population of the republic or province that is Russian language among Central Asian Muslim nationalities may reflect, therefore, the impact of ideological or cultural resistance to linguistic Russification, and not merely the groups' low exposure to Russians in the population or low levels of urbanization.[15] Ethnic ideology cannot, however, account for the relatively limited knowledge of Russian as a *second* language among Central Asians. Judging from 1970 census data, *once one takes into consideration differences in levels of interethnic contact* there is no significant difference between Muslim and other Soviet nationalities in the attraction of Russian as a second language. As table 1b reveals, at comparable levels of contact with Russians, the typical Muslim group and the typical non-Muslim group show nearly identical propensities to claim fluency in Russian as a second language. Just as unexpectedly, urban and rural non-Russians are nearly equally attracted to Russian as a second language (at comparable levels of contact with Russians). Thus, although traditional religion and urban-rural residence are strongly and independently linked to the adoption of Russian as a *native* language, they have no apparent independent bearing on the acquisition of Russian as a *second* language. In accounting for differences in knowledge of Russian as a second language, only the percentage of Russians present in the national republics appears to play an important role. Given an opportunity and a practical need to learn Russian (that is, where the percentage of Russians in the population is high), Muslims are just as likely as other non-Russian nationalities to learn Russian.

One limitation of the analysis as presented above is the large degree of aggregation. The measurement of "interethnic contact" obtained by calculating the percentage of Russians in a republic's population is particularly crude. Where the aggregate Russian percentage of the population is identical in urban or rural areas, or in Muslim and non-Muslim areas, the actual degree of *individual,* interpersonal contact may not be identical. Nevertheless, it can be shown that this measure of interethnic contact neither overestimates nor underestimates differences between Muslims and non-Muslims (or urbanites and ruralites) in the attraction to Russian.[16]

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15. Of course, a variety of other factors could account for some of the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the extent of knowledge of Russian. But, as indicated below, the role of education in accounting for Muslim/non-Muslim differences (as well as the urban-rural differences) in the learning of Russian (especially as a second language) appears to be minimal.

16. The key issue is whether the measure of interethnic contact tends to bias the interpretation of the relative susceptibility of Muslims and non-Muslims to acquiring Russian as a second or a native language. Let us briefly consider the direction of such a possible bias. First, it is plausible to suppose that the aggregate measure of interethnic contact tends especially to exaggerate the true levels of contact between Muslims and Russians, because there may well be a greater incidence of *de facto* residential segregation in the Muslim republics than in the non-Muslim republics. That Soviet Muslims are

It is important, however, to discover whether the relationships among interethnic contact, urbanization, and linguistic Russification reported above hold true for smaller units of the Central Asian population. Below, the earlier analysis is replaced by examining the degree of linguistic Russification of the local nationalities within Central Asian *provinces*. For each province (oblast) and autonomous republic within the five Central Asian union republics the linguistic behavior only of the titular nationalities of the union republics is examined. For example, within the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic (located in Uzbekistan) only Uzbeks are considered. Of course, looking at only Central Asian provinces does not permit an assessment of the relative susceptibility of Central Asians and other groups to linguistic Russification, because only Central Asians are studied. Narrowing the focus to the provincial level does, however, afford a chance to verify the previous evidence of urban-rural differences and of the relationship between the presence of Russians and the degree of linguistic Russification.

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less likely than non-Muslims to adopt Russian as a native language under *apparently* similar demographic conditions may result from actual differences in their demographic situations. If so, Muslims are not necessarily less "susceptible" to adopting Russian as a native language but have simply experienced a weaker demographic stimulus. In that case, the role of a Muslim ethnic ideology in mediating the effects of interethnic contact on native language switching would be smaller than has been indicated here. It would also follow that if Muslims and non-Muslims resided in *truly* comparable demographic settings, *either* the lag of Muslims behind non-Muslims in adopting Russian as a native language would be less than our previous analysis has allowed *or* Muslims might be even more attracted to Russian as a native language than are non-Muslims. Of the two alternatives, the second is not impossible, but the first is more plausible. Consequently, if there is a bias in the measurement of interethnic contact, it probably has led to an exaggeration of the magnitude of the Muslim/non-Muslim differences in the attraction to Russian as a native language.

Yet if there is a measurement bias that exaggerates the true level of contact between Muslims and Russians (by ignoring residential segregation), the analysis would underestimate the attraction of Muslims to Russian not only as a native language but also as a second language. Moreover, since the statistical analysis reveals that in apparently similar demographic settings there is no difference in the attraction of Muslims and non-Muslims to Russian as a second language, it follows that, if one could correct for the supposed bias in the measure of interethnic contact, Muslims would be shown to be even more attracted to Russian as a second language than are non-Muslims. This greater attraction of Muslims seems highly implausible (though not impossible). If one therefore rules out this conclusion as unlikely, and thereby rejects the assumption of a measurement bias due to residential segregation, one must then also rule out the possibility that the Muslim/non-Muslim differences in attraction to Russian as a *native* language are smaller than have been indicated (since this conclusion also rested on the assumption of a measurement bias).

By ruling out as unlikely the conclusions that Muslims are even more susceptible than non-Muslims to adopting Russian as a native or a second language and that the true Muslim/non-Muslim difference in adoption of Russian as a *native* language is smaller than has been indicated, one is left with one alternative. Either the direction of the measurement bias is reversed (which seems unlikely) or there is no systematic bias in our measure of interethnic contact.

Let us consider first the adoption of Russian as a *native* language. Table 2 shows that in 1970 every increase of 10 percentage points in the proportion of Russians in the *rural* areas of the Central Asian provinces was linked with an average increase of three-tenths of a percentage point in the proportion of the titular indigenous group claiming Russian as a native language. In contrast, every increase of 10 percentage points in the Russian percentage of the *urban* populations was associated with an average increase of seven-tenths of a percentage point in the proportion of locals who had adopted Russian as a mother tongue. Thus, increases in the presence of Russians are correlated with increases in the adoption of Russian as a native language among both urban and rural Central Asians. But, with the percentage of Russians in the population held constant, local urbanites are apparently more likely than ruralites to adopt Russian as a native language. These urban-rural differences are quite consistent; in every province a larger percentage of indigenous urbanites than of ruralites claimed Russian as a native tongue.

The presence of Russians in the population and urban-rural residence play very different roles in the acquisition of Russian as a *second* language. It is instructive to combine the percentages of non-Russians who claimed Russian as either a native or a second language into a single total. In this way, one can assess the impact of urban-rural differences and of the presence of Russians in the population on the total proportion of each nationality claiming a knowledge of Russian. Bear in mind, however, that, since the overwhelming majority of those Central Asians who claimed knowledge of Russian identified Russian as a second rather than a native language, whatever relationship one finds between the demographic setting and knowledge of Russian is almost entirely due to the link between the demographic setting and knowledge of Russian as a *second* language.

As table 2 reveals, for every increase of 10 percentage points in the Russian proportion of the *rural* population of the province there was an average increase of 10.1 percentage points in the proportion of the indigenous rural population claiming knowledge of Russian. Similarly, for every increase of 10 percentage points in the Russian proportion of the *urban* population, there was an average increase of 9.4 percentage points in the proportion of the indigenous urban population that spoke Russian. This does not mean that fluency in Russian was equally common for both urban and rural Central Asians. In fact, on average, 50 percent of the indigenous urban population and only 18 percent of the indigenous rural population of these provinces claimed fluency in Russian. But the difference between these averages is almost completely accounted for by differences in the proportions of Russians present in the urban and rural areas; indeed, on average, 50 percent of the provincial urban population and 18 percent of the provincial rural population was Russian in 1970.

Table 2. *Estimated Percentages of Central Asians Who Claimed Knowledge of Russian in 1970*[a]

| Russian Percentage of Rural or Urban Population of Province | Estimated Mean Percentage of Locals Who Claimed Russian as a Native Language | | Estimated Mean Percentage of Locals Who Claimed Russian as Either a Native or a Second Language | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 5 | 0.1 | — | 13.8 | — |
| 10 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 19.1 | 20.7 |
| 20 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 29.8 | 30.1 |
| 30 | 0.8 | 1.5 | 40.5 | 39.6 |
| 40 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 51.2 | 49.0 |
| 50 | — | 2.9 | — | 58.5 |
| 60 | — | 3.6 | — | 67.9 |
| 70 | — | 4.3 | — | 77.3 |

*Notes and Sources for Table 2:*

[a] The urban and rural populations of each province and autonomous republic within the five Central Asian republics are treated as separate units of analysis. The census category "districts (*raiony*) of republican subordination" found in the Kirghiz, Tadzhik, and Turkmen SSR's is treated as a "province" for purposes of analysis, and is further subdivided into urban and rural units. The five capital cities are treated as urban units. In all, there are 83 units of analysis: 44 urban and 39 rural.

The estimated percentages of the titular nationality that claimed Russian as a native language are derived by least-squares regression of "percent of the urban (or rural) population of the titular nationality claiming Russian as a language" on to the "percent of the urban (or rural) population of the province that is Russian." Separate equations are calculated for urban and rural population units. A dash indicates that there are too few cases where the Russian percentage of the population reaches the given level to permit reliable estimates of the knowledge of Russian among the indigenous population. The equations are given below.

1. *Native language of Rural Central Asians*
   $R_{nat} = -0.05 + 0.0292C \qquad R^2 = .58$
2. *Native Language of Urban Central Asians*
   $R_{nat} = -0.55 + 0.0688C \qquad R^2 = .53$
3. *Knowledge of Russian by Rural Central Asians*
   $R_{tot} = 8.41 + 1.070C \qquad R^2 = .80$
4. *Knowledge of Russian by Urban Central Asians*
   $R_{tot} = 11.22 + 0.945C \qquad R^2 = .82$

*Symbols*

$R_{nat}$ = Percentage of the indigenous urban (or rural) population of the province that claimed Russian as a *native* language in 1970

$R_{tot}$ = Percentage of the indigenous urban (or rural) population of the province that claimed Russian as *either* a native or a second language in 1970

$C$ = Contact: Percentage of the urban (or rural) population of the province that was Russian in 1970

The lack of a significant difference between the extent of knowledge of Russian among urban and rural Central Asians (once the levels of contact with Russians are taken into account) is particularly striking because it challenges the common assumption that a variety of differences between urban and rural non-Russians affect bilingualism. For example, it is often acknowledged that Soviet urban schools are of higher quality than rural schools. This difference in quality extends also to the quality of instruction in the Russian language.[17] Furthermore, since urban populations have received more formal education than rural populations, exposure to Russian as a subject in school has been greater in urban than in rural settings. Yet the more extensive knowledge of Russian among Central Asians residing in urban areas can be almost entirely accounted for by the difference in the percentage of Russians present in the two residential settings. This evidence suggests that the amount of interethnic contact is far more important in the spread of Russian among the Central Asian population than is the quality or extent of formal instruction in the Russian language.

The relationship between bilingualism and native language switching should probably be viewed as a multiphased process where the adoption of Russian as a mother tongue would ordinarily be preceded by the acquisition of Russian as a second language. Moreover, when switching of mother tongue does occur, it probably occurs as an *inter*generational change. The evidence presented thus far suggests, however, that for Central Asians bilingualism (adoption of Russian as a second language) is not simply a transitional stage but may be an end point in the process of linguistic Russification. To support this argument, it is helpful to examine data that register change in the languages used by different age groups. Unfortunately, only the 1970 Soviet census contains evidence on bilingualism; consequently, one cannot examine directly the relationship between current levels of adoption of Russian as a native language and past levels of bilingualism. But an examination of the native and second language choices by age cohorts in the 1970 census offers some insight into the question of intergenerational change. If it could be shown that there is very little attraction to Russian as a native language among young Central Asians, despite the existence of widespread bilingualism among the older age cohorts in the 1970 census, the argument that bilingualism is not a mere transitional stage in the process of linguistic Russification would be strengthened.

In assessing this possibility, one must take into account the recency and small magnitude of the influx of Russians into most of Central Asia which has limited the duration and extent of contact between the local nationalities and Russians.[18] As a result, too few Central Asians became bilingual in Russian and their national languages in earlier years to create a bilingual family or neighborhood environment for younger generations. Therefore, the low proportion of Central Asians switching to Russian as a native language could simply reflect the shortness of the time span in which the process of linguistic Russification has operated. This interpretation might be called the "limited contact" interpretation.

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[17] See M. Mobin Shorish, below.

Alternatively, maintenance of the traditional mother tongue by Central Asians could result not from the lack of opportunity to learn Russian but instead from an ideological or cultural attachment to the mother tongue. This interpretation might be labeled the "cultural distinctiveness" interpretation. If this interpretation is correct, one should find that even where older generations experienced sufficient contact with Russians (or other Russian speakers) to develop widespread bilingualism, younger generations show little propensity to adopt Russian as a mother tongue.

The available information does not allow a definitive test of these alternative interpretations. Most serious is the lack of information comparing the linguistic behavior of Central Asians with that of their own parents or their own children. But the 1970 census does permit a partial test, using data on the Kazakhs. The Kazakhs are an especially relevant test case for the cultural distinctiveness hypothesis. Of all the Central Asian nationalities, the Kazakhs have had the most enduring and the most extensive contact with Russians. In combination with the ever-increasing levels of mass education, interethnic contact has led to widespread bilingualism in Russian and Kazakh.[19]

Table 3 divides each age cohort in the 1970 census into four categories along a scale of linguistic Russification. Examining the distribution of the Kazakh population on the scale of linguistic Russification (table 3), of the 40–49 year-olds, the very first post-Revolution age cohort, a majority (57.8 percent) was bilingual in Russian and Kazakh. Successive age cohorts display increasing proportions of bilinguals, except for the two youngest age groups (aged 0 to 15), whose measured linguistic preferences must be interpreted with caution. What is most remarkable about the age trend among the Kazakhs is the meager proportion of 16–19 year-olds who have either adopted Russian as a native language and lost fluency in Kazakh (the "assimilated" group) or who have switched to Russian as a native language while maintaining fluency in Kazakh (the "assimilated bilinguals"). The 16–19 year-olds were born a full generation (24 to 30 years) after the first cohort in which a

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[18] On the movement of Russians into Kazakhstan and Central Asia, see the brief summary in Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland, and Ralph S. Clem, "Modernization, Population Change and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 17 (Summer and Fall 1975): 286–300.

[19] Silver, "Methods of Deriving Data on Bilingualism."

Table 3. *Percentages of Kazakhs and Ukrainians Located Along A Scale of Linguistic Russification, by Age in 1970 (among residents in their own union republics only)*

KAZAKHS

| Scale Type | Language Combinations<br>Native Language | <br>Second Language | Age in 1970<br>0–10 | <br>11–15 | <br>16–19 | <br>20–29 | <br>30–39 | <br>40–49 | <br>50–59 | <br>60+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parochials | Kazakh | none or not Russian | 81.0% | 43.3% | 25.0% | 24.0% | 33.2% | 42.0% | 62.3% | 82.7% |
| Unassimilated Bilinguals | Kazakh | Russian | 17.8 | 54.7 | 73.0 | 74.7 | 66.1 | 57.6 | 37.4 | 17.2 |
| Assimilated Bilinguals | Russian | Kazakh | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Assimilated | Russian | none or not Kazakh | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| (Total Percent) | | | (100.1) | (100.0) | (100.0) | (99.9) | (99.9) | (100.0) | (99.9) | (100.1) |

UKRAINIANS

| Scale Type | Language Combinations<br>Native Language | <br>Second Language | Age in 1970<br>0–10 | <br>11–15 | <br>16–19 | <br>20–29 | <br>30–39 | <br>40–49 | <br>50–59 | <br>60+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parochials | Ukrainian | none or not Russian | 81.3% | 46.7% | 22.3% | 26.7% | 41.5% | 51.6% | 66.7% | 79.0% |
| Unassimilated Bilinguals | Ukrainian | Russian | 7.9 | 43.2 | 67.4 | 63.1 | 49.7 | 40.9 | 26.6 | 16.1 |
| Assimilated Bilinguals | Russian | Ukrainian | 1.5 | 5.7 | 7.1 | 6.8 | 5.7 | 4.6 | 3.9 | 2.4 |
| Assimilated | Russian | none or not Ukrainian | 9.3 | 4.4 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.4 |
| (Total Percent) | | | (100.0) | (100.0) | (100.1) | (99.9) | (99.9) | (100.0) | (100.1) | (99.9) |

*Source:* The percentage distributions among the categories on the scale are derived from the 1970 census according to procedures described in Brian Silver, "Methods of Deriving Data on Bilingualism from the 1970 Soviet Census," *Soviet Studies,* 27 (October 1975): 574–97.

majority of Kazakhs were bilingual. Yet only 2 percent of the 16–19 year-old Kazakhs claimed Russian as a native language in 1970, compared to about 0.4 percent of the 40–49 year-olds. This is a very small gain in the proportion claiming Russian as a native language when one considers that the 16–19 year-olds have been raised in families in which a majority of the parents were probably bilingual in Russian and Kazakh. That so few young Kazakhs have shifted to Russian may well attest to their strong sense of ethnic identity.

To highlight the pattern of language use among the Kazakhs it is helpful to consider the case of the Ukrainians residing within the Ukrainian SSR (see table 3). Corresponding Ukrainian and Kazakh age cohorts have remarkably similar proportions of "parochials." Knowledge of Russian (considering the combined total of those who claimed fluency in Russian as either a native or a second language) is nearly equally widespread in the corresponding age cohorts of the two nationalities. But much larger proportions of Ukrainians than of Kazakhs are found in the two most advanced phases of linguistic Russification: "assimilated bilingual," and "assimilated." In fact, among the *oldest* age cohorts of Ukrainians one finds much larger proportions of the population in the two advanced phases than among the *youngest* age cohorts of Kazakhs. The closeness of culture between Ukrainians and Russians may have facilitated linguistic Russification of the Ukrainians. Despite roughly equal proportions of "parochials" in the Ukrainian and Kazakh populations, once a Ukrainian learns Russian he is much more likely to come to claim Russian as a native language than is the typical Kazakh.

The age-specific pattern of linguistic Russification among the other four large Central Asian nationalities is similar to that of the Kazakhs. Although smaller proportions of the four non-Kazakh groups than of the Kazakhs are fluent in Russian as a second language, among all five nationalities only tiny proportions of the population have adopted Russian as a native language even among the youngest age cohorts. Aside from the Kazakhs, however, only the Kirghiz have even a single age cohort (those aged 20–29 in 1970) for which a majority of the population is fluent in Russian. Consequently, if it is true that a bilingual environment is an important precondition for switching native languages, much larger proportions of Kazakhs have resided in such an environment. Nevertheless, the Kazakhs display only slightly greater attraction to Russian as a native language than do the other Central Asian nationalities.

The evidence thus lends some support to both interpretations of the levels of adoption of Russian as a native language among Central Asians. Among the Kirghiz, Tadzhiks, Turkmenians, and Uzbeks, because of the comparatively limited scope and duration of contact between Russians and local nationalities, the spread of Russian as a second language has been retarded and the stage has not yet been set for substantial switching to Russian as a mother tongue. But among the Kazakhs, whose territories have long been settled by large numbers of Russians and other Russian speaking Europeans, the advent of widespread bilingualism in Russian and Kazakh has failed to produce much switching to Russian as a native language, even among the youngest age cohorts. Therefore, bilingualism in Russian and the national language may be a stable compromise between conflicting linguistic demands and loyalties for Central Asian nationalities.

A final dimension of linguistic Russification among Central Asians remains to be examined: sex differences. For a variety of reasons, one would expect to find a higher proportion of Central Asian men than of women to be fluent in Russian. Because men have achieved higher levels of formal education, they have not only devoted more time to the formal study of Russian but they work in the higher-skilled occupations where Russian is more commonly used. Among the five Central Asian nationalities in 1970, an average of 24.3 percent of the males aged 10 and over had completed secondary education, compared to an average of 13.4 percent of the females of the same age. In addition, a higher proportion of men work outside the household. In 1959, the only recent year for which information is available, 45 percent of the male population of the five Central Asian nationalities were employed outside the household, as opposed to 30 percent of the female population.[20] Military service is also an important source of interethnic contact and of exposure to the Russian language and might have helped to boost men's fluency in Russian relative to women's.[21]

Contrary to expectations, however, research based on the 1959 census revealed that non-Russian men and women were about equally likely to claim Russian as a *native* language.[22] This unexpected result may be explained by the ethnic homogeneity of the typical marriage pair, especially for the Muslim nationalities. If it is true that shift of mother tongue signals a sharp break with the ethnic community, one should not expect to find many ethnically homogeneous Central Asian families in which only one spouse claims Russian as a native language. Central Asian men are, of course, more likely than Central Asian women to marry Russians, and one might, therefore, expect a somewhat higher proportion of Central Asian men to claim Russian as a native language. In any event, the overall rates of intermarriage with Russians are quite small.

One might also expect male-female differences in educational, employment, and military experience to affect levels of knowledge of Russian as a

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[20] See A. A. Isupov, *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR* (Moscow, 1964), p. 46. Note that the percentages are based on the entire population of each nationality, not the work-age population.

[21] See, for example, Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, p. 199.

[22] Silver, "Social Mobilization," p. 58.

*second* language among Central Asians. Indeed, this appears to be the case. The evidence reveals that for all five Central Asian groups males are substantially more likely to know Russian than are females. The differences in the proportions of males and females who claim Russian as a second language while retaining their national language as a native language (that is, the proportions of "unassimilated bilinguals") range from 9.3 percentage points for the Kazakhs and Kirghiz to 14.1 percentage points for the Tadzhiks. At the same time, the differences in the proportions of males and females found at the two most advanced levels of linguistic Russification ("assimilated bilinguals" and "assimilated") range from zero for the Tadzhiks and Uzbeks to two-tenths of a percentage point for the Kazakhs.[23]

Thus, Central Asian males are much more likely than females to acquire fluency in Russian as a second language, but they are only slightly more likely than females to abandon the traditional national language for Russian as a native language. It seems reasonable to argue that acquisition of Russian as a second language is mainly a pragmatic response to incentives and opportunities to learn Russian, but that the shift of native language involves a more profound change in ethnic identity, one that neither males nor females are likely to experience.

For Central Asians, as for Soviet Muslims in general, abandonment of the traditional mother tongue for Russian may well signify rejection of the ethnic heritage. Indeed, a large majority of those Central Asians who adopt Russian as a native language apparently fail to retain fluency in their national languages. Among the Kazakhs, for example, two-thirds of those who claimed Russian as a native tongue in 1970 failed to claim fluency in Kazakh. Among the Tadzhiks, four-fifths of those who claimed Russian as a native language failed to maintain fluency in Tadzhik. Switching the mother tongue to Russian is therefore accompanied ordinarily by declining ability to communicate with nationals who are fluent in the national tongue but not in Russian. A strong sense of distinctiveness from Russians, however, coupled with the very sharpness of the break with one's national group that a change of mother tongue implies, appears to have inhibited severely the extent of native language switching among Central Asians.

Learning of Russian as a second language appears to represent a pragmatic response to the level of interethnic contact in a community. Muslims are not less likely than other non-Russian nationalities to acquire fluency in Russian where demographic conditions that foster the spread of Russian are equal for Muslims and non-Muslims. But since acquisition of Russian as a second language is infrequently followed by switching to Russian as a native tongue among Central Asians, Central Asians need not view second language learning as a rejection of the ethnic community. The evidence examined here thus supports the conclusion that bilingualism in Central Asia is a stable compromise between ethnic attachments and practical linguistic demands.[24] Although high levels of interethnic contact between Russians and Central Asians are associated with the increased adoption of Russian as both a second and a native language, the rate at which Central Asians shift to Russian as a native language, even where bilingualism has become widespread, is much lower than the rate among most non-Muslim nationalities. The concurrence in the patterns of native language switching among Central Asian men and women, despite the divergence in the patterns of second language use, lends further support to the idea that for Central Asians ethnic identity is bound up with native language maintenance.

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[23] This discussion employs the same categories of the scale of linguistic Russification used in the analysis of generational trends.

This is not to say that stable bilingualism is unique to Central Asians or to the Muslim nationalities in the Soviet Union. In a study of language practices in Soviet Georgia, for example, Iu. V. Arutiunian concluded that "even those [Georgians] who have completely free command of Russian as a rule know their native language just as well. This means that bilingualism is the prospective form of the development of linguistic processes in the region."[25] Thus, for certain other Soviet nationalities that have a strong sense of cultural pride or of distinctiveness from Russians, bilingualism may well represent an enduring linguistic compromise rather than a mere transition phase in a process of complete linguistic Russification. At the same time, for many Soviet nationalities the spread of Russian as a second language does portend the eventual (though generally gradual) loss of their traditional mother tongues. Nationalities that have close historical or cultural ties to Russians, such as the kindred Slavic groups and groups that were converted to the Russian Orthodox faith during the tsarist era, may lack a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness that would prevent growing bilingualism from threatening the maintenance of the national tongue. This is probably especially true for groups that have lost some or all of the reinforcement for their national tongue that native language schools and other cultural facilities afford. The case of the Central Asians therefore illustrates only one of several patterns of linguistic accommodation in the Soviet multinational setting.

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[24] The evidence also supports Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay's argument that bilingualism is a stable condition for Soviet Muslims and does not threaten the national languages.

[25] Iu. V. Arutiunian, "O nekotorykh tendentsiiakh v izmenenii kul'turnogo oblika natsii," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 1973, no. 4, p. 8.