

Linguistic dimensions to ethno-national identity: the Avars of contemporary Dagestan

Kendra Dias

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Nationalism Studies, Central European University

Budapest, Hungary

Supervisor: Andras Pap

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Aspect

More work must be done on regions with pervasive multilingualism so researchers can continue to develop our knowledge of the role language has to play in everyday identity; as opposed to the assumption that language choice is a matter of cost-benefit analysis. Thus this thesis addresses the issue of the balance of concentric identities in Dagestan by focusing special attention on the function of linguistic choice and differentiation in identity formation. Specifically, how language choice (more pointedly linguistic preservation) can inform and represent different types of identity, in order to show the complexities of everyday identity.

The study of perceptions, attitudes, and choices regarding one's language and identity needs to be investigated through case studies involving real people. Thus data has been collected through a series of focus group interviews, individual interviews, surveys, as well as substantial non-participant observations. For Avars, linguistic identity is preserved precisely because of its conflation with ethnic identity which is continuously reified by the language choices of everyday interactions. However, the traditional multilingualism of Dagestan coupled with the institutionalization of linguistic and ethnic categories in what is now the Russian Federation have entrenched the complex and concentric spheres of identity that inform everyday life for Avars as well as helping to preserve the linguistic matrix of social relations throughout the Republic.

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Introduction

How many languages you speak, is how much a person you are.

-Russian proverb

Language is like a bridge over a rushing river, if you know it you get across, if you don't you will drown.

-Dagestani proverb

In 2013 I took a research trip to the three Avar villages of northeastern Georgia. I wanted to know, from the people who I assumed would know best, what the linguistic situation was for minorities of small languages groups; particularly a small linguistic group hailing from the territory of the Russian Federation who found themselves on the wrong side of the border after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As I was leaving the first village, Chantlitskhure, one of my interview partners, Mokhtar, proposed a seemingly simple experiment; “ask that boy who he is [by nationality].” A former student of Mokhtar’s, now a shepherd, knowing his language was different from Avar and that he was of course not a Georgian, or a Russian, stood in the field completely perplexed when pressed for a positive response. Many would question the importance of identity to a simple shepherd but in the contemporary world, fields spanning from anthropology and sociology to nationalism are questioning the effects of nations on the communities within them. Perceptions of identity have significant implications not only for minority groups but for the peace and prosperity of their host countries as well.

It is no mistake that so much has been written about minority language rights or that so much of nation-building processes center around questions of language. The problem however, is that these foci are concerned with institutional processes and while claiming to speak on behalf of everyday people, more often than not tend to overlook them in the process of coming to

conclusions. Indeed it may seem for nothing to study these mirco/miso-functions, often assumed irrational or uninformed, but it is just these processes we must understand in order to assess the implementation and effects of linguistic human rights in states like the Russian Federation (RF). How does existing literature understand the connection between language and identity? The main hurdle here is that the issue spans myriad scholarly fields and a variety of national domains. The review below is therefore oriented into several sections; the first will explore literature in the fields of sociology and sociolinguistics. Next we will look at the everyday aspects of language and language choice. Lastly, we cannot study the relationship of language and identity without considering institutional influences by way of categorization and rights.

Language and identity: the sociolinguistic perspective

First we have to understand what we mean here by terms such as identity and ethnicity. Brubaker raises a multitude of issues with the term identity and posits the best solution is to use a series of more clearly pointed terms in order to discuss what we really mean when we employ such a uselessly broad term.¹ Throughout this thesis, categorization (institutional or otherwise) will be used in reference to specific data collected with awareness to the purpose of its collection. Speaking to the identity of individuals in a linguistic community here is to aim at assessing the self-understanding and social location of speakers within a given linguistic community. Additionally, as Brubaker suggests in his study on ethnicity and groups, this study will regard

¹ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, no. 1 (2000): 1, doi:10.2307/3108478.

ethnicity as an event, rather than a constant entity, in order to judge exactly to what extent salience succeeds or fails in any given interaction.²

In his study on ethnicity as cognition, Brubaker follows the cognitive turn in the study of ethnicity and asserts that ethnicity is not a thing in the world but a perspective on the world. While my study will address the extent to which state imposed categories have informed everyday categories; the study's focus is placed on individuals' self-understanding of how they fit into the Venn diagram of ethnic and linguistic groups of the Republic. This approach is important to the study of identity because as Brubaker warns, the categorization of ethno-political practice is unreliable; but we must also be aware of the relationship between institutional and everyday categorization which don't necessarily correspond to each other.³ Following the cognitive and constructivist camps of ethnicity, it would be important to note that groupness is not only fluid but that some literature suggests that modernity may be to blame for a contemporary crisis of identity. In Hall et al's discussion of modernity for example, we find that there are in fact multiple identities formed in response to globalization.⁴

Now the question still remains; why is language so central to the study of identity and not any of the myriad elements of culture or group maintenance? De Saussure, in his course on general linguistics, explains that language is not only the most important of all social systems but that it in fact exists by a sort of contract with all the members of a community which enables individuals to gain (and use) the meanings created within its structure. Language therefore, is not the function of

² Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* / Rogers Brubaker (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2004., n.d.).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Stuart Hall, David Held, and Anthony G McGrew, *Modernity and Its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992).

the speaker but outside of the individual, a product each member of the collective must assimilate.⁵ When we look to Durkheim's collective representations we can see how important this collective authority can be. Collective representations are facts which are socially given and condense the social rules and practices which relate to how a group conceives of itself. They exercise a coercive power over individuals through the authority of the collective and cannot be avoided.⁶

Bucholtz's text surveys five principles by which identity is analysed in sociocultural linguistics. The main argument is that identity is a function of interaction as an intersubjectively achieved social and cultural phenomena.⁷ In this way they argue that sociolinguistics should be approached broadly and inclusively by accepting that identity is the product of discourse and does not preclude it in the individual. Identity is not simply the collection of broad social categories but a more nuanced and flexible. In the case of Dagestan this is an important distinction as speakers often orient to local identities. Like previously discussed sociologists, they assert that language is a mechanism for identity formation in that communities create semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings. This means that identity is always, "contextually situated and ideologically informed configurations of self and other."⁸ As such identity is not simply the evaluation of sameness and difference but also of authority and delegitimacy, or realness and artifice.

Edwards brings forward several important points in his book on Language and Identity. Firstly, he points out the connections between language and identity when he explains that in a

⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁶ Émile Durkheim and Steven Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method: And Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Method* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁷ Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, 'Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach', *Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4–5 (10 January 2005): 585–614, doi:10.1177/1461445605054407.

⁸ Ibid.

group where the language of daily use is also the ancestral language, “intangible symbolic elements are intertwined with instrumental functions”⁹ of the language so that an “outsider” who may become fluent in the language may find that there is still a deeper level of communication which they are not capable of attaining. This can be understood in the function of native languages in Dagestan compared to bilingualism with Russian or other lingua franca; for this reason the native language has a higher evaluation to its speakers because they are able to communicate on a different level than in other languages in which they have full competences. He also highlights several important points on dialects, the most important for our purposes being that, mutual intelligibility is not a requirement for dialects; a dialect may be termed such for the simple fact that speakers of several language varieties share a common written form or by national affiliation. This and other related linguistic descriptions are instrumental to understanding the complexity of the linguistic map in Dagestan.

The interaction of minority and majority group languages must be regarded in its complexity, as in Paulston and Paulston’s study on language and ethnic boundaries which recognizes that bilingualism is not stable and serves a variety of functions. The study discusses the three factors which determine the relationship between the dominant and subordinate groups which are; the origin of the contact situation, the degree of institutional separation from the majority, and the degree of majority control of scarce resources.¹⁰ However, it is not so simple, as the dis/agreement about the collective goals for the minority group (i.e. assimilation or pluralism) may modify the effect of those independent variables. Demands for assimilation, pluralism, and other social outcomes are expressed through the centripetal (inward) or centrifugal (outward)

⁹ John Edwards, *Language And Identity: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Christina Bratt Paulston and Rolland G. Paulston, *Language and Ethnic Boundaries*, 1976.

dispositions of groups. If both the majority and minority are either centripetal or centrifugally minded it most likely leads to integration; but if the groups are each oriented in a different way it is likely to lead to conflict; as clearly evidenced by the popular fronts and language movements of the late Soviet period.¹¹

The linguistic situation in Dagestan however, is much more complex. In his book on Multilingualism, Edwards makes several important distinctions; firstly, between elite and folk bilingualism which is becoming ever more polarized in contemporary Dagestan. Secondly, he discusses the difference between individual and collective bilingualism. For our study the important point here is that collective bilingualism as a function of necessity is closely tied to diglossia;¹² bilingualism which resulting from the necessity for different languages based on the domain of use. In Dagestan we find both collective bilingualism and diglossia depending on the region and languages in question.

Additionally, it is not only the interaction of majority-minority which is at play in the negotiating of group boundaries. As Fought cites, ethnic identity is negotiated in a social context and ascription by others can be a crucial factor.¹³ On the other hand, individual identity is multi-layered and it is crucial to understand that individuals use language deliberately to construct those identities. What is also of interest in her study of language and ethnicity, particularly speaking about Dagestan, is the relationship between minority groups. Although contact itself is not enough to initiate assimilation, the groups may feel a certain affinity towards each other which might cause speakers of different linguistic communities to downplay the differences between them.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John R. Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹³ Carmen Fought, *Language and Ethnicity*, Key Topics in Sociolinguistics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Considering the compact linguistic diversity and the complex interplay of linguistic and ethnic categories throughout the history of the republic, these will be important points to remain aware of.

No study on sociolinguistics would be complete without considering the work of Pierre Bourdieu. His book on Language and Symbolic Power is instrumental to understanding the processes at work in Dagestan concerning language maintenance. For Bourdieu, culture embodies the power relations which act as the core of all social life.¹⁴ As such culture mediates the relations between individuals, groups, and institutions and power mediates between cultural practice and social structure. When we consider language as a symbolic system which establishes and maintains social hierarchies, the function of multilingualism can more clearly be understood as a part of structuring life in Dagestan. The most important point of Bourdieu's work for this study on multilingualism in Dagestan are his structures of capital; economic, cultural (as for example education), social (networks), and symbolic (legitimacy). His assertion that culture is a form of capital at times is a quite literal reality in Dagestan but in a more theoretical sense shows us why linguistic survival in the region has been so successful. Since all action, as Bourdieu sees it, is interested we can see how the habitus would enable the preservation of such extreme linguistic differentiation in order to vie for a better position in the ethnic mosaic of the republic.

Lastly, it is important to always place ethnicity in its historical context. Levi-Strauss' study on myth, drawing from de Saussure's work on linguistics, is also important for our understanding of the dynamics involved in Dagestan. His study suggests that myth as a universally understood function of language as the third category of language which at once puts together de Saussure's langue and parole and functions on a plane all its own; spanning the past, present, and future. What

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

is important is his assertion that myth has been replaced in modern society by politics;¹⁵ events of the past are understood in a universal way which helps us to understand our present state and our duties in society regarding our immediate futures. In this way, we can understand the legacy of the Soviet Union in Dagestan- its accompanying linguistic imperialism- and contextualize the effects on society today as well as in their choices regarding language which concern their collective future.

Everyday identity and language choice

Literature on the study of everyday ethnicity will be an important contribution to the micro level study of identity presented in this thesis. For Karner, ethnicity is politicized culture; becoming such when social actors become reflective and call into question common sense understanding of the group. While most of the time social actors are unaware of their contribution to the creation or reproduction of social order, the notion of everydayness Karner points out is highly politicized either way; as the site of mindless reproduction of power structures or the positive field of active resistance.¹⁶

Fox and Miller-Idriss set out four domains; talking the nation, choosing the nation, performing the nation, and consuming the nation in which we can clarify the actions of everyday people, keeping in mind that answers must be provided in regards to both the content and context of the nation in everyday life.¹⁷ The most important domain for us will be talking the nation in

¹⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (October 1955): 428, doi:10.2307/536768.

¹⁶ Christian Karner, *Ethnicity and Everyday Life*, The New Sociology (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁷ Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, 'Everyday Nationhood', *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 536–63.

which a differentiation is made between talking about the nation and talking with the nation; the former being discursive acts which at once describe social reality and are constitutive of it, making the speakers both consumers and producers, the latter includes the ways of seeing, doing, and being which cause the ordering of social differences along ethno-cultural lines. Both talking with and about the nation are important components of understanding the everyday discursive acts of nationhood but Fox and Miller-Idriss point out that language is also used as a cue by which markers such as accent, intonation, or syntax can turn nominally interethnic interactions into experiential ones. The study of the everyday is important because discursive acts of even the most fleeting moments in the course of daily actions can be telling.

Several important counterarguments to this thesis are present in the literature on language choice which must be confronted. Linguistic sentimentalism, as de Swaan argues, is to blame for the push to save endangered languages while in fact there is no such thing as language extinction or lingocide, but rather the deliberate abandonment of languages in favor of more useful alternatives. This, simply put, is a gross oversimplification. His main critique stands with the equation of language preservation is as the preservation of a particular group's cohesiveness; which as discussed above in reference to constructivist thought would be analytically invalid. Most importantly he repeatedly points to the impracticality of calls for linguistic human rights. He rightly explains that the promotion of linguistic rights does not directly empower individuals; it may in fact hinder them since the enabling conditions for the preservation of languages entail much more than the domain of language; i.e. autonomy, cultural reconstruction, consolidation of borders, etc. However, as will be discussed below in our consideration of rights, many scholars are indeed dealing with these complications.

De Swaan claims that linguistic diversity is not only not the sole guarantor of cultural diversity but in fact, the multiplicity of languages actually subverts linguistic diversity since it is more likely that English will be taken up for communicative functions. On the other hand, when speaking of the dilemma language communities face in preserving their language in isolation or assimilating for prospects of upward mobility, de Swaan admits that, “when a language is no longer understood the community culture is no longer accessible.”¹⁸ Notwithstanding the seeming contradiction of these statements, and the fact that there are a number of cases which speak empirically against his fear of English linguistic imperialism, it is simply not clear to me why de Swaan is convinced that language preservation is somehow primordially bounded so that constructivist understandings cannot be brought into the sphere of sociolinguistic studies on language shift.

Laitin’s book on language and conflict is another argument to be considered in contrast to this thesis. Although in his considerations of linguistic diversity he presents several different theories about the degree of such diversity and conflict, the focus here will be his discussion of the coordination approach to nationality and his 3 ± 1 language choice theory.¹⁹ The coordination approach to nationality is demonstrated in short through Shilling’s Tipping Game whereby members of a community seek to maintain an equilibrium of culture. The premise is both contrary to the notion of culture being passed down through generations maintaining its distinctiveness and poses a sense of binary choice where members of a community will do anything to maintain the balance. Laitin’s choice theory asserts that certain ethnic minorities must hold in their repertoires

¹⁸ Abram De Swaan, ‘Endangered Languages, Sociolinguistics, and Linguistic Sentimentalism’, *European Review* 12, no. 4 (October 2004): 567.

¹⁹ David D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

3 ± 1 languages in order to gain access to the maximum amount of rights and resources within that territory or state. I am not convinced that it is possible to assess micro level functions on the process of language choice by using macro level assumptions and mathematical equations. Therefore, this study will assert that minority language is not, as he insists, simply a calculation of rights and resources. As discussed above, Bourdieu's economy of culture shows us that the equation of rights and resources with material and socioeconomic mobility must be reconsidered.

Institutional influence: categorization and rights

It would be impractical to consider a study of identity without recognizing state and institutional (to be understood as both state and non-state institutions) influences on their populations; either through their categorizations of groups or through the distribution of rights and resources based on those categorizations. Such categorization can, at least partially, explain why language has, of all available cultural stuffs, so often become a battle cry for minority groups and ethno-political entrepreneurs. A vast body of literature has been done on issues regarding institutional categorization, most notably on the collection of data through process such as the census. Indeed entire books have been devoted to the reading of the Soviet censuses.²⁰ No one would dispute the importance of these studies but here what concerns this study, as Kertzer and Arel have pointed out, is that it is not the census categories themselves but the function of a group's subjectively evolving assessment of itself within politically induced categories that is telling.²¹

²⁰ Ralph S. Clem, *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses / Edited by Ralph S. Clem*, Studies in Soviet History and Society (Ithaca, N.Y.) (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, c1986, n.d.).

²¹ Kertzer, David I. and Dominique Arel. "Censuses, identity formation, and the struggle for political power," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, New Perspectives on Anthropological and Social Demography (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Many important aspects of the Soviet era only serve to amplify the complexities of such categorization including the Lenin's indigenization (*korenisatsiia*) policies for example.

The debates on the meaning of "native language" are well known for scholars of census categorization. In Russia (via the Russian Empire and Soviet Union) native language derives from a backward looking approach, meaning that language which your ancestors spoke. This approach was taken on order to serve as a proxy question for ethnicity since it was decided that, "each perfectly knows one's language."²² While this method is seen as a nationalist's paradise, it is questionable in a globalizing world rife with language shift to what extent this statement still holds true. Another often cited problem with the legacy of the Soviet Union's policies, is the territorialisation of ethnicity. This has lasting implications not only in regards to the state's move from asymmetric to symmetric federalism but in terms of language policy. The principle of territoriality, as Arel notes, is most often not unilingual but multilingual, which inherently leads to the politicization of statistical data on language. To what extent this is a relevant factor in Dagestan will be seen since other factors, for example the standardization of certain ethnic languages done at the expense of others, are most likely more telling than the data provided by state sanctioned categories.

Phillipson points out the fact that globalization is not a phenomena that has emerged as recently as academia may like to present it.²³ This is particularly poignant in the republics of the RF where linguistic imperialism (indeed all forms of imperialism) began as early as the dawn of the 1800s. The interplay of Russian language in everyday life throughout the region is indeed

²² Arel, Dominique. "Language categories in censuses: backward- or forward-looking?" in *Census and Identity*.

²³ Phillipson, Robert. "International Languages and International Human Rights," in *Language: A Right and a Resource: Approaches to Linguistics Human Rights*, ed. Kontra, Miklos and Tibor Varady (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999).

complex and the consensual expectation of linguistic assimilation may very well have depoliticized language. In the same vein, Kontra is right in stating that most linguistic rights fall into the “being nice” category of state action not the legally enforceable realm so that, “the foundation for rights is power and constant struggle is necessary to sustain language rights... language rights are fragile basis for language policy...”²⁴ especially considering the recognition that language policy is the result of decisions made in other domains. The rearranging the linguistic identity of ethnic communities into a new identity with proficiency in a common language is not uncommon and since this is viewed as integration (without assimilation) it is acceptable by linguistic human rights standards. Unfortunately this usually requires coercive measures for example, as Bourdieu emphasises, throughout education. This process has been very much at work throughout the RF; making this study all the more interesting and important.

While Rannut explains that the importance of language is its transformation into a political object and resource in primordial and instrumental terms, they also correctly recognize that language policies affect the identity of the community living within the control of that state and their level of participation.²⁵ This study will seek to expand our understanding of these processes in the Russian Federation by exploring the everyday context of language. Indeed when speaking of linguistic human rights Kontra points out that it is important to approach an everyday understanding through folk linguistics. They explain that in the same way that there exists a discrepancy between the way rules about language exist in speakers’ minds and the way there are codified by professionals a parallel discrepancy exists regarding linguistic human rights.²⁶ This is

²⁴ Kontra, Miklos, Robert Phillipson, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Tibor Varady. "Conceptualising and Implementing Linguistic Human Rights," ,” in *Language*.

²⁵ Rannut, Mart. “The Common Language Problem,” in *Language*.

²⁶ Kontra, Miklos. ““Don't Speak Hungarian in Public!”-A Documentation and Analysis of Folk Linguistic Rights” in *Language*.

an important point to be aware of if one considers the extreme Caucasophobia prevalent throughout Russian society²⁷ which has grave consequences for Dagestanis.

An introduction to the case study

Speaking specifically to the Russian Federation, while a substantial body of literature exists on language policy in the Russian space; primarily focusing on Soviet language policy²⁸ but also including historical works,²⁹ very little focuses on the effects of these policies on indigenous languages. Furthermore, what exists in the annals of Soviet language policy, focuses exactly on those peoples of the South Caucasus (and Baltics) whose titular languages were not only developed to the extent that corpus and elite structures for instance were mainly not an issue of impediment, but that had in fact existed in that way prior to the Soviet experiment.

The trend continued on in post-Soviet studies on language; the question of ethnic minorities and policies regarding cultural/linguistic rights has been widely debated in a variety of fields concerning the post-Soviet era. Language policy of the past was/is largely seen through the lens the elite and institutional efforts of the time. Additionally, the focus of such studies on language in the RF center around federal laws and their effects on well-known and widely studied cases on Turkic languages like Tatar and Bashkir, who are notorious for standing up against Russia for their rights. While there is important work done on the language diversity of the North Caucasus (NC), the literature is limited to the field of linguistics. On the other hand, non-linguistic contemporary

²⁷ Kisriev, Enver. "Republic of Dagestan: Nation-Building Inside Russia's Womb," in *Nation-Building and Common Values in Russia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

²⁸ Marshall, David F. "A politics of language: language as a symbol in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its aftermath." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. 1996. 117:7-42

²⁹ Dowler, Wayne. *Classroom and Empire*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001; Geraci, Robert P. *Window on the East*. London: Cornell University Press, 2001.

studies on the NC sadly, focus mainly on aspects of religion and the sociopolitical effects of war and extremism.

The NC is the northern part of the Caucasian Isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas, geographically comprised of seven ethnic republics; Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and the Republic of Dagestan and two Russian majority regions; Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai. Administratively, the region extends further north including three provinces; Rostov Oblast, Volgograd Oblast, and Astrakhan Oblast, and the Republic of Kalmykia.³⁰ In 2010 the region was split into the North Caucasian and Southern Federal Districts. The North Caucasian District, which is comprised of the non-Russian majority titular republics, represents one of the most linguistically diverse in the world rivaled only by Papua New Guinea.³¹ It is home to two of the three indigenous language families; Northwest Caucasian and Northeast Caucasian as well as several widely spread families; Indo-European, Turkic, Semitic, and Mongolic.

The Republic of Dagestan, home to just under 3 million inhabitants, lies on the eastern most corner of the North Caucasus, north of Georgia and Azerbaijan. It is the most heterogeneous republic in the Russian Federation. The last census conducted in 2010 recognized 13 major ethnic groups corresponding to the official languages which mainly derive from the republic's literary languages; Aghul, Avar, Azerbaijani, Chechen, Dargwa, Kumyk, Lezgian, Lak, Nogai, Rutul, Tabasaran, Tsakhur, plus Russian. The issue of Dagestani diversity becomes much more complex once we look past state categorizations. Approximately 35 language branches actually exist, each

³⁰ For a regional map see Appendix I

³¹ K. David Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

containing a varying number of sometimes mutually-incomprehensible and uncoded language varieties.³² As a cohesive republic of Dagestanis however, it is the most homogeneous with only 3.6% ethnic Russians reported in 2010. There is little consensus about linguistic variety in the Caucasus; with debates ranging from categorization of languages into families and estimates on the number of languages spoken throughout the region to questions about the actual number of speakers and the ethnic categorization of those speakers.³³

Avars represent the largest ethnicity in Dagestan; just under a third of the total population. Avar language has a reported 800,000 speakers and serves as a literary language for approximately 60,000 speakers of the Andic family as well as for speakers of the neighboring Tsezic (Didoic) language family.³⁴ Literary language (also known as standard variants or dialects) refers to those languages which are codified and have a strong literary tradition which speakers of smaller, and often uncoded languages, use as official ethnic languages. This means that speakers of non-standard Avar or other language varieties may use literary Avar for example in school instruction, media, literature, and/or communication with government officials. As mentioned, sources vary widely on the categorization of linguistically diverse peoples considered ethnically Avar but we can generally accept the following list; eight sub-branches from Andic; Andis, Akhvaks, Baguals, Bothlikhs, Chamalints, Godoberints, Karatints, Tindints, five sub-branches from Tsezic/Didoic; Tsez/Didoyts, Beshtints/Kaputchin, Ghinukhts, Gunsibts, Khvarshints; one from the distant Lezgian branch, the Archins; as well as those speakers of the distant Dargin dialect continuum who live within Avar regions.

³² For a linguistic map see Appendix II

³³ For an excellent and comprehensive linguistic review of Caucasian languages see, J.c. Catford, 'Mountain of Tongues: The Languages of the Caucasus', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (October 1977): 283–314.

³⁴ Борис Махачевич Атаев, *Аварский: история, язык, письменность* (АБМ Экспресс, 1996).

This means the Avars are a prime example of how ethnic amalgamation has functioned in the Republic; many speakers of other languages often have been either forced to identify on the census as Avar (because their ethnicity was not represented) or choose to do so (for a variety of reasons³⁵). Additionally, although linguistic mapping shows there are no further branches on the Avar side of the Avar-Andic language family, through fieldwork experiences (both in and outside of Dagestan) we find speakers who use Avar as the literary language understand their language variety to be “dialects” of Avar, although they may be mutually-incomprehensible to each other or to literary Avar language. Such fieldwork experiences serve to highlight the complexity and confusion regarding the linguistic diversity of Dagestan and indeed how that diversity fits into the ethnic mosaic.

The linguistic situation in Dagestan is in a frightful position. All of the language groups listed as ethnically Avar above, and an additional nine other Dagestani languages, feature in UNESCO’s list of endangered languages in the Russian Federation.³⁶ The languages on UNESCO’s list are classified into four categories; vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, and critically endangered depending on what generation is learning and speaking the language which gives researchers an understanding in how many domains the languages is being used. Of the 15 listed above all except Avar and Dargin are registered as “definitely endangered” whereas these two literary languages are registered as “vulnerable”. While the analysis of my findings might call their classifications into question what is important is not the qualitative but quantitative extent of endangerment; just over 18% of the 131 languages on the list are Dagestani

³⁵ Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, ‘Problèmes Ethno-Linguistiques et Politique Soviétique Au Daghestan’, *Cahiers Du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, no. 2 (1990): 359.

³⁶ Moseley, Christopher (ed.). 2010. *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*, 3rd edn. Paris, UNESCO Publishing.

languages. Indeed the academic world clearly understands the growing trend of language death across the globe and the unfortunate effects it can have.

Thus, existing literature has not adequately addressed the issue of indigenous languages in the North Caucasus of the contemporary Russian Federation. Furthermore, broader aimed theories such as the 3+/-1 theory of minority languages discussed above, can only explain part of the picture regarding speakers of small languages in the region. My research focuses on the missing link by exploring the importance of identity in language choice in multilingual Dagestan. While the existing literature does set an important foundation in the field of linguistics, academic work being done on the realities of life for Dagestanis is scarce. The brief overview above shows us that there is a gap in literature regarding the ‘everyday’ aspects of language for citizens across the RF and it is of pressing importance to shed light on this region, which has much to offer the fields of sociolinguistics and nationalism, before it is too late.

Notwithstanding our brief introduction to the linguistic situation in Dagestan and the worldwide trend of language death; the complex history of Dagestan adds interest to the case of Dagestani language variety. From their incorporation into the Russian Empire through the period of the Soviet Union (SU) and beyond, Dagestan is an anomaly in a wide range of political and social outcomes. It serves as a unique and important case due to its compact ethno-linguistic diversity, history of tribal socio-political structure which is preserved at least to some extent in their contemporary equivalents, and to its status as a federal subject of the RF. Considering that this will be the first of such studies done in the region the importance of gathering “real data” in the field seems obvious. Aside from the gap, the study of perceptions, attitudes, and choices regarding one’s language and identity needs to be investigated through case studies involving real people. We may theorize and speculate but the complexities of individual and group feelings and

choices cannot be understood without considerations provided by precisely those we seek to study, understand, and in a sense speak on behalf of.

In order to make sense of the current linguistic situation in Dagestan and to gain a more nuanced understanding to the roles of language in identity maintenance we have to ask several related questions. Most obviously we must start by investigating why ordinary Avars aren't afraid of linguistic extinction. By looking into the evidence presented we can then examine how language affects identity in Dagestan and inversely, how identity affects language variety in Dagestan. Lastly, an analysis of this case study will show us how multilingualism is affected by institutional categories of ethnic and linguistic groups. Thus this thesis addresses the issue of the balance of concentric identities in Dagestan by focusing special attention on the function of linguistic choice and differentiation in identity formation. Specifically, in my project, I look at how language choice (more pointedly linguistic preservation) can inform and represent different types of identity, in order to show the complexities of everyday identity.

The traditional multilingualism of Dagestan coupled with the institutionalization of linguistic and ethnic categories in what is now the Russian Federation have entrenched the concentric spheres of identity that inform everyday life for Avars. I will show that, for Avars, linguistic identity is preserved precisely because of its conflation with ethnic identity which is continuously reified by the language choices of everyday interactions. The identity of Dagestanis is battling between the entrenched effects of the institutionalization and politicization of ethnic groups in the Republic (starting from their incorporation into the Russian Empire) and while that is informing ways of understanding one's place in society, everyday interaction is still very much informed by the traditional understanding of linguistic identity in the region. These two spheres; the institutional and 'everyday', are constantly informing and reforming conceptions of identity in

the region. It is the purpose of this work to measure, for the first time, what the everyday effects of language are and how this informs identity construction for members of communities speaking small languages.

I do not intend to prove or disprove the linguistic correctness or plausibility of claims about the languages encountered in this study. The linguistic and ethnic mapping of Dagestani groups, although complex, serves as a simple guideline from which to depart; not only the lack of consensus in the academic world, but the politicization of certain categorizations makes it dubious to consider them too strongly. Furthermore, when I speak of the linguistic situation in Dagestan, language choice of Dagestanis, or any other broadly defined reference to the larger regional space, I am not claiming that my study is representative for generalizations about all ethnic groups in the republic. It would be contrary to the purpose of conducting a case study to speak as if it represented analogous data for the whole of the republic. In fact, as my analysis will show, there is great difference in the experience of different ethnic groups in Dagestan which is dependent on a variety of factors both historical and present-day. When I speak of Dagestanis, I am speaking of those Dagestanis (Avar and non) with whom I have experience which supports my analysis.

More work must be done on regions with pervasive multilingualism so researchers can continue to develop our knowledge of the role language has to play in everyday identity; as opposed to the assumption that language choice is a matter of cost-benefit analysis. As Fishman notes, the case study is the rarest method used in sociolinguistic research.³⁷ By understanding more clearly how Dagestanis identify themselves within the concentric social and political spheres of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Dagestan itself, one can assess ways in which language

³⁷ Rebecca Agheysi and Joshua A. Fishman, 'Language Attitude Studies: A Brief Survey of Methodological Approaches', *Anthropological Linguistics* 12, no. 5 (1 May 1970): 137–57.

choice serves as an integral aspect of ethnic identity formation and maintenance. The case of linguistic identity in Dagestan can help researchers and linguistic human rights' advocates more clearly articulate the complexities of language choice and the importance of language maintenance for speakers of small languages. When we begin to take on these types of case studies, scholars can more clearly articulate the realities of language choice for ordinary people. What we find is that language- whether it is the preservation of one's mother tongue, the shift to a state language, or any variation between- is very rarely viewed by ordinary people as a choice; rather it is the simple reality of life which is comprised not of a single choice but a series of daily choices made by individuals, families, and communities.

These complex series of linguistic choices contribute significantly to the matrix which guides everyday experience in society. This is both the function of the available modes of transmission for the language varieties in question and more personal processes of beliefs about these languages. For the available modes of transmission we know that most literary languages have and use, according to the location of speakers, most of the typical modes of transmission; media (TV and print), schools, institutions, cultural groups, political representation, etc. As for the folk linguistic aspect, several important findings will be discussed below. In sum, the modes of transmission are less important rather, when speakers use each language in their repertoire and how they evaluate each language being used that way will tell us more about language choice in multilingual society.

I will begin, in the next chapter, by presenting a brief history of Dagestan in order to show the development of the institutions, both formal and informal, which effect Dagestanis and their languages. A substantial portion is devoted to how Dagestan fits into the federal structure of the RF in the post-independence era in order to assess the status of rights awarded (and not) as well as

the amount of power and control the republic has in deciding matters concerning its diversity and ethnic groups' needs. I will end with a thorough description of who the Avars are; in which ways they interact with and differ from other groups in Dagestan.

Chapter 3 will turn to the study, starting with a thorough description of the methodology, research locations, and participants. I will then present the central findings and based on a comprehensive analysis, a discussion will follow on the implications of these results in light of the literature and theories outlined above. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the state of everyday identity and linguistic choice for Avars in Dagestan and offer some recommendations on avenues for future research.

Chapter 1: Multilingualism in context

A brief history

If we are to understand the contemporary situation for Dagestanis in the Russian Federation we must first understand a few important aspects of their history. The geographic region of the Caucasus has a long and complex history, but for the purposes of this study several moments must be considered more in depth; starting with their incorporation in the Russian Empire. By the 17th century the Safavid and Ottoman Empires had effectively split the southern Caucasus but the North Caucasus, although maintaining a connection through Islam, were ruled by local khans and regional alliances until the Russian conquest came into full swing starting with the reign of Peter the Great in the latter half of the 18th century. Russian conquest in the NC was precipitated by their need for direct access to their Christian brothers to the south who sought protection from the aforementioned Islamic empires even further south.

Russia's southern expansion however, had always proven a problem for the empire as they faced fierce resistance during the Caucasian Wars from 1817-1864. The resistance the North Caucasians was very successfully led by Imam Shamil III, an ethnic Avar, who united a great portion of the region including not only Chechens and Dagestanis but as far west as the Abkhaz and Cherkess. In 1859 however, Shamil surrendered to the Russians in Gunib, Dagestan. Imam Shamil is not only a great hero across the NC, and particularly for Dagestanis and Avars; even some of the great Russian writers of the 19th century wrote about him.³⁸ After the last of the Caucasus had been subsumed by the empire mass deportations occurred and over a million North Caucasians fled to the Ottoman Empire as the emissaries promoted resettlement. Unfortunately,

³⁸ For example; Hadji Murad by Leo Tolstoy.

this proved to be the first instance of genocide by Russians in the region since half of those who left died en route and many others were sold as slaves on arrival.³⁹

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s the Russian Empire made sweeping administrative reforms; many of which were aimed at better control of the Caucasus. Under the leadership of Viceroy Mikhail Vorontsov, Russia's short unsuccessful attempts at Russification and overall policies of benign neglect were changed to tactics of coopting local elites, centralizing the administration, and modernizing education in the region. It was during this era Russian scholars began codifying the languages of the NC. Now, let us move forward, to the federal aspects which effect life for Dagestanis, as much of contemporary legal structures remain as a part of the ever present Soviet legacy.

Federal approaches to ethnicity and language

The Russian Federation is the largest multiethnic state in the world which currently finds itself in a precarious situation. Having inherited not only the multiethnic composition of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) but also the legacy of imperial domination of minority groups, the country must now strike a balance with the need to form a cohesive democratic state and address Russians' own feelings of discrimination and their reactionary push for nationalizing policies for redress of the Soviet past. When speaking about linguistic and ethnic minorities, their language rights and recognition, they can be broken up several ways and be viewed through the lens of myriad specific domains. Theorists like Kymlicka form important distinctions between types of groups and the available rights each may claim.⁴⁰ Pap also does this

³⁹ Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus - An Introduction* (Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1995).

within a more structured legal approach.⁴¹ While neither of these frameworks fit within the scope of this survey, the important point of their work is that both (the latter more than the former) recognize the important of context in addressing the politics of recognition and rights.

Minority politics can be understood by looking at three interconnected aspects; the politics of recognition, rights for reproduction (in the case of language for example), and resources. While many scholars have focused their work on one of these aspects, this paper will look holistically at the interaction between the three, since each informs or re-informs the others. While this section addresses the changes in contemporary laws of the RF, the focus will center on how these different legislative measures have (or have not) affected the Republic of Dagestan. As stated, Dagestan is one of the seven republics of the North Caucasus. Most interestingly it is the most heterogeneous republic of the RF both ethnically and linguistically but is the most homogeneous republic in that just over 10%⁴² of its inhabitants are of non-Dagestani origin. Dagestan is particularly interesting in this respect for several reasons; my own research suggests for example, that although several scholars claim that struggles for recognition are a precondition for further stages of preservation,⁴³ this may not be the case in Dagestan. Additionally, they have been unable to retain large amounts of the former asymmetrical system as Tatarstan and Baskhortostan have done in their struggles for language status. Furthermore, when looking at laws aimed at additional rights and resources for minority groups, Dagestan has managed not to qualify despite of obviously meeting the criteria.

⁴¹ András L. Pap: Murphy's Law on the free choice of identity? Legal and political difficulties in defining minority communities and membership boundaries, manuscript, pp. 1-28

⁴² Census results show 3.6% ethnic Russians living in Dagestan as well as 3.2% Chechens, 4.5% Azerbaijanis, and 0.7% of other ethnicity. "Перепись-2010: русских становится больше" (in Russian). Perepis-2010.ru. 2011-12-19.

⁴³ Charles Taylor and And Others, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, 1994.

Categorization and counting

The first component we have to consider is the relationship between categorization, counting, and minority protection. Much of the literature surrounding this topic was mentioned in the literature review in chapter one, however it is important to understand how these processes function within the Russian Federation through the legacy of the Soviet Union. The fact of the matter for the RF is that much of present policy on categorization carried over from their Soviet (and even imperial) past. The debates on the meaning of “native language” are well known for scholars of census categorization. In the RF, native language derives from a backward looking approach, meaning that language which your ancestors spoke. Language served as a proxy question for ethnicity since it was decided that, “each perfectly knows one’s language.”⁴⁴ While this method might be seen as a nationalist’s paradise, it is questionable in a globalizing world rife with language shift. To what extent this very primordial view of identity still holds true is obviously under fire in post-Soviet debates of what it means to be *rossiskii*.⁴⁵

While ethnic entrepreneurs try to take advantage of this situation, it is the state who controls the process of category making and the decision about acceptable thresholds for benefits. Decisions about which categories to include become political choices, especially when it comes to questions of language, since any decision to standardize one inherently must exclude others. In the early Soviet period, the Russian authorities sent teams of ethnographers and anthropologists to “scientifically” put these issues to rest. What resulted was the Red Book of Peoples of the Russian Empire which was updated and used for census categorizations until the end of the Soviet era.

⁴⁴ Kertzer and Arel. *Census and Identity*.

⁴⁵ The meaning of the two words for ‘Russian’ are important to distinguish; *ruskii* is reserved for those ethnically of Slavic/Russian decent whereas *rossiskii* refers to people or things of the Russian state; a civic marker of identity.

However, the number of nationalities available on the census diminished over time and some scholars estimate those listed on the census are between a quarter and a third of the reality.⁴⁶ Clem makes an important observation about the processes of Russification and Sovietization when he states that it is not clear to what extent combining categories was due to real assimilation or simple a function of bureaucracy. These functions of categorizing are complicated by local affective identification; for example a study by Ware et al in 2001 showed that most citizens identified first as Dagestanis not as members of their respective ethnic group.⁴⁷

Indeed the question of accuracy and reliability in census data is an important avenue to explore in the RF; throughout the Soviet era, even though there were documents with fixed nationality, claimed nationality often changed between censuses. This may have been the cause of two factors, first, felt identity and claimed identity in indigenous peoples are not always congruent and may change due to policies that make certain identities more or less favorable; second, as my research in Dagestan suggests, identity claims can be made at different levels for the efficacy of official registers as opposed to varying levels of affective identity within a larger group. This last factor is supported by the fact that the simple process of census taking created problems especially in the NC because of the inadequate anticipation of the kinds of responses which led to ad hoc reclassifications.⁴⁸ Actually all the way to the last Soviet census we find this type of ethnic differentiation where there were almost seven times more self-identified nationalities than official ones.⁴⁹ As Arel explains, the 1989 census had 128 recognized categories but there were 823 unrecognized categories claimed in the process of census data gathering as a result of the fact that

⁴⁶ Clem, *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses* / Edited by Ralph S. Clem.

⁴⁷ Christoph Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Clem, *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses* / Edited by Ralph S. Clem.

⁴⁹ Kertzer and Arel. *Census and Identity*.

citizens may volunteer either regional or sub-ethnic identities.⁵⁰ Additionally, Soviet policies such as the land distribution policies of the 1930-1950 when the plains were allotted to mountain collectives (*kolkhozy*) led to more opportunities for corrupting the numbers; people who resided on these collectives were sometimes still recorded as inhabitants of their native village (*aul*) causing an overestimation of mountain populations for the sake of allocation of funds and benefits.⁵¹ It is also important to note that each administrative unit developed categories in their own way be they administrative, political, scientific, etc. which are not necessarily translatable in other contexts. Therefore the complex ascription of national identities in the SU resulted in the fact that there was no one way to categorize citizens. For this reason the often arbitrary practices of collective identification throughout the Soviet era had very little to do with individual identity which remained biographic and relational.⁵²

The problem of categorization and counting does not end at the census however. As mentioned above, the SU was prolifically concerned with identification and most documents included a fixed identification. One such document was the passport; from 1932-1997 all Soviet passports included what is known as the “fifth element” which classified each holder in the same backward looking process census takers were instructed to use. The process of registering identity is interesting in that, like the census, often officials made decisions on behalf of citizens, without much consultation. Even more interesting, is how although these decisions sometimes followed norms like following the paternal line in cases of children of mixed marriages; they very often

⁵⁰ Dominique Arel, ‘Demography and Politics in the First Post-Soviet Censuses: Mistrusted State, Contested Identities’, *Population (English Edition, 2002-)*, no. 6 (2002): 801, doi:10.2307/3246617.

⁵¹ Jean Radvanyl and Shakhmardan S. Muduyev, ‘Challenges Facing the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus’, *Eurasian Geography & Economics* 48, no. 2 (March 2007): 157–77.

⁵² Alain Blum, ‘Identities in Soviet History’, *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 2 (May 2003): 213.

were contingent upon the relations between Russians, the titular nationality, and other minorities is the administrative territory in question.⁵³

The sudden abolition of the fifth element created massive resistance from minority groups. The federal government's desire to recentralize was matched with their need to foster a more civic sense of identity across the RF and claims to democratize the state by aligning with global practices. The official stance centered on the 1993 Constitution and the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Minority Rights, ratified in 1996, which both state that individuals must be able to choose whether or not to identify as a member of their ethnic group.⁵⁴ On the other hand, minorities feared it would lead to further assimilation, be more difficult to prove discrimination on ethnic grounds without official demarcation, and most importantly would add confusion to legitimate claims for special rights and resources afforded to minority groups. Several republics, including Dagestan, decided to add an insert in Russian passports which included the ethnic language and regional emblem, until the state officially "solved" the issue by allowing citizens to include their nationality on their birth certificates.

Federal restructuring

Post-independence Russia, has seen several stages of democratization, regionalization, and recentralization; each having a significant impact on the politics of minority rights. The basis of the federal structure of the RF, it is important to understand, is also a relic of the Soviet era. According to the constitution, the RF is made up of 89 constituent units which are all equal in their

⁵³ Sven Simonsen, 'Between Minority Rights and Civil Liberties: Russia's Discourse over "nationality" Registration and the Internal Passport*', *Nationalities Papers* 33, no. 2 (June 2005): 211–29, doi:10.1080/00905990500088578.

⁵⁴ The Constitution of the Russian Federation (Article 26.1); Council of Europe. Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Strasbourg, 1.II.1995 (Article 3.1)

relations with the center however, of over 100 ethnic groups, only 53 of them have their own national entity.⁵⁵ Yeltsin's early independence era saw a huge increase of regional power (a continuation of late Soviet policies) which took the form of asymmetric federalism. Under this approach, administrative territories were granted larger control over a variety of cultural and administrative functions. Unfortunately for the Russian state, this practice was in large part due to a desire to appease ethnic groups and as a result was done on a case by case basis leading to each republic not only making its own constitution and laws but its own separate agreements with the center as well.⁵⁶ Since then, the RF has become increasingly recentralized under the Putin regime and as a result the regions have lost varying degrees of their autonomy on aspects from elections to language use. The evident shift in laws of the RF has led to a difficult situation for minority groups which now must choose between cultural and political isolation or mixed linguistic identities with Russian bilingualism to support the nation-state identity.⁵⁷

Several stages of reorganization have occurred in the territorial and administrative structure of the RF as a result of Putin's strategies. Additionally, several new categories for administrative territorial units have emerged including the legally undefined territories of special status which assimilated former districts (*okrugs*) into larger units. The purpose of the new category was to regularize the federal structure and change the balance of power between the center and regions;

⁵⁵ V. A. Kartashkin and A. K. H. Abashidze, 'Autonomy in the Russian Federation: Theory and Practice', *International Journal on Minority & Group Rights* 10, no. 3 (September 2003): 203–20.

⁵⁶ From 1992-2001 regional elites signed 42 bilateral treaties and about 200 related agreements with the federal central government. LoukPoppe, EdwinMinescu, Anca Hagendoorn, 'Support for Separatism in Ethnic Republics of the Russian Federation', *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (May 2008): 353, doi:10.1080/09668130801947960.

⁵⁷ Dmitrii Zamiatin, 'The Territory of Nostalgia Russia's Geographic Image and Problems of Linguistic Identity in the Former Soviet Republics', *Russian Politics & Law* 46, no. 6 (11 December 2008): 59–71.

de facto de-federalization of the types of constituent units which according to the constitution each have an equal relationship to the central government. At the same time, these new units are meant to follow the territorial organization of ethnicity of the RF but that dimension has proved not to be a reality.⁵⁸ What they did achieve, was the creation of formal hierarchies between ethnic communities and the reduction of proper representation in the legislature for certain groups. Additionally, each new administrative unit created its own charter leading to large variation between different *okrugs* and their functional capacities.

Another option for control and agency on minority questions has been the creation of National Cultural Autonomies (NCA). The federal law allowed for the first time, a form of non-territorial self-determination regarding cultural issues to be enacted by public organizations for certain ethnic groups.⁵⁹ However, after the enactment of the law in 1996 there was a swift shift in the policies that lead to restrictions in their efficacy. Due to the lack of clarity on the concept of autonomy state and ethnic representatives approached the opportunity with vastly different aims. Since the state, in the end, is the gatekeeper to autonomy, representation, and rights, the state viewed the law as an opportunity to control relations with the regions. Ethnic representatives however, understood the possibility to connect more directly with the central government as a means to gain access to funding for their projects. Thus the NCAs' race to the top, like with territories of special status discussed above, became a source of inter-ethnic competition and formal hierarchies. After the first boom of NCA registrations the central government not only

⁵⁸ Oksana Oracheva and Alexander Osipov, 'Territories of "Special Status" in Russia: The Ethnic Dimension', *Journal of Communist Studies & Transition Politics* 26, no. 2 (June 2010): 212–32, doi:10.1080/13523271003712534.

⁵⁹ Nicky Torode, 'National Cultural Autonomy in the Russian Federation: Implementation and Impact', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 15, no. 2–3 (2008): 179–93, doi:10.1163/157181108X332596.

began to restrict the function of NCAs, by which they became no more useful than voluntary associations,⁶⁰ they also abolished other official forms of ethnic representation like the Consultative Council for Federal National Cultural Autonomies. On the one hand, the changes in policy left minority groups often worse off than before the registration of NCAs; on the other, the situation opened up the debate on the national question in the RF.

Linguistic legislation

When it comes to linguistic policy in the RF, as mentioned above in issues of categorization, much remains from Russia's Soviet past. Rannut explains the overarching issues with Soviet policies regarding language and ethnicity in that linguistic policies were always implicit; based on greater policies grounded in Soviet ideology which itself was never stable due to conflicts in leadership.⁶¹ However, language always had an important function since it is not a class-based phenomenon and this is why we find such an oscillation in strategy. From the outset of Lenin's *korenizatsiia*; the policy of rooting communist ideals through the agency of local elites and local languages, which gave way to Stalinist repression setting to eliminate ethnic groups according to a class-based approach. The shift to Russian continued through the Krushchev era under the guise of building communism via convergence (*sblisheniye*) and assimilation (*sliyaniye*) resulting in the loss of Russian language as a marker of Russian ethnic identity. The Brezhnev era is best known for its stagnation but lesser known was his emphasis on, "rebuilding human nature" via a system of "international education".⁶² Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* proved to be the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mart Rannut, 'Linguistic Policy in the Soviet Union', *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (September 1990): 437.

⁶² Ibid.

final nails in the coffin of the SU due to the simultaneous and continuing denial of self-determination for national groups.

As the very brief outline above shows, the Russian language has a lot to speak for as the direct cultural heir of the SU. Additionally, there is ambivalence in the contemporary Russian linguistic identity⁶³ which has led to new legislation to bolster such an identity, spelling even more trouble for linguistic and ethnic minorities. As Zamiatin has noted, the continuing Soviet flavor of Russian's contemporary geographic image is due to their authoritarian linguistic practices of Russification. The authoritarian rule to which he refers most likely includes the 2001 draft law on Russian language which was rejected by the Federal Council in 2003. The law is meant to fulfill a number of functions, not least of which is the need to address potential conflict between regions and the center on questions of language. This goal has taken on the role of defining, for the first time, the spheres of use for the Russian language as well as the legal norms by which language use and laws must be formed.

Notwithstanding the present shift in laws impacting minority rights and protection, the newest language law is simply the resurfacing of issues that sprang up during the dissolution of the SU. The story of Russian language laws begins in 1990 as a reaction to the mass mobilization of titular groups around the language issue. As the main impetus for the dissolution of the SU was an increase in national fronts calling for language status,⁶⁴ it is no surprise that new republics' constitutions gave official status to the local languages. Yeltsin set up the Council on Russian language in 1995 to deal with the problems around the loss of status for Russian language. In 2000

⁶³ Zamiatin, 'The Territory of Nostalgia Russia's Geographic Image and Problems of Linguistic Identity in the Former Soviet Republics'.

⁶⁴ Marshall, David F. (1996) *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. "A politics of language: language as a symbol in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its aftermath." 117:7-42

Putin reinstituted the council which resulted in the draft law. Although, among other things, the law prohibits actions which lead to the degradation of Russian; the main impetus lies in the reinterpretation of promotion-oriented rights⁶⁵ which now focus on the sole state language: Russian. The argument for the stress on Russian language as a unifying force of the imagined community⁶⁶ is weakened by the law's statement of intent to increase the respect of the Russian people for their own language. It is also troubling that the law oversteps its bounds by requiring the use of Russian language in regional governments as well. In fact, Article 29 of the Constitution prohibits any propaganda which claims linguistic superiority of any language over another⁶⁷ but we find myriad of legislative measures to the contrary; including for example the adoption of the Federal Target Program entitled The Russian Language to increase the state language in education in 2006-2010.⁶⁸

Not only has Russia ratified the Council of Europe's Framework on Minority Rights, they have also ratified the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous peoples. Of over 200 identified ethnic groups across the RF, only 41 of them are legally recognized as "indigenous small numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East." These are the only groups that are legally protects as indigenous peoples although at least an additional 100 groups technically qualify as indigenous groups according to international norms. Russia was able to cut the number of recognized groups down by instituting the following requirements; a maximum population of 50,000 who compactly

⁶⁵ Michael Blake. "Language Death and Liberal Politics," in *Language Rights and Political Theory* Ed. Will Kymlicka and Alan Patten (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003., n.d.).

⁶⁶ Joan F. Chevalier, 'Language Policy in the Russian Federation: Russian as the "State" Language', *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (January 2005): 285.

⁶⁷ The Constitution of the Russian Federation (Article 29.2). For English version <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

⁶⁸ Iryna Ulasiuk, 'Legal Protection of Linguistic Diversity in Russia: Past and Present', *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 32, no. 1 (February 2011): 71–83, doi:10.1080/01434632.2010.536237.

inhabit a remote region, maintain their traditional way of life, and identify as a distinct ethnic group. Aside from the strictly defined limits of indigenous groups in the RF, the central government has been effectively able to uphold these restrictions based on census results by simply choosing not to count certain groups separately; for example the Andi, Karata, and Gunizb who as we saw above are registered as Avars.⁶⁹ These regulations have provided another instance of ethnic competition whereby some groups are categorized as more indigenous than others. Furthermore the incentives for ethno-corruption in order to counteract state categorizations and quotas means the continued lumping and splitting of ethnic groups to suit the needs of ethnic representatives.

According to a 2000 decree, Dagestan was supposed to compile their own list of small-numbered indigenous peoples, to be included in the overall list of small-numbered indigenous peoples of Russia. In order to avoid internal ethnic conflict, they simply submitted a list including all linguistically recognized groups in the Republic⁷⁰ however in the end, no language outside of the territory specified by the law is eligible for the additional rights or resources. This fact stands in stark contrast to Article 9(2) of the Law on Languages of the RF which states that languages have the right to development and protection irrespective of the number of speakers but in accordance with their needs.⁷¹ As Garipov rightly concludes, the definition of indigenous peoples in the RF is discriminatory and does not meet the social purpose of the legislation as a result.⁷²

⁶⁹ Kartashkin and Abashidze, 'Autonomy in the Russian Federation'.

⁷⁰ Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, 'Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach', *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 1 (January 2001): 105–31, doi:10.1080/09668130020016503.

⁷¹ RUSSIAN SOVIET FEDERATIVE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC LAW ON THE LANGUAGES OF THE PEOPLES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (as amended by the Federal law, July 24 1998, # 126-Φ3). Article 9(2).

⁷² R. Sh. Garipov, 'The Right to Use and to Protect Mother-Tongue among Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of Russia. (English)', *Russian Juridical Journal / Rossijskij Juridiceskij Zurnal* 84, no. 4 (July 2012): 157–67.

This could not be more accurate considering the etymology of the legal concept of “small people” which in its Stalinist roots was not a quantitative measure but qualitative in the sense of backward or insignificant.⁷³

This survey of contemporary law in the RF shows us that, much like the oscillation prevalent in Soviet strategy, there has been a clear shift in focus from minority promotion to protection a unified state; both through de-federalization and protection of Russian as the state language. Yet, it also shows us that for all Putin’s attempts to restructure the federation and recentralize, his legislative measures have done little at all to clarify legal norms or streamline regional approaches to minority rights. What he succeeded in doing was giving the appearance of complying with international norms while actually finding ways of limiting the effectiveness of structures meant to ensure rights such as linguistic preservation.

The transition to independence

As previously mentioned, much of the rationale for changes in the federal structure and the recentralization of policy in the RF sprang from Putin’s desire to align the regions with the 1993 Constitution. This was also the case in Putin’s attempt to bring the republics back into the fold. After the breakup of the SU, most republics instituted their own constitutions, giving significant authority to the titular nations. This is an interesting point to consider in Dagestan where the titular group (as a collective of Dagestani peoples) has such a high degree of linguistic and ethnic diversity. The republic solved the issue of representation by creating a complex and unique consociational government headed by a 14 member State Council, each major ethnic group gaining

⁷³ B Donahoe et al., ‘Size and Place in the Construction of Indigeneity in the Russian Federation’, *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 49, no. 6 (December 2008): 993–1020.

access to veto rights. Elections for ministerial and legislative positions run on ethnic proportionality but the system is devised such that candidates are dependant not only on votes of their own group but also votes from other national groups to be elected in multinational regions. Additionally, the replacement of positions functions on a “packet” system which maintains the ethnic balance in the event of any disturbance.⁷⁴ This approach was no entirely alien to Dagestan however.

The historic system of multiethnic governance, known as *djamaats*, both created ethnic cooperation and distinguished Dagestan as a coherent cultural entity long before their incorporation into the Russian Empire. These *djamaats* functioned like proto-consociational confederations between neighboring villages of differing ethnic origins thus subordinating kinship to the political integrity of the community at large. After the collapse of the SU this system re-emerged in the form of ethno-parties which simultaneously reinforced ethnic affiliation, by promoting the creation of ethnically based organizations, and helped to maintain a balance as elites began forming temporary alliances with one or more of the larger more powerful ethnic groups.⁷⁵ Additionally the loss of support in the region following independence caused a stronger reliance on informal networks leading to further ethnic consolidation which fragment the political elite and prevent common social objectives from forming.⁷⁶

In 2003, Putin demanded that each republic looked into their constitutions for inconsistencies with the Russian Constitution. Dagestan was tasked with reforming their consociational structure in such a way that federal standards could be met regarding the party

⁷⁴ Enver Kisriev and Robert Bruce Ware, ‘Russian Hegemony in Dagestan’, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 1 (January 2005): 26–55.

⁷⁵ Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars*.

⁷⁶ Ware and Kisriev, ‘Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan’.

system, election laws, and their lack of a single head of state. After three public referendums against, the republic established a one man presidency. Thankfully however, they were able to maintain a large degree of the previous proportional representation partially by relying on informal agreements.⁷⁷ However, some studies suggest that key positions are still based on kin and blood ties in smaller communities.⁷⁸

Dagestan is not only an anomaly concerning their linguistic diversity. The republic has faced a daunting tasks in the post-independence era successfully; avoiding secessionist politics, coming to terms with the ethno-national aims of larger groups, resisting Chechen overspill, containing Wahhabism, and coopting potentially opposition elites.⁷⁹ The republic has additionally been plagued with massive economic depression and although federal subsidies from the central government account for 80% of the republic's yearly budget, they are still struggling to cope with the crumbling infrastructure, the disappearance of industry, large unemployment and overall impoverishment. As Radvanyi has rightly noted, new initiatives and programs aimed at the region deal solely with conflict resolution⁸⁰ and as we saw above, although the bureaucracy has doubled since 1991, the government is incapable of coming to terms with the social and economic issues they face. The impoverishment of Dagestan has caused a large percent of inhabitants to become seasonal workers outside of the republic.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Tamara Sivertseva, 'Daghestan: The Quest for National Identity', *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 3 (1999): 359–72, doi:10.1080/02634939995623.

⁷⁹ Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars*.

⁸⁰ Radvanyl and Muduyev, 'Challenges Facing the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus'.

⁸¹ Sivertseva's study showed 40% of women and youth were seasonal workers. Tamara Sivertseva, 'Culture and Ethnic Identity in Daghestan', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (September 1998): 142.

Despite the victory of Dagestan's consociational approach, in the wake of independence, there was fierce competition for political control among the three strongest ethnic groups; Avar, Dargin and Lezgin (although less so of the latter). Furthermore, there were several calls for ethnic recognition and independence which continue to endanger interethnic balance in the republic. As a result of their power and prestige, many smaller groups have also attempted to rally against them; most notably the Kumykhs. The situation is further complicated by the fact that at the time of independence many Dagestani communities were living outside of the republic's boundaries. Today, one third of Azerbaijan's population is made up of Lezgins, and there are several communities (mainly Avar), large and small, in Turkey, Iran and the Republic of Georgia. In 2011, Dagestani Avars in Azerbaijan expressed their disappointment with both the Dagestani and Russian government for their failure to aid their ethnic kin abroad.⁸² Additionally within the republic, several ethnic groups, including Nogai and Dido, have expressed discontent that their communities have largely been ignored by the government and have called for greater recognition.⁸³ Although they were able to overcome these issues, ethnic relations have been permanently marked by these events and the government and citizens alike fear a flaring up of ethnic tensions.

Who are the Avars?

The Avars are the largest, and most politically powerful, ethnic group in Dagestan. The acting president, Ramazan Abdulatipov, is an ethnic Avar and while he declared 2014 the Year of

⁸² Olaf Staaf, 'Political Mobilization Along Dagestan's Ethnic Divisions', *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 13, no. 11 (8 June 2011): 20.

⁸³ Ibid.

Culture, Avars had also already declared their ethnic group culturally autonomous in 2011.⁸⁴ Their current position may not be such a surprise if we consider their historic legacy, extending even before the great Imam Shamil. Lemencier-Quelquejay identifies Avars and Kumykhs as the two ethnic groups of Dagestan with complex socio-political societies compared to other indigenous groups whose societies functioned on simple clan structures.⁸⁵ Indeed, they have always enjoyed a position of not only historic but also cultural prestige. They are well known for their traditional music and having arguably the strongest literary tradition with several national poets, including the beloved Rasul Gamzatov. In fact, written Avar predates the Russian codification of Dagestani languages by over 3 centuries.⁸⁶ Tablets in Avar have been found written in modified Arabic, Turkic, and Georgian alphabets and only after a special commission was established in the 1930s for the development of Dagestani languages was the language written in a modified Cyrillic script.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the change in alphabets can tell us a lot about the political culture of Avars since classical Arabic served as both the lingua franca of Dagestan and the official language of Imam Shamil's government until Avars became a part of the greater pan-Turkic movement and switched their lingua franca to Azerbaijani.⁸⁸

Not only the lingua franca of Avars has changed over time however. This study shows that multilingualism has also been affected by changes in socio-political circumstance. Linguistic scholars in the NC have noted that regional lingua franca were usually a function of altitude as both traditional ways of life; including trade and animal husbandry, depended on the traversing

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, 'Problèmes Ethno-Linguistiques et Politique Soviétique Au Daghestan'.

⁸⁶ Атаев, *Аварский*.

⁸⁷ For a look at the history of the Avar alphabet please find the table in Appendix III.

⁸⁸ Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, 'Problèmes Ethno-Linguistiques et Politique Soviétique Au Daghestan'.

the harsh mountainous climate. Thus, the language of those populations inhabiting the mid-range altitude typically became the lingua franca. For Avars this meant that while Andis and Dido spoke Avar, they themselves also spoke Kumykh and Nogai.⁸⁹ In the present decades however, Dobrushina's study has found that knowledge of Russian language as a lingua franca has begun to hedge out Avars' knowledge of neighboring languages although the findings also suggest that smaller ethnic groups subsumed by Avars remain more multilingual than their neighbors.⁹⁰

The above survey of Avars notwithstanding, before moving to the study a more detailed look at multilingualism in Dagestan will help contextualize the study's findings. The linguistic situation in the NC contradicts the present trend of globalization in its linguistic and cultural revitalization. However, it is not simply the linguistic elements of language variety that make Dagestan unique. The linguistic situation in the region serves as a model for social functions; the distribution and hierarchy of languages in a given territory tells us a lot about ethnic relations by evaluating the demographic and functional power of certain languages over others.⁹¹ Although the extreme linguistic diversity in Dagestan is typically attributed to the geographic terrain, social factors had an equal role to play as arable land is scarce in the more mountainous regions. The practice of endogamy ensured that land could be claimed by the minimum membership of a given community and attests to the increase in linguistic diversity over time.⁹² As such, scholars assert

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Nina Dobrushina, 'How to Study Multilingualism of the Past: Investigating Traditional Contact Situations in Daghestan', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17, no. 3 (June 2013): 376–93, doi:10.1111/josl.12041.

⁹¹ Vladimir Lazarev and Ludmila Pravikova, 'The North Caucasus Bilingualism and Language Identity', 2005.

⁹² Bernard Comrie, 'Linguistic Diversity in the Caucasus', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 131–43.

that a move away from that traditional endogamy, towards the polyglossia in towns and regional centers, would endanger the linguistic diversity of the region.

Moreover, the linguistic situation in Dagestan is not simply a matter of extreme diversity. Communities speaking their own language variety in the linguistic map of Dagestan have a variety of configurations depending on where their speakers reside; they may be for example scattered, in a patchwork pattern, linguistic enclaves, or divided linguistic groups. The types of multilingualism and bilingualism are also diverse and depend highly on both the type and length of contact situations as well as the social and political status of the linguistic communities involved.⁹³ These include, but are not limited to, monolingualism as a result of isolation or prestige; non-contact, endo- and exo-ethnic minority-majority, and passive bilingualism; and neighbor or distant multilingualism. Additionally, although Russian serves as the official lingua franca of Dagestan, many communities function with several lingua franca.

Lastly, we must consider that multilingualism functions based on the needs of speakers in each contact situation; this means that first a speakers competences vary widely in each language in their repertoire and second, since many are learned through personal contact it can be very difficult to gauge their level of competence.⁹⁴ In fact, speakers may not intentionally falsify their level of competence but may simply identify knowledge of a particular language for a variety of reasons without necessarily holding such a competence.

⁹³ Dobrushina, 'How to Study Multilingualism of the Past'.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Analysis of the case study of Avars

Before looking into the study's data it is important to consider more fully the limitations of this research. Due to a number of complicating factors; not least of which is the current political climate in the Russian Federation, research in the North Caucasus is difficult. This is no doubt a large cause of the existing deficit of general information and overall consensus on ethno-linguistic questions in the region. Considering this and the lack of time and resources for the study, I had to make use of the contacts I had in the region and those of the people I met during the research trip. It is important to note that the research was conducted in Russian language throughout and the translations are my own. I do not have any working knowledge of Avar language; therefore, my evaluations of language use can only speak to what I recorded in Russian or what participants translated for me.

I originally aimed my study at the everyday aspects of language choice by studying ordinary people of the middle age demographic (30-50) in the city and regions. During the course of my fieldwork however, I found that the general demographics of urban and rural locations were different. It simply was not feasible to gather focus group participants of the same age range; moreover, the results were enriched by looking at different age groups in their respective locations. Additionally, most of the participants were involved either in fields relating to questions of culture (in the regions) or language (in the city). I don't find this to be an impediment to the study's results since no participant either held or expressed interest in holding a position of decision making power. Although the study's participants were interested in the types of questions this research investigates, there were no ethnic activists or entrepreneurs, and no attempts to propagandize or sway the investigation. Most importantly, the results of the focus group interviews have been

placed in the context other field data which confirmed and added depth to the views provided by these ordinary people.

Methodology

The research trip spanned 8 full days, split equally between rural and urban spaces. Throughout the trip I was able to speak with residents of all walks of life. The most interesting component of my field excursions however, is the diversity of linguistic situations I was able to observe; from the ethnically mixed capital, to the regional center, small homogeneous villages, and even a non-titular village. This provided me with a comprehensive look at what everyday life is like for all types of Dagestanis and enriched my understanding of the study's primary research questions. I began in the regional center, Gunib, and took several field excursions to neighboring villages; Bastada, Chok, and Megeb, and then concluded my trip in the capital of Dagestan, Makhachkala.⁹⁵

The greater Avar region (sometimes described as Avaristan) is located in the extremely mountainous terrain of southwest Dagestan extending all the way to the Chechen and Georgian borders. Gunib (just under 2,500 inhabitants) is the administrative center of Gunibskii District. Literary Avar serves as the lingua franca although speakers of Avar language varieties which are mutually comprehensible often just use their dialect. It serves as the cultural center of the district and is well known for its historical importance in the resistance against the Russians in the Caucasian Wars. As this was my second trip to the region, I had a contact there with whom I stayed, which allowed me maximum access to the inhabitants and round the clock opportunities

⁹⁵ For a regional map of Dagestan as well as a map of Gunibskii region please see Appendix IV and V respectively.

for informal interviews and non-participant observations. During my time there I was able to visit the regional newspaper office, the cultural center, school, library, attended the holiday celebration for children's literacy, and an exhibition opening at the local historical museum.

Batsada and Chok (sometimes spelled Chokh) are small mountainous villages in Gunibskii District with Avar inhabitants, each speaking their own language variety of Avar. For residents of both villages who do not work in administrative or cultural positions, due to isolation and impoverishment, rely on subsistence farming, traditional animal husbandry, and seasonal labor (usually in Moscow). Bastada, to the southeast of Gunib, is a very isolated but ordinary Dagestani village. While I was there I took a tour of the village with some locals, attended the opening of their new medical center, and sat in on the yearly town meeting with the mayor. Chok, to the southeast of Gunib, is a well-known village for its historical importance and once housed many of the regions great Soviet artists. There, I took a tour of the village with some locals and met some residents.

My last field excursion in the region was in Megeb. It is the outermost village on the west-southwestern side of Gunibskii District, bordering the Lak region which separates them from their kin in Akushi, Levashi, and other surrounding districts further west. The residents of Megeb are both ethnically and linguistically Dargin; so although the standard variant of Dargin is used in schools, the lingua franca is both the Megebskii variant of Dargin and Avar language which is used with Avars from the region who arrive to the village for business and official matters. As the village is geographically closer to Kumyk, the regional center of the Lak District and historic trade center of southwestern Dagestan, the village is home to many traders and merchants. During my field excursion I stayed overnight with another local contact, toured the village, visited the school, cultural center, and met with residents.

The second half of my research trip was spent in the capital city, Makhachkala. Located in the center of Dagestan's Caspian coast, Makhachkala is the largest city in the North Caucasian Federal District with a population of nearly 600,000. As expected, it is extremely ethnically diverse however, Avars make up the largest proportion with 26.5% of the population. The city is home to nearly all of Dagestan's Russian population, who make up 9% of the total inhabitants. Russian is the primary language of interaction in the city due to its ethnic mixing, but speakers of ethnic languages may sometimes choose to speak their common languages. The city is home not only to fulltime residents but a large number of seasonal workers. The demographics are additionally different from regional areas due to the location of the republic's only universities. Although it was my second time in Makhachkala, my interactions with locals was limited due to the fact that my contacts in the city were not Avar, and because of intensified police presence, I chose to stay in a hotel. Through regional contacts from Gunibskii District however, I was able to meet up with the Foreign Language and Philology Departments at Dagestan State University.

Due to the aforementioned lack of data in sociolinguistic research of the Caucasus, a variety of methods were chosen to ensure the maximum amount of usable data. The primary focus for data collection was a series of focus group interviews conducted in Makhachkala and Gunib. I was able to record two focus groups in each location; each group with an average of five active participants. Each interview began with a visual prompt using photos from a recent local exhibition on Avar literature. The interview guideline focused on the preservation of mother tongues, relations between peoples and languages, and situations of use, contact, and potential conflict. If the focus group ended earlier than anticipated, I additionally elicited responses to the two proverbs found at the opening of this thesis.

After each focus group was complete I asked all participants to fill out a survey. I also used the survey with informal interview partners and local residents. At the end of the research trip I had collected 38 completed surveys from participants in Makhachkala, Gunib, and Megeb. The purpose of the survey was to gain a general demographic look at residents in the research locations which would help to place the interviews and observations in context. The questions were a mix of multiple choice and open ended response. The first side of the form was general demographic questions and questions about self-identification. The second side was a table where participants were asked to list all the languages in their repertoire according to their competence as well as to describe how they used each language.

As mentioned, in addition to these two sources, I conducted unstructured interviews with volunteers including; two in Makhachkala, three in Gunib, three in Megeb, one in Batsada, and one in Chok which were recorded in my field notes. These informational interviews were conducted in the course of touring through villages, during visits to homes, or simply around the village with residents who were keen to tell me about their opinions and experiences. They usually took the form of casual conversation, mostly initiated by participants, and followed topics of interest to them and the situation; although all the participants were interested in answering any of my queries.

Lastly, I was able to conduct a substantial amount of non-participant observation in all five of the research locations. Upon arrival in each new location I was introduced as a linguist which allowed locals to feel comfortable with speaking their local dialects, or code switching in a natural way. I was, with few exceptions, encouraged to photograph or record anything I found interesting to my research and took continuous field notes throughout field excursions. Because of the enormous generosity of the participants and village residents in general, I was always invited to

participate in the daily processes of village life, and as previously outlined, attended a number of special events. My observations focused mainly on speech patterns, code switching, loan words, ambient or indirect language choice, general relations and evaluations concerning language choice, textual materials, stories/anecdotes, etc.

The focus groups

The first focus group took place in Gunib at the public library. All the participants were women, until half way through the interview when a man joined the group. The majority of participants were municipal employees, mainly working in the library itself. There were no dissenting opinions in the course of the discussion. The group did not have a dominant participant and there was an overall high rate of participation within the group; only 2 of the 8 participants failed to offer opinions. Two days before the interview, when I arrived on location, there was a celebration for the Week of Children's Books during which children from surrounding schools performed different skits and recited poems and stories. During the interview there were many references to this celebration and others which are organized or take place at the library or other cultural institutions in Gunib. The recurrent theme of the discussion was their adamant assertion that the language would never go extinct.

A few days later the second focus group took place in Gunib at the cultural center. Most of the male participants were involved in cultural professions, either as professional artists and musicians or as part-time teachers of the arts; the female participants were secretaries or other municipal employees. As a mixed group the women were not as strong participants and there were much more animated debates than the previous group. Although participation was very high, again only two of the eight abstained from speaking, there were several dominant participants who was

engaged in debate during the course of the interview. Because of their backgrounds the discussion centered on cultural elements, especially music, but they also talked quite a bit about the traditional way of life and lamented the loss of interest in the younger generation. This was also the only focus group to discuss matters of faith, although they did not discuss religion specifically.

The third focus group took place in Makhachkala in the Foreign Language Department of DSU. Although the group was very large, approximately two dozen people, there were only six speakers while the others simply observed the discussion. This was most likely a combination of the department head's desire to show hospitality by assembling a large group to help and the curiosity of students who found out that an American was coming to talk to them in English.⁹⁶ The group was comprised of students from the second and third years of study as well as two professors and a secretary. In spite of the attendance of professors, and their participation in the discussion, students spoke freely and were not controlled by the elders who sat in the back of the classroom. There were very few dissenting opinions although once a professor disagreed with a student's opinion. This was the only group to discuss economic matters although they connected economic and cultural spheres and did not find that it was a major driving force.

The next day I returned to DSU to conduct the fourth focus group with the Avar language group of the Philology Department. The group was significantly smaller than the previous, approximately a dozen students and a professor, but still had only six active speakers. The students were from the third and fourth year of study and were largely more active in discussion. Although this interview was the shortest the participants were engaged in discussing their opinions with each other; disagreeing and reframing their arguments based on the sharing of personal stories. Like the

⁹⁶ I agreed in advance to speak with the students in English since they had never met a native speaker before but the focus group was conducted first in Russian.

third group, the professor sat at the back of the classroom and participated but never limited student discussion. The group discussed employment but not economic factors like the third group and shared the adamant assertion that it was simply impossible for the language to go extinct like in group one.

Survey data

I received 27 surveys from the focus group interviews and an additional 3 from the newspaper office in Gunib and 8 from the residents of Megeb. A brief look at the survey results will clarify the general linguistic situation in the research locations, which vary significantly. Based on our introduction to the research locations as well as the focus group summaries above, it is clear that the demographics of the research participants varied according to the location. In the regions the average age was 41 in Gunib and 48 in Megeb whereas of urban respondents the average age was 23. Interestingly the average level of education did not vary as expected according to region; respondents in Megeb claimed the highest overall level of education with most claiming the equivalent of an MA degree whereas participants in Gunib averaged a BA degree. Naturally, as participants in Makhachkala were primarily students between the second and fourth years of study the highest level of education was primarily a high school diploma or the equivalent of an Associate's degree. I began by looking for correlations between multilingualism and age group, level of education, and region. Because of the demographics of the study participants in each location, it is not surprising that the most significant variable was region.

In terms of native language, 100% of participants in Gunib claimed fluency in their native language, while only 86% in Megeb and 77% in Makhachkala claimed the same. This follows common knowledge concerning language shift, in that there is a higher rate of language shift in

urban areas where there is less occasion for a minority language to be spoken. As to which language was identified as a respondent's native language that also showed regional variation. Since this study is focused on Avar it is important to note that while 100% of participants in Gunib claimed Avar as their native language, only 85% in Makhachkala claimed Avar, and in Megeb 29%. Megeb is an interesting case, since as part of Gunibskii region, literary Avar is taught to all children in school as the native language. When I asked residents about it, while some said they would prefer that Dargin was taught instead, most residents were not against it. They explained there had been a vote about it and in the end Avar was chosen.

When it comes to the global fight for spheres of influence, it is obvious that Russian as both the government language and the lingua franca in the republic had the highest number of speakers. Only one participant, from Megeb, failed to claim any knowledge of Russian. What is interesting when we consider world languages is the claim that Arabic is gaining ground due to a newly enriched geopolitical identity with Islam in the Dagestan.⁹⁷ The study shows this may not be the case; of all 38 surveys, only two respondents claimed knowledge of Arabic and neither claimed fluency. As for English, the number of participants who claimed any knowledge were almost completely limited to the Foreign Language Department at DSU although English language is now compulsory in all schools in Dagestan starting from first grade.

The surveys showed that the average number of fluently spoken languages overall was highest in Megeb (2.7) followed by Makhachkala (2.4) and lastly Gunib (2). The discrepancy was also evident in the level of traditional multilingualism in knowledge of additional Dagestani languages. While 100% of respondents in Megeb claimed knowledge of at least one other

⁹⁷ In her study, Sivertseva claims that of 750 inhabitants in Khushtada, 40 were fluent in Arabic. Sivertseva, 'Culture and Ethnic Identity in Daghestan'.

Dagestani language (Avar) only 27% of respondents in Gunib responded as knowing an additional indigenous language. Furthermore, not a single Avar respondent in any location claimed to have any knowledge of Dargin. This shows the extent to which Avar as a lingua franca in the region allows Avar speakers to benefit from the concentric levels of linguistic hegemony in Dagestan.

On the other hand, the diversity of additional indigenous languages claimed on the surveys was highest among Avars with four participants claiming knowledge of some Lak, three for Kumykh, one Lezgin, and one Tsumadin; while Dargin respondents only claimed two additional languages with all respondents claiming some knowledge of Lak and one for Lezgin. The variety of other indigenous languages can be explained by the fact that Dargin respondents were from a single isolated village while the majority of Avar respondents who claimed an additional Dagestani language were from Makhachkala where there is a greater chance of interethnic mixing and contact. It is interesting to note that only one, of all the surveys, identified Kumykh language as an additional language since many people mentioned that it was once a lingua franca in the region due to the central market there. In Megeb however, as discussed above, the traditional second language for Dargins historically was Lak since their village is geographically closer to the Lak regions. This shows us that bilingualism with Russian language only endangers traditional multilingualism in urban areas where due to the high volume of interethnic contact a single lingua franca is necessary. Isolated villages with high contact with neighboring regions of different ethnic languages where traditional ways of life are largely maintained still function in a highly multilingual context.

Speakers in Megeb additionally claimed fluency in additional Dagestani languages far more often than multilingual speakers in Makhachkala. This makes sense considering the situations in which language contact occurs and the reasons speakers have for speaking another

language. By and large in urban areas people identified additional indigenous languages under the lowest category of competence “only some phrases” and identified the situations for usage with for example, “with friends”. In remote regions, such as Megeb for example, language contact extends much deeper than friendly phrases. As noted, many residents of Megeb take part in trade business, and others are municipal employees; for which they must use neighboring languages. Additionally, because of the historic contact between villages ties to members with those specific communities also reach deeper; sometimes including for example mixed marriages. While this is true across Dagestan, and particularly in Makhachkala, the culture in small villages like Megeb has retained aspects which require multilingualism. Makhachkala on the other hand, is ethnically mixed to such an extent that the use of a single common language is necessary and creates a new type of social culture in which sharing of linguistic differentiation is not a function of social order.

This brings us to the last point of the surveys which highlighted in which situations speakers used each language they claimed. These results, while difficult to codify,⁹⁸ are telling about the spheres created by multilingual speakers and evaluation of appropriate language use. The most common responses provided for Russian for example were as a common language/for travel, everywhere, for work, and at school/with friends. Speakers of Avar identified the language as useful with family, as a common language, at work, and everywhere. Dargin speakers, being the residents of Megeb exclusively, identified their native language as useful everywhere, with family, and at work.

Now that we have a clear understanding of the research locations, the residents involved in the study, and the overall linguistic situation, the discussion can turn to more nuanced analysis. The following examination will take an integrated approach; in that I will look holistically at all

⁹⁸ Agheysi and Fishman, ‘Language Attitude Studies’.

the study's data focusing on three general themes; processes of multilingualism, identity, and beliefs and feelings about language shift and extinction. Considering the presentation of general survey results above centred on multilingualism, we will begin the next phase of analysis on this theme.

Multilingualism

When it comes to multilingualism, it is not only the sociocultural norm in Dagestan,⁹⁹ but highly regarded as an important and interesting part of every person's life. Among the younger participants in Makhachkala, speaking several languages is seen as fundamental to life chances, "speaking only one or two languages, it limits a person" remarked a student from the third focus group. This idea of limitations¹⁰⁰, on the other hand, was also used in Makhachkala to speak about those who only speak indigenous languages, since they would only be able to get a job in the region where that particular language is spoken.

Multilingualism has a risky darker side however; there is always the potential for competition, conflict, and misunderstanding. Yet by and large, very little discomfort or animosity was expressed in the focus group interviews. Overall, conflict over linguistic choice is avoided by what participants felt was common sense politeness. Additionally, not a single participant had distasteful feelings toward Russian language. On several occasions when asked about Russian as a colonizing language, participants not only found the idea funny but said they Dagestanis were thankful to Russian language, and that it connected them. "If not for Russian language, how would we be speaking together?!" a man in Batsada asked. Often participants talked about the change in

⁹⁹ Lazarev and Pravikova, 'The North Caucasus Bilingualism and Language Identity'.

¹⁰⁰ In Russian the meaning of the word used here is closer to being boxed into a border.

the lingua franca over time with indifference, “it is not that it is Russian specifically, Russian or not Russian, if not then which?” The function of a common language has no significant value, it is simply a means to an end without any particular connection to the people. In Makhachkala the situation is quite homogenous when it comes to interethnic mixing since a singular lingua franca, Russian, is used but the situation is much more interesting in Gunib.

As the regional center of Gunibskii region, the village is also a type of melting pot with residents originating in a variety of ethnically Avar areas, each speaking their own language variety. The village itself, like the others, has its own language variety spoken by those whose family originally hails from the center; however participants described both the use of literary Avar as a common language and the use of their own variety with non-speakers. I often asked how people from Gunib were able to function with such a high degree of linguistic mixing. A girl from the local school told me stories about how all the children were often confused as they confronted vocabulary from their friends’ various dialects they were not familiar with, but assured me that it was fun and they used the occasions to teach each other about how things are called where they come from. A man from the second focus group enthusiastically noted, “absolutely not [difficult for us]. Even it is interesting, sometimes when each has their own accent and dialect. Sometimes we try to speak in each other’s and we make jokes... it connects us.” Affective local identities were always a topic of conversation although as the survey results above showed they almost never were recorded in writing.

Concerning the appropriateness of language choice in any particular situation, the “decision” always seemed obvious to participants. There is little choice when it comes to the language speakers will choose in any interaction firstly because participants expressed the clear necessity to default to the best suited lingua franca and since each language within a person’s

repertoire has a clearly defined sphere of use. When asked if they ever encountered uncomfortable situations or if they had ever been confronted based on their language choice in an interaction the immediate response was always no; although several participants explained that perhaps that was not a function of openness but due to the fact that they themselves would never speak an unknown language in front of a non-speaker. It seems then that there is a matrix of language use in Dagestan; common languages which can be used in public spaces, native languages which are used with the family or in one's home village, and all other languages which would be spoken as a foreign language only with those people to whom it is most likely the native language. Which category a language would fall into depends on the location of a speaker at the time and for some a language may fit into several categories. During the second focus group a woman explained, "I have a daughter who speaks in Gunibskii but when she comes home with the family we make a note that she speaks in our language. I am from Kulakskii and in our family we speak exactly in ours and she automatically switches. Sometimes when I get home I forget to switch but she does it automatically. All children are like that here."

The frequency with which Avars switch codes means that language is also used very fluidly and language choice is not necessarily always dictated by the speakers but by domain. During a number of occasions I witnessed speakers using more than one language at the same time. At a meeting at the cultural center in Gunib the head of the office for Youth Sports and Culture was directing his subordinates on the next course of action in planning an event. He spoke both in Avar and Russian, flowing freely between the two every few sentences. The town meeting in Batsada was also conducted in two languages; Russian and Batsada dialect. The mayor made his official report to the inhabitants completely in Russian and when it came time for the villagers to bring their questions and complains forward the entire hall switched to Batsada dialect. In every school

I visited I also found that teachers switched languages several times a lesson; instructing in Russian, reprimanding students in the local dialect, seamlessly translating their remarks in Russian and continuing the lesson. Interestingly, the classroom was the only place I found people translating their own remarks from any language to another. At a home in Makhachkala, however, I found that younger family members would translate portions of the Russian conversation into Avar language for elders which they explained was common in situations where a deep or detailed understanding of the conversation was necessary.

During a number of observations I also found there was a high degree of transference in situations where someone was either managing, organizing, or fulfilling an official function. On work related phone calls at the office of Youth Sports and Culture, at the newspaper office, the opening ceremony of the medical centre, etc. people speaking in Avar language would use Russian words or phrases for structuring language or action; for example then, after, although, as if, numerals, etc. Inhabitants also used common Soviet era phrases and common vernacular in Russian as well as common religious phrases in Arabic.

In several of the interviews participants joked about the usefulness of speaking a language that others potentially would not understand but in every case, their compatriots were either uncomfortable, politely refuted the idea, or made sure that I understood this was not a serious suggestion. In the fourth focus group a girl told the story of a Lezgin girl who came to stay as a guest with her family. In this respect however, the second focus group discussion was the most interesting. Several participants began speaking about their stereotypes about other ethnic groups. Regarding the Dargins of Megeb some of the discussion became accusatory about their tendency to switch their identity and their habit of speaking Dargin in front of non-speakers, until one participant came forward in their defense, “but if they didn’t switch like that then they would have

left their language long ago. Even if that village hadn't been in the mountains, they would have lost their language... because here we have to survive..." With the exception of this one instance, residents of Gunib, felt strong solidarity and pride for the fact that Megebskii people had saved their language for over 600 years.

In spite of Avar's desire to use the appropriate common language, during the fourth focus group interview participants remarked how it was always possible to speak Avar with other Avars no matter their location. When asked how they would identify other members of their ethnic groups, they explained it was a matter of getting to know people; once you found out that another person was an Avar, then it was natural that you would start to speak in Avar together. The matter of ethnicity comes up often when people are getting acquainted. During an informal interview in Megeb, when I asked about the accuracy of the things I heard about Dargins in Gunib my interview partner, who frequently works in Gunib, informed me that he had encountered some difficulty when the national question came up with Avars but failed to elaborate further.

Ethnicity however, is often implied or understood without asking about a person's origins. Every focus group discussed with delight the differences in Avar dialects and how they could tell each other apart, either by vocabulary, different case endings for words, different pronunciation, or intonation. Particularly in Gunib, residents loved to point at each other and describe examples of how the words could be different. The Avar group of the Philology Department also discussed these differences but with a more serious reverence, "we listen to each other's dialects with pleasure and respect them because the literary language is made up of these dialects." The evaluation of linguistic competence and ethnicity extends beyond language variety and can have negative effects. Participants in the third focus group discussed the problems of speaking with an accent at length, "those that speak in the native language they of course know Russian; those who

move to the city, all the same they keep their accent and it is very difficult in the majority. And when they speak in Russian with an accent it is even more difficult to speak in a foreign language.” This quote shows us not only that Dagestanis face problems with Russians but also that there is negative evaluations about speakers of indigenous languages from the regions. Although a professor disagreed with the student’s assessment of village students’ ability to learn foreign language, the overall lower evaluation of students from the region was commonly shared because students from the city speak Russian with less of an accent.

Identity

As it may have become evident, the results of this study shows that the other major reason indigenous languages and their varieties continue to exist in Dagestan, aside from the tradition of multilingualism, is that for speakers of these small languages, language is so inextricably tied to their identity; meaning their understanding of what it means to be a part of their community, and without it they, and their group, would cease to exist. This was usually meant quite literally, as an artist from the second focus group explained, “a people without their language it’s like a tree, if it was without roots then it would die. A tree must have roots so that it can nurture the village.” Indeed, one of the most important poems written by the great Avar poet, Rasul Gamzatov, includes a stanza which states, “if my language were to die tomorrow, I am ready to die today.” This poem was recited at every focus group interview as well as on several other occasions, and portions of it appear on posters in school language classrooms.

Throughout the course of each focus group interview, participants connected language to a variety of cultural elements; history, traditions, the land, blood and kin ties, uniqueness, music, literature, matters of faith, etc. While this may seem obvious for sociolinguists, some of the

connections participants made can still tell researchers a lot about the evaluative extent of the native language for Dagestanis. This is particularly true when we consider religion. Across Gunibskii region, the road are lined with several types of road signs; some blue and some green. The blue signs are regular state road signs; marking villages and destinations along the roads, which feature only Russian language, but the green signs are verses from the Koran which were put up by the local municipal government. Each verse is written first in Avar and then below in the original Arabic language. The municipal government finds the naming of villages acceptable in Russian language but when it comes to religion, Avar came first. This shows us the importance of Avar language in religious practices in the region which shows us why there is so little knowledge of Arabic in the region. Indeed a participant in the second focus group tied Avar language quite tightly to spirituality, “it is through language that we have a connection to the cosmos. You see, the cosmos is up here and people are down below, if one doesn’t learn the alphabet, for example they learn Russian in school but not Avar, with all our extra letters, we will end up somewhere else [shows his hands branching off in two diverging paths upward].”

Much of the discussion in this group centered on the traditional way of life for mountainous people, as they lamented that this was slowly changing. This discussion took on two broad topics, their connection to the land and family relations. Traditional gender roles are well maintained in the region to this day. When it comes to family life, which will be discussed further below, one participant was able to summarize the significance to Avars and the preservation of their language thus, “native language in Avar means language of the mother’s milk. When a mother takes care of her child they are already receiving something of the language then, some understanding... That’s why we have such a great relationship with mothers. We believe even when a woman is pregnant it is important how you relate to her, what words you use and how you speak to her. Everyone

knows the three things a man must do in life¹⁰¹ but there is the most important role for women in the family.”

Speaking to the Avars and their connection to the land, as another participant summarized nicely, “Avars live in the mountains and other nations live lower down. Avars are a mountainous nation, we got used to the difficulties of life... and before the Soviet Union we all lived together peacefully more than now that we have democracy. But now each person lives independently and has everything he needs for himself at home. Earlier people used to help each other...” Recalling back to the discussion of Dargins’ ability to save their language, being a mountainous people was seen as a strong plus, almost a necessity, and this was a constant theme in discussion. In both focus groups in Gunib the significance of the land was discussed, as well as throughout my travels in the region in day to day conversation, not only in connection to language but also due to the fact that the territory itself has very important historical significance. As discussed in chapter two, Gunib was the site of Imam Shamil’s last stand and surrender to the Russians. The history is very much a part of everyday life in the village and discussions of Avar greatness extend into the modern period. The region is home to several national heroes, both during the Soviet era and beyond and homage is paid to them through statues in their home villages, on the walls of all schools and cultural institutions, and in local museums.

During an interview in Makhachkala a young man told me that Avars are the best at protecting their language and traditions. When I asked about this in Gunib, participants politely denied the assertion but always one participant humbly agreed, “No, there is a little something to that... because Avars are a special nation somehow. We had more heroes... and

¹⁰¹ This is commonly known among all Caucasian cultures; get married, build a house, have a son. Although in present day sometimes people refer to the three things as build a house, buy a car, have a son.

demographically... how can I explain it to you? Historically we have been a greater¹⁰² people.”

The historical legacy of the Avar nation, their ability to overcome hardship imbues everyday life and inspires a constant patriotism. During the second focus group interview, while imagining what life would be like if Avar were to go extinct a speaker explained, “With one’s own language a person feels more protected. You have situations when a person feels comfortable... and what would happen then, if a person didn’t have a place in a time of difficulty where he knew that everything would be understood?”

It is not only their great heroes which set the Avars apart from the ethnic groups of Dagestan however. Avar music was described as a cultural product which is consumed by other ethnic groups; many non-Avar Dagestanis play Avar music at their weddings, watch their concerts on TV, and play Avar music in their cars, taxis, and public transport. This was both a source of pride and introspection since it is no longer only Avars who play their traditional songs. Participants in both Gunib and Makhachkala noted that not only were other ethnic groups from Dagestan singing Avar songs, even foreigners the world over have begun learning their traditions, “Why should we leave ours behind if others are putting attention on that [our music and traditional songs]. We need to work on it and save it ourselves.” The loss of traditional music was also tied to the degradation of the language. While discussing the change in the lexicon of Avar, one participant noted, “When I listen to those kinds of old songs already I don’t completely understand. There are words which nowadays I already don’t understand [because they aren’t used by us anymore].”

¹⁰² Here the word in Russian used for great is the one which is reserved to heroic or historically significant.

Is language shift moving toward extinction?

Although concerns over the loss of tradition and the richness of the language were discussed, and participants often talked of those who were no longer speaking the language at home, participants still felt as though their language was not in any significant danger. Several focus group participants simply couldn't understand how it would be possible for the language to go extinct. This was particularly true of one participant in the fourth focus group who could not imagine that Avar speakers would not speak their native language. In the only display of disdain for those who didn't have full competence in their mother tongue, a heated debate between several students ensued: Participant 1: "...and every self-respecting person wouldn't say that our language is going extinct and he wouldn't speak in ours... when someone from the city doesn't know the native language and they try to speak it sounds strange, and people would laugh at them, it's strange..." Participant 3: "How can you say that, about people who are trying to know their language? I myself don't know the literary language well and when I speak it I mix in words from my dialect. If a person is trying and they are laughed at they would lose the desire to try." Participant 6: "If we come to the city and Russians laughed at us speaking Russian it wouldn't be good." The confusion about native language loss was shared by a participant in Gunib when she heard one of her compatriots describe a story in which one of her relatives had begun to forget Avar and replied, "How could that be? What is it some kind of illness?"

There was a constant play between the acknowledgement of language shift and the denial that Avar language had the potential to go extinct. While most people simply refuted the idea that language shift would lead to the loss of the language, the evaluation of linguistic degradation in the third focus group was enlightening, "[people are concerned today] not that it will go extinct but that it is becoming worse...not only because of globalization but now a lot of peoples are

mixing.” Ethnic mixing was a popular phrase among students in Makhachkala and while many participants spoke about wanting to live peacefully together with all nations there was a fear associated with the mixing of nations; this seemed to be the strongest reason people felt a language could be endangered. On the other hand, the constant sense of identity and pride attached to the language allowed participants to distance instances of language shift, which was always attributed to other unknown speakers, and by making it less personal and far from their communities, they could easily avoid acknowledging such linguistic endangerment. Participant 1: “While there will be alive the Avar nation there will be Avar language and nowhere is it going extinct.” Participant 2: “Even if only one person will be alive, then the language is already moving and functioning.” Throughout the trip exchanges like this between participants confirmed that many find the language inseparable from the people who speak it.

Exchanges such as this, from the first focus group show us how participants were able to accept and enjoy multilingualism while simultaneously evaluating the importance of each language; Participant 6: “language must be free... but your own should be loved, respected. The native language is the best” Participant 1: “Yes, your own is best” Participant 2: “And our language will never go extinct.” Participant 3: “No, never.” Evaluations of language repertoires were strongest in Makhachkala. During the third focus group, with the foreign language department, a student commented on the importance of native languages and linguists, “...a linguist must know any language and all languages but not English although it is a foreign language.” This speaks strongly to the clearly defined roles languages have in Dagestan; world languages are not languages which deserve special attention, they are a means to an end as well as markers of prestige, financially useful but not emotionally important. The native language conversely is a matter of deep meaning, something that is the shared responsibility of the family to maintain.

Indeed every focus group identified the sole responsibility of language conservation to rest on parents. The third focus group described it best; Participant 3: “In the family and community if he is taught to love his native language and culture then certainly he will learn it. But I can’t go to someone and say to them, ‘go and learn this.’” Participant 5: “Why did we save our languages; thanks to the fact that we have the villages and regions... only a small group can control [the continuation of a language], maybe family.” Participant 1: “[here in the city] they sit in the lessons but all the same they can’t speak in their native language... it depends on the way the family educates.”

Conclusion

This case study came to some of the same conclusions found in Dobrushina’s study of contact situations of Avars in the Charoda district. Firstly, small unrecognized ethnic groups (or in my case non-Avars) who reside in a titular region (in both cases Avar) learn the titular language as a mother tongue in school. This vastly increases multilingualism within these small ethnic communities. It also encourages the self-ascription of these small groups to Avar identity.¹⁰³ On the other hand, reciprocal bilingualism has decreased significantly as a result of majority prestige and the increase in urban social structures among Avar villages (particularly Gunib as the administrative center of the region in this study). This clearly shows that multilingualism and identity in Dagestan function within concentric spheres of cultural and socio-political hegemony.

Overall, as Sivertseva concluded in her study, self-identification is done in a multi-stratified identity structure¹⁰⁴ where people identify with Dagestan, their respective ethnic group,

¹⁰³ Dobrushina, ‘How to Study Multilingualism of the Past’.

¹⁰⁴ Sivertseva, ‘Culture and Ethnic Identity in Daghestan’.

all the way down to their native village (and language variety) depending on the relevance of the identity to the contact situation. However, as the survey results showed, official or written identities almost always default to the accepted social ethnic category writ state census categories. This further confirms the distancing of language domains where officially codified language serve republic wide functions and one's language variety and thus affective identity is relegated to personal interactions.

In terms of language shift, Lemencier-Quelquejay noted that, even if a language is not a codified literary variety, speakers are still found to be the most loyal to them as their native language.¹⁰⁵ This speaks to the fact that in and out-group ascription is based on dialectic differentiation which is known through personal contact between speakers. Additionally, multilingualism continues to persist in the republic due to process of diglossia. As Lazarev noted, both ethno-cultural and social (both socio-economic and socio-political) values are attached to language and since these values may not coincide it can lead to asymmetric double language identities.¹⁰⁶ The native language fulfills the function of identity maintenance while other languages allow Dagestanis to function within the greater society. Furthermore, traditional multilingualism creates an environment where a binary choice, between two competing languages, rarely occurs.

Furthermore, linguistic preservation is strengthened as a result of the clearly defined spheres of use for each language in a speaker's repertoire. While the state may be relied upon for the continuation of standard variants of ethnic languages, an array of lingua franca, and the state language, Russian; dialects serve a special function in the matrix of identity in the republic and the

¹⁰⁵ Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, 'Problèmes Ethno-Linguistiques et Politique Soviétique Au Daghestan'.

¹⁰⁶ Lazarev and Pravikova, 'The North Caucasus Bilingualism and Language Identity'.

expectation of speakers is that they themselves are responsible for its continuation. As these languages are both native and ancestral the depth of communicative functions in these languages is far deeper than a speaker's bilingualism in any other language. For this reason, despite varying degrees of transference, code switching, and various forms of borrowing, most speakers of small language varieties cannot fathom a world in which people would not continue to speak in their respective dialect. On the other hand language shift is an undeniable fact throughout the world and this is also true in the urban areas of Dagestan. For this reason it is not only the family which is tasked with the survival of ethnic dialects but the entire community of speakers. Indeed although the repertoires of a particular community may shift over time due to a variety of social factors, regional villages retain much of their traditional multilingualism.

Avenues for future research

It is important that work in the fields of sociolinguistic and nationalism continue in the Republic of Dagestan; for starters, studies such as this must be conducted with other ethnic groups. By continuing this research with smaller, less prestigious groups researcher could not only create an accurate map of the current linguistic matrix in Dagestan but by so doing understand more fully ethnic relations across the region. Additionally it would be of great use for linguists with knowledge of indigenous languages to conduct such studies which would give us greater insights into processes such as code switching, borrowing, and transference leading to a fuller understanding of the processes of language shift and language death. Furthermore a more pointed study of language attitudes and folk linguistics would prove fruitful in Dagestan; either by using methods such as commitment measure to study the active/cognitive component of attitudes or the

mirror image technique to more accurately judge evaluations of languages based on their perceived congruity or incongruity of a language in any given situation in a bilingual settings for instance.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Agheyisi and Fishman, 'Language Attitude Studies'.

Appendix I

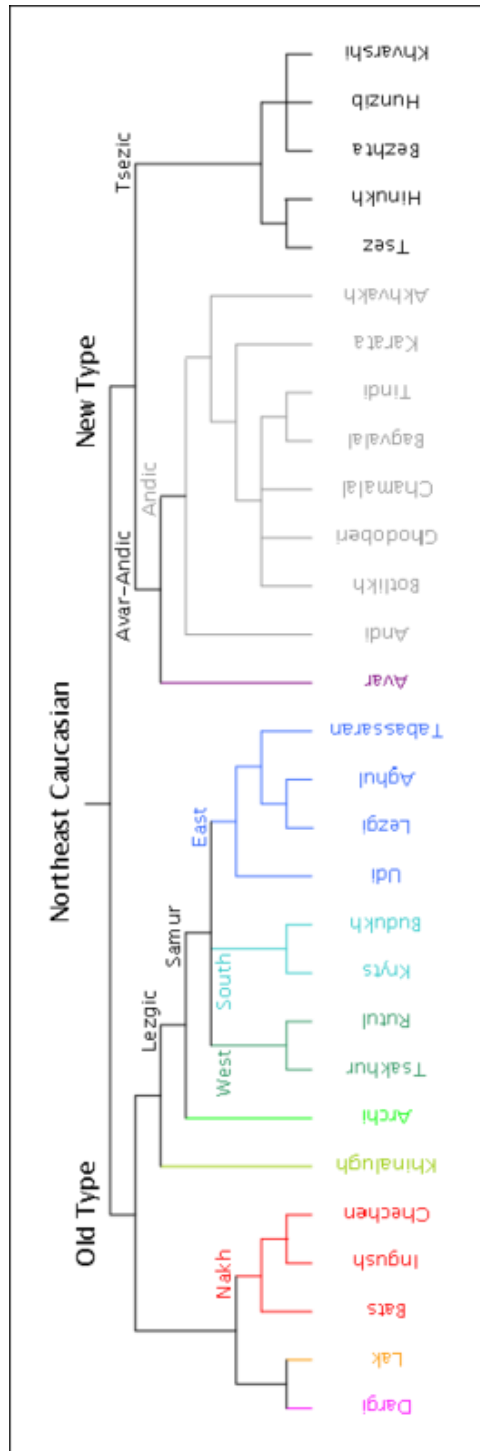
Regional map of Caucasian Isthmus.¹⁰⁸

Geopolitical map of the Caucasus Region (2008)



¹⁰⁸ http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caucasus-political_en.svg

Appendix II

Northeast Caucasian language map.¹⁰⁹

Please note that this linguistic map does not reflect relative dating. It only shows the branching and grouping of language families. Therefore, Lak and Dargi may not be closer to each other than Chechen and Ingush for example. *Inspired by the information in Schulze (2009).

¹⁰⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Northeast_Caucasian_Splits.png; Schulze, Wolfgang. "The Languages of the Caucasus"

Appendix III

The development of the Avar alphabet.¹¹⁰ Column I is a modified Arabic alphabet, column II and III modified Turkic (Azeri), column IV modified Georgian, and column V modified Cyrillic.

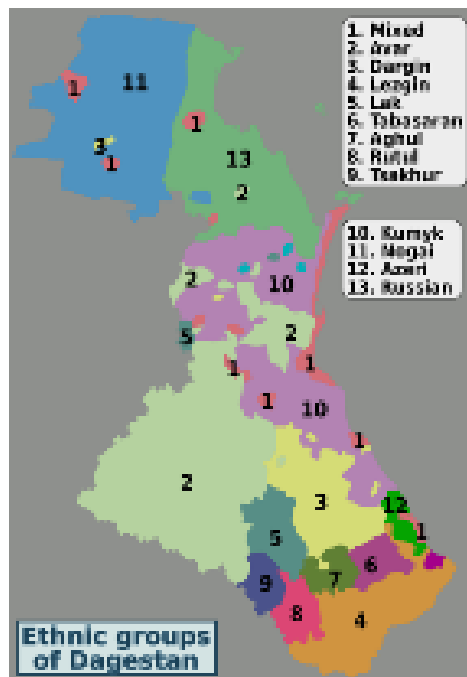
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2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9
A	A	A	A	A
B	B	B	B	B
C	C	C	C	C
D	D	D	D	D
E	E	E	E	E
F	F	F	F	F
G	G	G	G	G
H	H	H	H	H
I	I	I	I	I
J	J	J	J	J
K	K	K	K	K
L	L	L	L	L
M	M	M	M	M
N	N	N	N	N
O	O	O	O	O
P	P	P	P	P
Q	Q	Q	Q	Q
R	R	R	R	R
S	S	S	S	S
T	T	T	T	T
U	U	U	U	U
V	V	V	V	V
W	W	W	W	W
X	X	X	X	X
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Z	Z	Z	Z	Z
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[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]
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[cb]	[

I	II	III	IV	V
А а	А а	А а	А а	А а
В в	В в	В в	В в	В в
Г г	Г г	Г г	Г г	Г г
Д д	Д д	Д д	Д д	Д д
Е е	Е е	Е е	Е е	Е е
З з	З з	З з	З з	З з
И и	И и	И и	И и	И и
К к	К к	К к	К к	К к
Л л	Л л	Л л	Л л	Л л
М м	М м	М м	М м	М м
Н н	Н н	Н н	Н н	Н н
О о	О о	О о	О о	О о
П п	П п	П п	П п	П п
Р р	Р р	Р р	Р р	Р р
С с	С с	С с	С с	С с
Т т	Т т	Т т	Т т	Т т
У у	У у	У у	У у	У у
Ф ф	Ф ф	Ф ф	Ф ф	Ф ф
Х х	Х х	Х х	Х х	Х х
Ц ц	Ц ц	Ц ц	Ц ц	Ц ц
Ч ч	Ч ч	Ч ч	Ч ч	Ч ч
Ш ш	Ш ш	Ш ш	Ш ш	Ш ш
Щ щ	Щ щ	Щ щ	Щ щ	Щ щ
Ъ ъ	Ъ ъ	Ъ ъ	Ъ ъ	Ъ ъ
Ы ы	Ы ы	Ы ы	Ы ы	Ы ы
Э э	Э э	Э э	Э э	Э э
Ю ю	Ю ю	Ю ю	Ю ю	Ю ю
Я я	Я я	Я я	Я я	Я я

¹¹⁰ Атаев, Аваркий.

Appendix IV

Ethnic map of Dagestan (top).¹¹¹ Linguistic map of Dagestan (below).¹¹²



Please note the difference between the light green areas in the first map (the Avar region) compared to the same geographic location in the second map. This highlights the complexities of linguistic differentiation and ethnic amalgamation in throughout the republic.



¹¹¹ Peter Fitzgerald Jeroen, *English: Ethnic Map of Dagestan*, 12 March 2013, File:Dagestan ethnicities.svg, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dagestan_ethnicities.png.

¹¹² http://www.geocurrents.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/dagestan_Language_map.jpg

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The map shows the following districts and cities:

- Грозный** (Grozny)
- Карадаг** (Kara-Dag)
- Корода** (Koroda)
- Тур Санатор** (Tur Sanator)
- Хоточ** (Khotoch)
- Хандах** (Khandakh)
- Кегер** (Keger)
- Санта** (Santa)
- Синта** (Sinta)
- Кудам** (Kudam)
- Чох** (Chokh)
- Чох-Коммуна** (Chokh-Kommuna)
- Гамсутль** (Gamsutly)
- Обох** (Obokh)
- Мегеб** (Megheb)
- Шентода** (Shentoda)
- Сотраль** (Sotraly)
- Шулани** (Shulani)
- Мичи** (Michi)
- Бухты** (Bukhty)
- Наказух** (Nazakukh)
- Бацада** (Batzada)
- Кулла** (Kulla)
- Хуты** (Kuty)
- Ругуджа** (Rugudzha)
- Тлогов** (Tlogov)
- Урала** (Uralla)
- Алдан** (Aldan)
- Гэнода** (Gynoda)
- Карадах мост** (Kara-Dag most)

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