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# Objective and Subjective Data on Altai and Kazakh Ethnolinguistic Vitality in the Russian Federation Republic of Altai

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This study deals with the ethnolinguistic vitality of Altai and Kazakh as compared to Russian in the Russian Federation Republic of Altai. Data were gathered by document analysis, interviews with experts and by conducting a subjective ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire. The data showed that Altai and Kazakh, as a consequence of a long-lasting Russification process, have become endangered languages in Altai. The dominance of Russian is ubiquitous and hardly hampered by a growing consciousness of ethnolinguistic identity and a number of language revitalisation activities. The ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire corroborated the weak position of Kazakh as compared to Russian. For most of the indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality Kazakh informants reported significantly higher vitalities for the Russian out-group. Also a comparison at group level yielded a significant difference in favour of Russian. The Kazakh language in Altai can be considered a threatened language that will be more and more limited to the domestic domain and to speakers of the older generation. With respect to Altai a number of indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality showed higher vitalities for the Altai in-group. A comparison at group level did not show significant differences between Altai and Russian. This shows that the vitality of Altai in spite of the dominance of Russian is high and opens up possibilities for further growth.

**Keywords:** Altai, ethnolinguistic vitality, Kazakh, language policy, language revitalisation, Russification

## Investigating Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Along with many other Turkic languages, Altai and Kazakh have been under heavy Russian influence for over a century. Russification processes caused a forced shift to Russian among the speakers of these languages. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russification process has mostly ended and a growing mother tongue consciousness can be observed among Altai and Kazakh speakers as among many other titular nationalities in the Russian Federation (see e.g. Forsyth, 1992). In this paper, the language revitalisation efforts of Altai and Kazakh speakers and the relationship between ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions and mother tongue consciousness will be discussed. The language vitality of an ethnolinguistic group can be investigated in various ways. In our investigation we combine the ethnolinguistic vitality theory developed by Giles *et al.* (1977) and the typology of minority language situations developed by Edwards (1992).

Ethnolinguistic vitality theory is derived from Tajfel's (1974) intergroup relations theory and Giles' speech accommodation theory (Giles & Powesland, 1975). According to Giles *et al.* (1977) status, demography and institutional

support factors combine to make up the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group. An assessment by means of the ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire of a group's strengths and weaknesses in these domains in terms of how group members actually perceive their own group and out-group(s) on important vitality items provides a rough classification of groups as having low, medium or high vitality. Low-vitality groups are most likely to go through linguistic assimilation and will in the end cease to exist as distinctive collective groups, whereas high-vitality groups are likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings (Bourhis *et al.*, 1981). They also proposed that group members' subjective vitality perceptions may be as important as the group's objective vitality. Edwards (1992) proposed a typology for classifying a number of variables relevant to language contact situations along two parameters: group characteristics and individual characteristics of group members. Following these parameters he formulated questions concerning demographic, sociological, linguistic, psychological, historical, political, geographical, educational, religious and economic characteristics of the group and the region. Edward's taxonomic–typological model is exploratory in nature. 'It seeks distinctions rather than concentrating on those issues that present themselves as factors of language shift in the situation being researched' (Clyne, 2003: 54). In his latest evaluation of various models of language maintenance and shift, Clyne (2003) suggests that the model of Edwards (1992) may be more useful across a wide range of linguistic minority situations, not just specifically immigrant ones.

In this study, the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire of Bourhis *et al.* (1981) was utilised to collect data on the attitudes of Altai and Kazakh speakers with respect to Altai and Kazakh as compared to Russian in the Russian Federation Republic of Altai. In detailed interviews with key informants the model questions from Edwards' (1992) typology were used to get an overview of the language situation in Altai. Relevant data were gathered on numbers and concentration of speakers, the distribution of speakers in rural and urban areas, degree and type of language transmission to younger generations, degree of language standardisation, language attitudes, aspects of language–identity relationships, history and background of the groups as well as the languages in the region, degree and extent of official recognition of the languages, speakers' attitudes and involvement regarding education, language representation in the media, and so on. Both approaches proved to be viable instruments in empirical research (see e.g. Smolicz *et al.*, 2001; Yagmur *et al.*, 1999). Also in studying the language revitalisation efforts in the Russian Federation Republic of Bashkortostan, combining subjective ethnolinguistic vitality and Edwards' typology turned out to be successful (Yagmur & Kroon, 2003).

In the following sections, first, some historical, demographic and linguistic background information will be given on the Republic of Altai. After that, our findings regarding the objective language profile of the Altai and Kazakh language groups in Altai as well as our findings regarding the groups' subjective ethnolinguistic vitality will be presented. In our discussion finally we will draw comparisons between Altai and Kazakh ethnolinguistic vitalities, go into the relevance of our findings for Altai and Kazakh language

revitalisation, and formulate prognoses for the effectiveness of language revival efforts in the Altai Republic.

### **Altai: Land, People and Language**

The Republic of Altai, capital Gorno-Altaiisk, is one of the republics of the Russian Federation. It is located in the centre of Asia. Its neighbours are Kazakhstan in the South-west, China and Mongolia in the South-east and four regions of the Russian Federation (Altai Kray, Kemorovo Oblast, Republic of Khakassia and Republic of Tuva) in the north. The republic's territory is situated in the bounds of the Altai mountains and covers 92,600 km<sup>2</sup>. Forests, with numerous lakes and rivers and a unique variety in flora and fauna, cover one quarter of the area.

According to the Siberian Federal District (SFD, 2002), the Republic of Altai in 2002 had 204,900 inhabitants, 73.9% of which lived in rural and 26.1% in urban areas. The indigenous population of the republic are Altaians (31.0%). Other main groups are Russians (60.4%) and Kazakhs (5.6%). Small groups of many other nationalities live in the republic, among which Ukrainians (0.9%) and Germans (0.4%) are the most numerous. Russians are late settlers in the region. Even though migrations from other regions are not allowed, increasing numbers of Russians move into the region. In the Russian Federation as a whole live some 70,000 Altaians (Nasilov, 2002; Samaeva, 1992; Vahtre, 1991).

In the remote past the territory of Altai was the witness of manifold wanderings of peoples. A communal society existed in the area from the 3rd millennium BC, and there is evidence of a Mongolian civilisation in the 5th century BC. The Turkish khanate ruled the region from the 6th to the 10th century AD and it was under control of the Mongolian khans from the beginning of the 13th to the 18th century. Russian colonisation of Altai started in the 18th century and in 1756 the Altaians came under Russian hegemony.



**Figure 1** The Russian Federation Republic of Altai

From 1918 to 1922 a civil war was fought between Altaians and the Bolshevik forces. In June 1922 the Oyrot Autonomous Oblast was founded, which was renamed the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Oblast in 1948. In June 1991 the Gorno-Altai Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed, and in May 1992 the name Altai Republic was adopted (Samaeva, 1992; SFD, 2002)

The main indigenous language of the republic is Altai. It is one of the about 40 languages that together constitute the Turkic language family. Within this family, Altai is part of the Northern Turkic group. Modern literary Altai is relatively young as compared to other Turkic languages because its formation as an independent language took place only in the beginning of the 20th century. Altai consists of two main groups of dialects: a Southern group (Altai-Kizhi, Telengit and Teleut) and a Northern group (Tubalar, Selkup, Chelkan and Kumandin).

An Altai written language was first created by missionaries in the 19th century based on the Southern dialect Teleut. Its script was basically the Russian alphabet, supplemented with some special signs for specific Altai phonemes. This script still exists (with a short break between 1931 and 1938 when Altai was written in Latin script). In 1983 a spelling reform took place, which is basically still valid. The Altai literary language has been documented since the 18th century when the first word lists and small dictionaries were published. Altai texts were collected and published by Radlov, and the (Russian) Altai Mission translated a large number of religious texts in Altai. The first real dictionary was published in 1884. In the process of the Altai peoples becoming one nationality, the first literary Altai language turned out to be inefficient because it was based on the dialect of only a very small group. By Law of 8 December 1923, the southern Altai-Kishi dialect, which was spoken by the majority of the people in Altai, was chosen as the basis for developing a new standard literary Altai. As we have shown in Yagmur and Kroon (2003), this type of language-planning activity fits into the early stage of Soviet language policies in which official discourse supported indigenous minority languages and provisions for teaching these languages were made available. According to Leninist ideology all languages had equal status, but this position changed gradually under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev in favour of Russification policies aiming at the creation of a *homo sovieticus* without linguistic, ethnic or cultural divisions (for details see Yagmur & Kroon, 2003). The use of native languages was confined to only a very few domains and Russian became the only accepted language for educational and socioeconomic mobility, public institutions and media. Extreme Russification continued until the late 1980s when the disintegration of the Soviet Union and *perestroika* opened new possibilities for the native peoples who, according to Hagendoorn *et al.* (1998), in spite of harsh assimilation policies, had managed to maintain a sense of belonging to their language, culture and identity. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Altai reclaimed its autonomous status within the Russian Federation and started to develop new language policies that contributed to shaping the future of the Altai language.

## Objective Data on Ethnolinguistic Vitality in Altai

This section contains an overview of the sociolinguistic situation in the Altai Republic. The data presented here are based on document analysis and on information provided by the experts from the Institute of National Problems of Education (INPO) in Gorno-Altaiisk.<sup>1</sup> In presenting these data, we approximately follow the dimensions brought up in Edwards' typology, namely, the history of the area and its demography: the background of the respective groups in the region, the numbers and concentration patterns of speakers, rights and recognition of speakers; status factors: degree and extent of official recognition of respective languages and also their functional value in social and educational life, association between respective languages and economic status, type and strength of association between language and religion, group and language representation in the media; institutional support factors: degree of language standardisation, patterns of language transmission and/or acquisition, language teaching in schools, language proficiency and attitudes of speakers, and finally current language maintenance efforts.

### History and demography

In his *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, Forsyth (1992: 406) reports that

in Siberia most circumstances tended towards a decline in the use of native languages in social intercourse in general, and more particularly in the educational system. As in any multinational state or empire, the common language of communication was inevitably that of the dominant nationality, so that in the school syllabus the native language was in competition with Russian as the language of instruction, and in higher education the use of Russian was almost inevitable.

Especially after the Khrushchev policies (1958) speakers of native languages shifted to Russian. As opposed to the oppressive measures of the Stalinist era, Khrushchev introduced new policies and measures for the Russification process to be successful. One measure was strengthening the role of Russian. 'Russian as a second mother tongue for all' became the slogan, and the concept of Soviet military (one language for all soldiers from different ethnic groups) strengthened the concept and spread of Russification. The result was also highly effective in the Altai region. Nowadays, in the towns of Altai, the major means of communication is Russian, however, Altai is more common in the rural areas. According to Vahtre (1991), as a consequence of the 1950s collectivisation policies the originally nomadic Altaians were forced into permanent settlement, which led to the formation of mixed population Altai-Kazakh and Altai-Russian villages. The majority of the Altai population now is bilingual, and Russian has a strong influence on Altai (Nasilov, 2002).

Historically speaking, the main hallmarks in the rise of Russian in Siberia were the 1938 decree 'On the obligatory study of the Russian language in schools in the national republics and territories' and the 1959 decree 'On reinforcing the connection between school and life and the further development of the educational system in the RSFSR'. It is important to point out that especially the 1938 decree set the legal basis for not developing education

programmes in native languages. According to Forsyth (1992) these pieces of legislation gave the parents the right to choose in which language their children would be taught and as such led to an increase in the use of Russian in schools, especially among the smaller nationalities of Siberia.

The Russian Constitution of 1993 in Article 68 explicitly guaranteed the right for the republics 'to institute their own state languages. They shall be used alongside the state language of the Russian Federation in bodies of state power, bodies of self-government and state institutions of the Republics' and the right to all peoples 'to preserve their native language and to create the conditions for its study and development' (Ruiz Vieyetz, 2002: 40). These constitutional rights were secured in the 'Law on Languages of the Altai Republic' of 3 March 1993. Article 4 of this law reads as follows: 'State languages of the Altai Republic are Altai and Russian. Russian is also used as a basic language in international communication. Kazakh is used in official spheres of communication in places where speakers of Kazakh are concentrated.'

Even though promotive measures had been taken to adopt pluralism in the Russian Federation in the early 1990s, the Russian position concerning native language instruction is still cautionary. Policy makers claim that the emphasis on mother tongue teaching, such as the introduction of Altai as a compulsory school subject for children of Altai background and an elective subject for children from other ethnic backgrounds, would lessen the importance of Russian teaching and suggest that the symbolic value of Russian teaching should not be hampered by emphasis given to mother tongue education. A recent tendency in the Russian Federation administration, therefore, seems to be to restrain Altai educational unity. A Russian Federation decree of 24 March 2001, nr. 255, refers to the Kumandin, Telenghit, Tulabar and Chelkan as independent peoples. As, according to the Russian Constitution, every people has the right to develop and teach its own language, this development can have a negative effect on the status and development of literary standard Altai. Therefore, this political move also aims at reinforcing the lingua franca role of Russian in Altai Republic. According to Kouzmine (2004), an important issue here is the (draft) Law on the State Educational Standard of General Education, which is now under preparation by the Gosduma of the Russian Federation. This law must guarantee continuity and integration of the educational space 'vertically', that is the succession of educational programmes in consecutive stages of general education being realised on a monolingual and monocultural Russian basis, but it must also provide a framework for unity of the main goals and contents of education in Russian schools 'horizontally', that is irrespective of the content of education (Russian or national, monocultural or bicultural), and irrespective of the language of instruction (native non-Russian or Russian non-native). Also in view of the contemporary public discourse in the Russian Federation that seems to favour a more monocultural and monolingual position, it is as yet unclear whether this ambition can be realised.

### Status

Although the main indigenous ethnos and language in Altai Republic are the Altaians and their Altai language, there is an absolute dominance of Russian. Janhunen (1993) even reports Altai to be an endangered, nearly extinct language, as only about 20,000 Altaians can speak it. In the Southern Altai rural areas of Ust-Kansky, Ongudajsky, Ulagansky and Kosh-Agachsky, Altai is still spoken and acquired as a mother tongue. The Russians mainly live in the urban centres of the country in the Northern Altai regions of Chemalsky, Shebalinsky and Ust-Koksinsky. There, only the elder generation speaks Altai. As a consequence of contact between speakers of Russian and Altai and also due to mixed marriages, Russian–Altai bilingualism exists with Russian as the dominant language of Altai speakers.

Altai language is historically claimed to be the root of all Turkic languages, and it is also highly associated with Shamanism. Altai language's symbolic function, therefore, is much higher than its communicative function. According to our key-informants,<sup>2</sup> Altaians in general feel proud of speaking Altai and ashamed of not knowing the language. Altai language is an important dimension of Altai identity and 'spirit'. Altai people practice either Shamanism or Orthodox Christianity, and the Shamans are known to only speak Altai during all kinds of worships, which highly contributes to the prestige of the language. The same positive attitude towards their language is reported for the speakers of Kazakh. Being Muslims in the case of Kazakhs, however, there is no direct link between language and religion because Arabic is the language of the Koran. Altaians and Kazakhs are reported to have a positive attitude towards each other's languages and also the Russian majority is reported to have a positive attitude towards Altai.

Apart from some 1000 Kazakhs in the Altai capital Gorno-Altaysk, the Kazakh population mainly lives in the remote rural regions of Kosh-Agachsky on the border of China and Mongolia, and in the South-west of the country bordering the Republic of Kazakhstan where contact with Russian is highly limited and Kazakh language maintenance is rather strong. Kazakh, however, is not necessarily acquired as a mother tongue in all homes and, according to our informants, an estimate of 5–10% of all Kazakhs are reported to be weak in their native language. A home language survey conducted among school children also confirms the interview findings (see below). There is furthermore strong lexical and semantic influence of Russian on the Kazakh language. Many speakers of Kazakh seem to use a newly emerging code, combining Kazakh syntax with Russian words. Also codemixing is highly common. In places where Altai and Kazakh people live together, they have spoken competence in both languages. When these people speak to each other, they speak either in Altai or Kazakh. Very interestingly, when Kazakh and Altai people visit each other's home, the host's first language is the medium of communication.

With respect to the socioeconomic status of ethnolinguistic groups in Altai it can be suggested that until the 1990s, key government positions were mainly held by Russians. Although educated Altaians meanwhile had acquired white collar jobs, Russian dominance in public institutions, also after *perestroika*,

continued. Interestingly, the 1997 elections led to a redistribution of power to the advantage of the Russian-speaking population. Given the socialist past, persons who hold power in government institutions are economically better off. In rural areas Russians and Altaians are more or less comparable in terms of socioeconomic status. The position of Kazakhs depends on the region where they live but they are mainly farmers. The number of Russians in Altai is increasing as local Russians do not emigrate and considerable new Russian groups come in for settlement.

### **Institutional support**

Figures of the Russian Federation Ministry of Education covering the years 1993–2000 show that the Republic of Altai has a rather stable number of schools with tuition in Altai and Kazakh (see Table 1). Without exception, these schools are located in rural areas. The number of schools offering Altai and Kazakh as a subject increased in the same period from 77 to 108 and from 8 to 14 respectively. Less than 10% of these schools are located in urban areas.<sup>3</sup> The number of children visiting schools with tuition in Altai and/or Kazakh, however, has been diminishing over the years. According to Nasilov (2002), using Altai in education is, among other things, hampered by dialectal differences, especially in pronunciation. Policy makers claim that because teachers themselves are dialect speakers, they are often not able to correct their pupils in this respect. Such assumptions, in a way, reflect the policy makers' attitudes towards the place of dialect use in education. Apparently, they favour standard language use above all other varieties.

In Altai, like everywhere, parents want the best education for their children. For that reason, the majority of Altai and Kazakh speakers, notwithstanding their positive language attitudes, and notwithstanding the availability of Altai- and Kazakh-medium alternatives, send their children to Russian-medium schools, which in a way explains the declining number of pupils in Table 1.

When language use and proficiency patterns are examined, a clear language revitalisation pattern can be distinguished. When census figures are compared with the latest home language survey figures, the effects of Altai language maintenance efforts can be seen. A comparison of census figures in Siberia between 1959 and 1989 shows a reduction in the percentage of non-Russian people claiming their ancestral language as their native language. According to the 1959 census, 88.7% of the Altaians considered themselves as native speakers of Altai. After 1991, the legal status of Altai was elevated in the Altai Republic, leading to higher prestige among its speakers. Accordingly, in 1994, 89.6% of the population considered themselves as speakers of Altai but only 2% were fluent in the language, whereas 73% were fluent in Russian. The findings of a recent home language survey among 509 primary school pupils in Altai showed an increasing interest in Altai language (Aznabaeva *et al.*, 2001). In Gorno-Altaiisky schools, 68.1% of the children reported Altai to be their mother tongue, while 19.7% reported Kazakh and 7.3% reported Russian. 64.2% of the children reported that they use both Altai and Russian in their homes. In terms of language proficiency, pupils report that they can understand (63.2%), speak (57.4%), read (57.8%) and write (51.3%) Altai. Apparently,

Table 1. Mother tongue education figures for Altai and Kazakh

School year	Schools with tuition in Altai and Kazakh		Schools with Altai and Kazakh as a subject		Children in schools with tuition in Altai and Kazakh	
	Altai	Kazakh	Altai	Kazakh	Altai	Kazakh
1993–94	66	3	77	8	4,795	497
1994–95	68	1	111	13	4,642	156
1995–96	63	1	106	14	4,661	161
1996–97	66	1	96	13	4,492	163
1997–98	64	–	80	12	4,197	–
1998–99	64	1	102	14	3,601	154
1999–00	66	1	108	14	3,346	128

an increase in the number of Altai-medium schools and language revitalisation measures show their effect on language proficiency of younger generations.

As far as institutional support of Altai is concerned, further reference can be made here to 10 weekly hours of radio broadcasting in Altai and to a bilingual TV station, which broadcasts seven hours per week in Altai. The main newspapers in Altai language are *Altaidyn Cholmony*, *Zvezda Altaja*, *Ullalu* and *Adzu*, and six or seven local district papers. Several publishers provide the Altai speakers with fiction, novels, children's literature and magazines and textbooks in Altai. Before the 1990s Kazakh newspapers used to come from Kazakhstan but since 1996 subscription to these newspapers by Altai people is not possible, which is why local Kazakhs in Altai started editing their own newspapers.

### Language revitalisation

In order to reverse language shift (Fishman, 1991), serious efforts have been made to revitalise Altai. Janhunen (1993) suggests that because of a rise of ethnic revival in the Altai region, the status and use of native languages might improve in the future. Also Forsyth (1992) refers to the revival of interest in national cultural traditions that developed in all parts of the Soviet Union in the 1970s and also emerged among the Siberian native intelligentsia, leading to a kind of 'native rights movement', e.g. in Altai where national feelings were stirring in the late 1980s around the (successful) opposition against the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the river Katun valley (leading to devastation of the cattle rearing economy and culture of the native people).

According to our informants, following 30 years of Russification, after 1990, the government, the intelligentsia, teachers, families and citizens supported mother tongue revitalisation efforts in Altai. Due to a psychological continuation of Russification, many parents and teachers at the time were still against native-language education. The Altai government, however, created important and well paid jobs for Altai speakers, which considerably increased the status of the language. The top-down government programme to revive the Altai language is effective. Not only structural changes but also symbolic moves are carried out to strengthen the position of Altai. The government, for instance, established a terminology commission for enriching the language, and Altai-language teachers were at the same time trained as English teachers. In the schools where they work, they now teach both Altai and English. In this way, the international prestige of English is associated with Altai and parents are tempted to send their children to such schools.

Until *perestroika*, speaking Altai or Kazakh in public institutions was forbidden, but after 1990 this ban was lifted. When Kazakh and Altai speakers now visit public institutions, mostly Russian is spoken, but again the language of communication is often dependent on the public servant's first language. According to our key informants, the Republic of Kazakhstan played a role in the revival of Kazakh in Altai by giving scholarships to students of Kazakh background, who live in Altai, to study at Kazakh universities in Kazakhstan. The motivation for mother-tongue education in Kazakh is low because university education in Altai is only in Russian. Lack of qualified teachers,

mother-tongue books and teaching materials are furthermore serious problems faced by Kazakhs in Altai. Kazakhstan is reported to support Kazakh mother-tongue education and Altai–Kazakh cultural movements in Altai.

An important impetus for supporting the revival of the Altai language has been the organisation of national conferences and workshops, such as the public round table on Language Policy in Education at the Pedagogical College in Gorno-Altai (2000) and a local conference in Northern Altai (2001) to discuss language revival efforts. At the 2000 event, which was covered by articles in *Ulalu* (17.5.2000) and *Altaidyń Cholmony* (3.5.2000), the educational foundations of mother-tongue education, methods and theory of teaching, multilingual education and the issue of educating students with different proficiency levels in the same classroom were discussed, and a mother-tongue council was established, in which language teachers, government officials and researchers collaborate to improve the quality of Altai-language education in schools. Another consequence of the round table was the adoption of a law on Altai as a compulsory school subject for children of Altai background and an elective subject for all other children (see above). Ethnic Russians in Altai (unsuccessfully) protested against this law with the belief that the children's rights were violated. Plans for obligatory learning of Altai as a school subject by all children are being discussed now. In the 2001 conference, school authorities mainly discussed recently developed Altai textbooks, some of which were found not to be appropriate for dialect speakers of Altai. Also a decision was made to design teacher-training books, and all kinds of materials for standard Altai teaching in all schools. As a result of the conference a group of researchers conducted a field study in Northern Altai to assess the proficiency level in the Northern dialect. Furthermore a large Northern Altai language corpus was built, and a council for Northern Altai was established. The Altai case was finally presented at the 2001 UNESCO Paris conference 'Indigenous Identities: Oral, Written Expressions and New Technologies' and at the 2002 Moscow conference 'Content of Education in Polyethnic Russia under Modern Conditions' that was hosted by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation.

In Altai, new language laws caused an increased mother-tongue consciousness. Attitudes towards Altai and Russian changed considerably. In the next section, on the basis of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions, the factors contributing to the vitality of Altai and Kazakh will be outlined so that the process of language revitalisation in Altai can be fully understood.

## Subjective Data on Ethnolinguistic Vitality in Altai

### Instruments and informants

In order to find out the subjective views of Altai and Kazakh group members with respect to Russian, Altai and Kazakh vitality, a Russian translation of the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire of Bourhis *et al.* (1981) was used.<sup>4</sup> We deliberately chose a Russian-language version of the questionnaire, as, according to our informants, not all younger Altaians would have sufficient proficiency in Altai or Kazakh. The questionnaire

involved rating Russian and Altai, and Russian and Kazakh groups on 22 items, measuring group vitality on the three dimensions of demographic factors, status factors and institutional support factors respectively. Altai and Kazakh respondents rated Russian and Altai and Russian and Kazakh vitalities respectively on 7-point Likert scales. In the questionnaire, 1 stood for lowest vitality, while 7 stood for highest vitality. The ordering of the scales was counterbalanced across the 22 items and bipolar (positive–negative) ratings, which were reversed on alternate questions.

The questionnaire was administered to 233 Altai informants in and around Gorno-Altai. As a differential locality effect of Russification was expected (Altai language use was more common in rural than in urban communities), different groups from rural and urban backgrounds were targeted. Accordingly, 129 informants from urban areas (mean age = 19.39) and 93 informants from rural areas (mean age = 18.65) completed the questionnaire (11 informants did not specify their regional background). The number of female informants (174) was more than male informants (54), while five informants did not provide any gender information. The questionnaire was also administered to 206 Kazakh informants in the Kosh-Agachsky region. As the Kazakh speakers mainly live in rural areas in Altai, no urban group was included in the study. There were 70 male (mean age = 33.96) and 132 female informants (mean age = 31.98), while four informants did not specify their gender.

## **Findings**

The sociolinguistic and sociohistorical situation in Altai has been briefly described in the previous sections along with Edwards' (1992) typology. The objective data show that a number of measures have been taken to revitalise Altai and, albeit to a lesser extent, Kazakh in Altai Republic. On the basis of this affirmative climate, one would expect language revitalisation to be in process. Community support for the native language, however, is the most essential factor here. And as it turns out, given the fact that Russian still has the role of lingua franca in Altai, many parents still send their children to Russian-medium schools for pragmatic reasons (a good university education, job prospects and so on). The group members' subjective views concerning the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group are crucial for community support and consequently for language revitalisation to take place. Given the fact that Altai and Kazakh went through severe Russification processes in the last century, one would expect a very low vitality among the Altai and Kazakh speakers, especially in urban areas. Also in view of the fact that languages other than Russian had very few domains of use, the functional and instrumental value of Altai and Kazakh was highly limited. Under such negative circumstances, it is hard to expect high vitality measures among the group members.

In statistical analysis of the data, SPSS (Version 9) was used. Following earlier research using the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire, the data were also subjected to factor analysis. This analysis led to an uninterpretable multifactor solution, which is why in the following basically descriptive statistics are used. In Table 2, subjective ethnolinguistic vitality

**Table 2** Vitality ratings of Altai–Russian ( $n = 233$ ) and Kazakh–Russian ( $n = 206$ ) in Altai

<i>Questionnaire variables</i>	<i>Vitality of</i>		<i>Vitality of</i>	
	<i>Altai</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Kazakh</i>	<i>Russian</i>
Demographic factors				
Proportion of population nationally	3.64	4.87	2.88	5.18
Proportion of population locally	3.97	5.28	3.21	5.26
Birth rate	3.75	4.50	3.95	3.83
Exogamy	4.55	4.60	4.88	4.33
Immigration	4.14	3.19	3.78	4.35
Emigration	4.92	3.81	5.07	4.32
Status factors				
Language status locally	5.39	5.49	3.43	6.18
Language status internationally	3.54	2.77	4.52	2.01
Groups' control over economics and business	4.45	4.93	3.96	5.30
Groups' status	5.34	4.48	4.38	5.47
Groups' political power	3.75	3.06	4.24	2.74
Group's pride of cultural history and achievements	6.03	4.59	5.89	5.17
Group's cultural representation	5.24	5.06	4.90	5.44
Groups' strength and activity	4.73	5.39	4.43	5.49
Groups' wealth	4.54	5.04	4.71	5.02
Groups' future strength and activity	5.21	4.79	4.87	5.28
Institutional support factors				
Language used in government services	3.16	6.11	2.64	6.12
Language used in mass media	3.35	2.48	5.39	1.89
Language taught in schools	4.99	5.56	2.99	6.15
Language used in business institutions	3.51	5.70	2.94	6.15
Language used in places of religious worship	3.28	2.71	3.01	2.77
Contact between Altaians and Russians	4.92	5.11		

ratings of 233 Altai and 206 Kazakh informants (urban and rural altogether) are presented. Based on Table 2, first the findings with respect to Altai–Russian vitality and after that the findings for Kazakh–Russian vitality will be presented.

In each of the three groups of factors there are a number of significant differences between the vitality measures of the Altai and Russian groups (irrespective of locality). These differences do not, however, unidirectionally show higher ratings for the Russian group, as one would expect given the massive Russification process of the last century and the resulting dominant position of Russian in Altai. In the group of demographic factors, for some variables, e.g. proportion of population on a national (1) and on a local level (2) as well as birth rate (3), the vitality of the Russian group is rated higher, whereas in other cases, e.g. immigration (5) and emigration (6), the Altai group's vitality is rated higher. In the group of status factors, variables that refer to material aspects like control over economic and business matters (9), strength and activities (14) and wealth (15), show higher vitality ratings for the Russian group, whereas the status of the Altai language (8), the Altai group's status (10), its political power (11), its cultural pride (12), and its expected future strength and activities (16) are rated higher than Russian. Altaians seem to be especially proud of their language, which is, as a matter of fact, considered to be the cradle of the Turkic language family, and their cultural heritage and activities. Looking at institutional support factors, finally, it becomes clear that Russian is considered the dominant language in government services (17), schools (19) and business institutions (20), whereas Altai is clearly considered as the language of religious worship (21) – which, in view of the influence of Shamanism, is understandable – and the mass media (18). Looking at the influence of regional background, *t*-tests showed a significant difference between urban and rural informants' vitality rating for only three variables: the status of the Russian group ( $T = -2.638$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ) and its future strength ( $T = -2.147$ ;  $p = 0.033$ ) were rated higher by the rural informants, whereas the local proportion of the Russian population ( $T = 2.322$ ;  $p = 0.21$ ) was rated higher by urban informants.

In order to see the group differences with respect to total Russian and Altai vitality scores, for each informant a vitality score was computed, and on the basis of these scores a total score for each group was calculated and turned into a Russian and Altai vitality scale (for details of this procedure see Yagmur & Kroon, 2003). Between these two scales a *t*-test was done but no variation was observed between the groups. In other words, irrespective of their background, Altai informants perceived Russian and Altai vitalities alike and on the group level there are no indications whatsoever of lower ethnolinguistic vitality for the Altai minority group and language. This outcome, in combination with the outcomes on the level of separate variables, can be interpreted as a sign of high ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions of the own group, which is in line with the revitalisation efforts reported and the high self-esteem of the Altai group expressed during the interviews with key informants. Altai identity and 'spirit' in combination with the Altai language stand out to be overarching core values for the Altai group.

**Table 3** *t*-Test between Kazakh and Russian vitality scores

<i>Dimension</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T-value</i>	<i>p</i>
Russian and Kazakh vitality	Russian vitality	98.47	9.57	13.690	0.000
	Kazakh vitality	86.08	12.82		

Also for the Kazakh and Russian groups a number of significant differences between the vitality measures are observed. These differences are, however, more than in the case of the Altai figures, pointing in the direction of higher ethnolinguistic vitality of the Russian group. In spite of their isolated position, in each of the three groups of factors, Kazakh speakers tend to report lower vitality ratings for the Kazakh in-group than the Russian out-group. Concerning demographic factors, e.g. only exogamy (4) and emigration (6) show higher ratings for the Kazakh group. In the group of status factors this applies to the international status of Kazakh (8), the Kazakh group's political power (11) and the group's pride of its cultural history and achievements (12). Rating Kazakhs' international status higher than Russian is highly intriguing, for which we cannot provide any plausible explanation. In the group of institutional support factors, finally, only Kazakh use in mass media is rated higher. For the rest, Russian receives higher vitality ratings.

In order to see differences with respect to total Russian and Kazakh vitality scores on the group level, in the same way as described with the Altai data, we constructed Russian and Kazakh vitality scales and carried out a *t*-test. In Table 3, the results on the informants' Altai and Russian vitality ratings are presented.

As shown in Table 3, in the eyes of Kazakh informants, Russian vitality is significantly higher than Kazakh vitality. Given the position of the Kazakh minority and its language within Altai, which is clearly less strong than the Altai position, the Altaians after all being the name-giving ethnos of the republic, and the fact that Russian enjoys considerable institutional support in education and in all public institutions, this difference is not at all surprising.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Our findings with respect to Altai and Kazakh versus Russian ethnolinguistic vitality in the Republic of Altai show clear similarities and at the same time remarkable differences. This applies not only to the two types of data that were gathered but also to the two ethnic groups that were the object of our investigation.

First of all, our objective data made clear that Altai and Kazakh, as a consequence of a massive and long-lasting Russification process, have become so-called endangered languages in Altai Republic. Notwithstanding the fact that both (mutually comprehensible) languages belong to the Turkic language family, which has millions of speakers all over the world, the number of speakers of the languages was reported to be limited. In the case of Altai only about 55,000 people were reported to have Altai as a mother tongue and only a

very limited amount of them were reported to be fluent in the language (Grimes, 2001). The number of Kazakhs in Altai amounts to only some 11,000 people and also in this case the number of fluent speakers of a Kazakh variety seemed to be limited. In other words, in Altai Republic, Altai and Kazakh are really acquired as a mother tongue only in a limited number of families. In addition to this not very favourable situation for language maintenance, figures provided by the Russian Federation Ministry of Education showed that in the years 1993–2000 only a very limited and still decreasing number of Altai and Kazakh pupils used the possibility of attending schools where Altai and Kazakh are languages of tuition. Although the 'Law on languages of the Altai Republic' in 1993 declared Altai, together with Russian, as a state language of the republic, and referred to Kazakh as a language used in official spheres of communication where Kazakh speakers are concentrated, the objective dominance of Russian in Altai Republic can be qualified as ubiquitous and inescapable. This clear dominance of Russian is hardly hampered by a growing consciousness with respect to ethnic and linguistic identity and a number of language revitalisation activities that were reported to have taken place in Altai Republic in recent years with regard to Altai and Kazakh. Members of the Altai intelligentsia mainly initiate these revitalisation efforts that seem to be closely connected to what was referred to as an Altai 'spirit', in which ethnic identity, language, Shamanism and a feeling of belonging to nature are the main ingredients. In the case of Kazakh, revitalisation efforts, in which a considerable support comes from the Republic of Kazakhstan, are much more limited and less influential than in the case of Altai.

As far as the Kazakh group is concerned, the outcomes of the ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire corroborated the objectively weak position of Kazakh as compared to Russian. For the majority of demographic, status and institutional support indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality the Kazakh informants reported significantly higher vitality for the Russian out-group. A comparison at group level yielded a significant difference in favour of Russian. If Bourhis *et al.*'s (1981) claim holds, that subjective ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions are in the end decisive for the possibilities of an endangered language to survive, the combined objective and subjective data for the Kazakh group lead to a rather negative prognosis. As far as we can see on the basis of our data, which were provided by informants with a mean age of about 30 years, the Kazakh language in the Altai Republic can, in terms of Fishman's (1991) scale, really be considered a threatened language, going in the direction of Stage 8 (Social isolation of a few remaining speakers of the minority language). Without intensive governmental measures and support and also without a change in the Kazakh in-group's low ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions, Kazakh will become a language that will be more and more limited to the domestic domain and to speakers of the older generation.

With respect to the Altai group, the picture is somewhat different. The outcomes of the ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire show that the Altai group of informants reported higher vitalities for the Altai in-group than for the Russian out-group for a number of indicators. A comparison at group level, however, did not yield significant differences between Altai and Russian. Against the background of the objectively strong position of Russian

in Altai society, this is a remarkable outcome, especially in view of the rather young age of the informants (mean age about 19 years). It shows the vitality of Altai in spite of the dominance of Russian and opens up possibilities for further growth, i.e. for climbing in the direction of Fishman's (1991) Stage 1 (Use of the minority language in higher education, central government and national media).

The main reasons for this difference between Kazakh and Altai, apart from objective demographic, socioeconomic status and institutional support factors, in our view can be found in the stronger ethnolinguistic identity of the latter as reflected in the subjective but nevertheless very real concept of Altai 'spirit'.<sup>5</sup>

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### Notes

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2. See note 1.
3. These figures were collected and provided to us by Oksana Pustogacheva.
4. We are grateful to Georgii Khruslov (INPO Moscow) for translating the questionnaire into Russian and to Oksana Pustogacheva, Elena Chichmanova and Tolganai Mukhtasirova for their cooperation in data collection.
5. During our research visit to Altai, this 'spirit' was communicated to us by means of folkloristic performances by pupils at the schools that welcomed us as well as in various 'spiritual' activities in the overwhelming natural environment of mountainous Altai.

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