

Research Article

Ekaterina Protassova*, Maria Yelenevskaya

Introduction: Everyday Verbal and Cultural Practices of the Russian Speakers Abroad

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0191>

received September 12, 2023; accepted September 13, 2023

Abstract: The Russian-speaking space plays an important role for diasporans: starting a business, founding a company, seeking legal advice, or high-quality medical treatment is always more convenient when participants understand the nuances of communication in a common language. It facilitates the understanding of highly specialized fields such as legislation and medicine. In business, it makes presumptions and expectations transparent, and common values allow the quality scale to be defined and shared. The sphere of activities conducted in the diaspora in Russian depends on the contingent of immigrants: their education, career aspirations, and interests. Integration in a new society is closely linked to the level of language proficiency in the local language/s and also in English as the lingua franca of science, commerce, and entertainment. Yet, Russian often competes with the other languages and serves as a unifying factor for communities with a background in the former Soviet Union. In the present special issue, the authors combine sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology while analyzing the everyday verbal and cultural practices of Russian speakers abroad. Observations of communication in immigrant groups reveal the cultural potential of the speakers as reflected in their discourse. They demonstrate a variety of lifestyles and practices, but have a strong sense of cultural identity.

Keywords: immigrant expectances and realities, Russian-speaking diaspora, language commodification, lifestyle, homemaking, arranging space in immigration

Placing Russian Speakers on the Globe

Even before the war in Ukraine, which triggered a real exodus from Russia, Shcherbakova analyzed the dynamics of migration in the last years relying on the official statistics of the Russian Federation. She showed that the number of migrants leaving Russia for permanent residence (or extended stay) in other countries had increased after the expansion of migration criteria. In 2011, the number of departures from Russia increased by just 13%, while in 2012, it grew by 3.3 times. In 2013, the number of departures from Russia grew by another 52%, in 2014 by 66%, and in 2015 by 15%. In 2016, the number of departures from Russia dropped by 11%, but in the next 2 years, it began to rise again: by 20% in 2017 and by 17% in 2018, when the number of emigrants reached nearly 441,000. In 2019, the number of emigrants decreased by 6%, dropping to 416,000. According to the data elicited for January–December 2020, the number of people who left Russia due to a change of residence (extended stay) increased again to almost 488,000 people or 17% compared to 2019 (411,000). Among emigrants from Russia, the proportion of people going to a permanent place of residence in neighboring countries was noticeably lower until 2011, ranging from 46% (2004) to 67% (2007). In 2011, it amounted to 61% of emigrants who cancelled their domicile registration at the place of residence, and 65% among all emigrants

* **Corresponding author: Ekaterina Protassova**, Department of Languages, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, e-mail: ekaterina.protassova@helsinki.fi

Maria Yelenevskaya: Department of Humanities and Arts, Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, Israel

registered under the new rules (at the place of residence and at the place of stay for a period of 9 months or more). In 2012, the share of departures to the commonwealth of independent states (CIS) and Baltic countries, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia exceeded 80% of the total number of emigrants from Russia and, gradually increased (with the exception of 2016, when it decreased to 84%), reaching almost 89% in 2019. According to the data for January–December 2020, the share of emigrants who left Russia for neighboring countries amounted to 86.7%, including 85.5% departing to the CIS countries. Until 2012, Russian citizens prevailed (94–96% in 2002–2010 and 80% in 2011) among the registered emigrants from Russia. Automatic deregistration at the end of the stay led to an increase in the share of foreign citizens among migrants leaving Russia – up to 84% in 2015 compared to 18% in 2011 and 2–4% in the previous years. Then, it slightly decreased, amounting to 80% in 2016, 81% in 2017, 83% in 2018, and about 82% in 2019. By contrast, the share of Russians leaving the country decreased to 15% in 2015. In 2016, it was 19 and 17–18% in 2017–2019.

Savina and Artamonov are convinced that there is a significant difference between Russian statistics and those published outside the country's borders, because in Russia, only those who leave the country having declared their status are counted, while abroad, all newcomers are registered. Those who identify themselves as Russians, but are no longer citizens, are lost for the Russian statistics. Descendants of emigrants who have retained their linguo-cultural identity and some affinity with Russia are not accounted for either. One can conclude that there are many more Russians abroad than tracked by emigration or immigration statistics. In the United States, e.g., 2.6 million people announced their Russian origin or heritage in 2017, a decrease from 2010 when the corresponding number was 2.9 million. At the same time, 936,000 US residents indicated Russian as the main language of their home communication in 2017, marking an increase from 854,000 in 2010. In 2018, the Russian language hit ninth place in the ranking of the most common home languages in the United States. In Germany in 2017, 1.4 million indicated that they came from Russia, and about 14% of German households of foreign origin speak Russian. Both estimates may be inaccurate, because most of the Russian-speaking ethnic Germans immigrated from Kazakhstan and most of the Jews came from Ukraine, whereas at home, German is used along with Russian. Most of those who left the country before the beginning of the war in Ukraine were young, single, educated, and ambitious. They chose countries in the “far abroad” more frequently than CIS countries. They preferred China, South Korea, and India; older people chose Germany, Georgia, and Israel. The new emigration flows from Russia are more often directed towards Armenia, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Latin America (which were visa-free for citizens of Russia). Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Baltic countries, first of all Latvia, were also popular destinations. But the war changed the immigration policies of these countries, and Russian citizens are now banned from these countries, with the exception of diplomatic, humanitarian, and family visits. Ukrainian war refugees go westwards: to Poland, France, Germany, Romania, and some European countries which still remain currently visa-free for them. In the countries where recent Russian-speaking immigrants stay, they are not always welcome. So, according to our contacts in Kazakhstan, only a few businessmen came from Ukraine, while most refugees go west. As of April 12, 2022, there were 115,000 newcomers from Russia, and by the middle of May, 250,000.

It is impossible to say how many Russian citizens have left the country since the beginning of the war. The numbers cited in the media differ greatly. Thus, in an interview to the Russian- and English-language independent news website Meduza, a reputed Russian demographer Yulia Florinskaya said that the realistic number was between 100,000 and 150,000 people. But the interview was conducted in May 2022 (meduza.io/feature/2022/05/07/skolko-lyudey-uehalo-iz-rossii-iz-za-voyny-oni-uzhe-nikogda-ne-vernutsya-mozhno-li-eto-schitat-ocherednoy-volnoy-emigratsii). The exodus that was triggered by the announcement of the draft clearly increased these numbers dramatically. At the end of September 2022, the Georgian Ministry of the Interior revealed that within a week about 53,000 Russians crossed the border. The total number of people who left to escape the draft is estimated to be 194,000 (republicworld.com/world-news/russia-ukraine-crisis/98000-russians-enter-kazakhstan-total-194000-flee-to-escape-putins-military-call-up-articleshow.htm). Another bold estimate is 260,000 (internationalinvestment.biz/news/2833-skolko-rossiyan-vyekhalo-iz-strany-posle-obyavleniya-mobilizacii.html). Exact numbers are unlikely to become ever known, because not every draft dodger is crossing the borders legally.

A new wave, which started after the announcement of partial mobilization in September 2022, sent thousands of young men fleeing. The President of Kazakhstan, K.-Zh. Tokaev, was cited to promise safety to Russians looking for rescue in a “hopeless situation.” He views it as a “political and humanitarian issue” (cursorinfo.co.il/world-news/stalo-izvestno-skolko-rossiyan-sbezhalo-v-sosednie-strany-spasayas-ot-prizyva-v-armiyu). Many Kazakhstanis are zealously following these developments, and some are outraged and filled with anger, report the voices from there. One has to admit that now, unlike during World War II, many Kazakhstanis are against migrants from Russia arriving in their country. They argue that it is not a question of life and death like it is for Ukrainians; rather it is the flight from sanctions and a search for better economic opportunities. People are afraid that newcomers will take their jobs and create a fifth column, facilitating Russia’s annexation of Northern Kazakhstan. They remember that Putin, Zhirinovskiy, Nikonov, and other Russian politicians claimed that those territories had been “donated” to Kazakhstan. At the same time, there are volunteers helping newcomers, and public service centers are being “sutured up” in Astana. In Central Asia, newcomers encounter people who still speak Russian and are ready to use it in communication (Bahry et al.; Khokhrin and Fedorko). Yet, not all the migrants are ready to abandon their “imperial” attitudes, which repel the local population.

Changes in everyday practices and language use are inevitably related to changes in the migrants’ identities and allegiances. We will demonstrate that either of them can be the cause or the consequence of the other. We are not limiting our research to ethnic Russians, but are investigating Russian speakers; therefore, we are interested in exploring how migrants experience their ethnicity and whether their everyday practices give indications of their self-perception as individuals and as members of an ethnolinguistic group. Clearly, there are certain characteristics that are common to Russian speakers and their everyday practices all over the world; there should also be important reasons to rely on the common background. It may be just the weight of the Soviet legacy, or there might be some other typical features of Russian speakers, which are mirrored in their habits and everyday routines. One has to admit that the war in Ukraine has caused a new rift in the Russian-speaking diasporas which affected community life and the use of language. Although Russian remains the lingua franca, some refugees from Ukraine pursue protest language policy, rejecting the use of Russian in their formal and informal communication. All these issues are explored and discussed in the articles included in this thematic issue.

Everyday practices embrace tangible and intangible, material, and symbolic. Contributors explore such issues as homemaking and cuisine, children’s upbringing, and distribution of roles and responsibilities in the family. Educational and cultural organizations of the Russian speakers supporting their goals and values are worth scrutinizing. We look into changes in festive traditions and leisure-time activities, the style of clothing, and etiquette. Russian is employed in a variety of situations by almost every Russian-speaker abroad. We are going to classify such circumstances and show what happens when the language is used and what symbolic capital is invested, utilized, or wasted when Russian is at work.

Yuri Lotman said once in an unpublished interview:

One might think that humanity is moving towards a single, very clear, emasculated, so to speak, castrated language, which is necessary just for one trader to talk to another. But for me, to listen to a person and say, ‘hey, you are one of us’, or ‘I trust you’, or ‘listen, where did you spend your childhood’—for such things we need, as we say, ‘wrong’ words. It is these words that create the warmth of the language, its comfort and insularity. A language for all is much colder, but more democratic. The desire to isolate oneself through language—whether it is the desire of a small group of individuals or big national groups—is quite natural and easy to understand.

Creating a New Home

Immigrants’ homes are multilingual. In households that have not got rid of physical books, we will find dictionaries and children’s books in Russian and the language/s of the host country. Souvenirs brought by visitors from the Former Soviet Union or reminders of the hosts’ trips to the hometowns carry inscriptions in

Russian. Computer and smartphone screens reveal that their owners can switch over from Russian to English and to the local language, and sometimes, the operation system “speaks” Russian. Notes pinned up in the kitchen or at the entrance often suggest that “correspondence” between family members is conducted in two languages, with youngsters writing in the language of the host society, and parents in Russian. Cultural hybridity in the arrangements of the household and its management, as well as reflections of one’s home-making choices, will show how human beings digest a complex social environment and respond to it with altered behavior. Nostalgia is an indispensable part of migrants’ life and fertile ground for creating diasporic myths (Cohen). They try “to rebuild the ideal home which never existed” (Boym xvi; Sheffer).

Home is both a multifaceted phenomenon and a concept; therefore, its study calls for the application of different theories, because no single one is capable of embracing this complex social phenomenon in its entirety (Sutcliffe; Selwyn and Frost; Yelenevskaya and Protassova). Working with the field material, we have to bear in mind the partial autonomy of different types of theories, and our goal is to make the most of each but arrive at a coherent interpretation of the analyzed phenomena which doesn’t lead us to contradictions. In the case of material culture, the advantage is that it is durable, and material evidence can be re-observed, reanalyzed, and reinterpreted (Hodder 184). In this sense, recorded interviews and written texts are also material manifestations of discourses, which can and should be repeatedly re-analyzed and re-interpreted in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of their content, speakers’ intentions, and attitudes. A narrative component is an essential part of the culture theory.

Although the attitude of most people toward their home may seem to the observer and to the subjects themselves as deep attachment, it is often deceptive. Home is a conglomeration of symbols and metaphors, and as a result, we do not see it for what it really is. Either we do not think about it and take it for granted, or we are unable to look at it as outsiders, which is especially true if we consider migrants’ transnational experiences (Ralph and Staeheli). The residents’ class affiliation and social status are often determined by the district in which they live. Such criteria and social stratification of cities may be unfamiliar to the migrant. The schools where they send their children, the availability of public transport and the address they put on their job applications may affect their aspirations for upward socio-economic mobility.

To overcome the difficulties of adaptation to the new environment, people try to reproduce the familiar in everyday practices, arrangement of their dwellings, rituals, crafts, and art forms. Home and homemaking are essential for self-perception and thus, for the identity of people on the move. Studying images of happy spaces, Bachelard posits that one of these is home. Topophilia, attachment to some spaces, is manifested in our feelings that in these spaces we are protected from the hostility of the outside world. Our imagination is not at peace with concepts that are frozen and do not evolve. Nourished by new experiences, our imagination enriches us with new images which we either cherish or reject. We do not domesticate spaces relying on their “real identity” but on the intricate interpretation of our imagination (Bachelard). The feeling of home being one’s own space comes up strong in the interviews we conducted with people who used to live in multi-generational homes, which was typical of the Soviet living conditions.

Everyday consumer practices have economic, political, and linguistic dimensions (Ryazanova-Clarke; Muth; Ryazantsev and Pismennaya; Mustajoki et al.). The personality of the migrating consumer and homemaker is reflected in the varying attitudes toward keeping old and buying new objects, in self-expression through photos, pictures on the walls, albums, bibelots, and books on the shelves. It emerges in discussions about styles, in the revival of family memories, and in the discursive construction of the uniqueness of home. It is material objects that serve as vehicles of values penetrating the habitat. And these objects sometimes seem incompatible with each other, a contradiction of intended purposes, an oxymoronic mixture testifying to the hybridity of their owners developing under the influence of changes in their environment.

Each one of us creates an image of the self to present to the outer world. Throughout our life, this image is evolving and helps us assert ourselves as a personality with specific claims to a niche in society and one’s own style. It is malleable and communicates different things to different people we encounter, yet we wish this image to be unique and distinctive from all the others. There is also another image which we create for ourselves and which mirrors trajectories of our life. It is closely related to the objects we have accumulated at different moments of our life. There are individuals who are not concerned about environmental changes, and there are those who are constantly looking for ways to improve themselves and their surroundings. It matters

a lot in migrating whether one wishes to be surrounded by artifacts related to the dominant culture of the new environment or to hold on to old objects and relationships associated with them, and which have become so important for us that they accompany us through our life's travels. And the narrative of one's inner world turns the visual world into an illustration of the narrator's linguistic biography. As Wes Anderson puts it in *The French Dispatch*, "Maybe with good luck we'll find what eluded us in the places we once called home."

Searching for a Suitable Environment

While maintaining emotional ties with their countries of origin, migrants influence the situation there through their life experiences: citizens from countries of mass emigration who remain at home are especially sensitive to social changes, one of which is the outflow of the working-age population. Closer links between diasporas and their countries of origin characterize modern migration, allowing diasporans to gain dual (or multiple) citizenship, dual education, dual domicile, and work appointments in two (or even more) countries. Some shuttle between the homeland and the host country forming so-called transnational communities. Changes in the conceptions of identity, citizenship, and the fatherland result from such processes. In any event, self-determination for migrants occurs both in the place of origin and in the country of residence. Moreover, it is shaped by relations with other groups of migrants in the new homeland as well as with groups of compatriots in other countries.

One of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland, **MA**, writes in FB:

My husband and I have traveled extensively over the previous 17 years, until last year. And nearly always [we went] to a new location. On each journey, I attempt to answer the question: would I like to live in this country/city/village/house? [I do this] by tasting foods, noting the style, pace [of life], scents, and other things. Quite frequently, I respond to this question in the affirmative; and then inherent rationality enters the discussion: what are the living conditions here, such as medical services, education, fundamental laws, living costs, and so on. At this point, most destinations lose their allure and are reduced to "I should still return here for a vacation." But there are a few places that are still "hanging on" and have been on my "I want to live here" list for years. I'm curious what will come of it. By the way, I once relocated to Finland in the same manner, recognizing from the start that the response was affirmative and that I needed to depart. Do you have similar places in your country? Have you made a decision yet, or are you still looking? Or has none of the nations piqued your interest more than the one where you live now?

NN who has lived in Finland for 3 years and went back to St. Petersburg thinks that he is happy where he is now and could live anywhere because he is a citizen of the world:

Traveling and living are two very different things. Each country has its own issues. There is no ideal area to live since there are too many elements to take into account: climate, cuisine, medical care, attitudes towards immigrants, security, and so on. There is a phrase that goes as this, "East or west, home is best"¹ and you can always be useful at home; but traveling, yes!!!

MA does not agree with him:

There are problems everywhere, but as far as we are concerned, we are willing to handle them in this country since the benefits of living here outweigh the problems, and this is what matters. There are several factors to consider. Yes, but to put it bluntly, this adage about east or west... and being useful at home is simply not true. I don't want to be "useful" to anybody; I just want to "live happily ever after". So-called self-persuasion is the urge to defend your decision-to-believe that everyone "in a foreign country is evil".

Other participants mention the same insecurity:

One can live anywhere! As one wise guy put it, "The worst thing is that a human being gets accustomed to absolutely anything!!!!" Just think!!! Emigration is a heroic deed, but few people know this, only those who have been through a lot of

¹ «Где родился, там и пригодился».

things. Such folks no longer throw around words like “You don’t like it here, then get away”. Someone who has fallen on hard times is able to appreciate serenity and delight in sticking to one’s priorities and values. I’ve always wanted to try Finland, and here I am, it’s my third year of trying!)))) There are advantages and disadvantages here, but on the whole, this is not my cup of tea. But how do my family (my children and my wife) feel about it—I enjoy the moments [when I see this]. So, I am grateful to Finland for this. Canada has always attracted me, and I might try again!)))) The ways of our life are inscrutable!!! Anyways, in any country, the key to culture and people’s mindset is in the language. It is really tough for me to learn Finnish, so English comes in handy. I work in tourism, and because of my job I meet a lot of people. I like Italians and Spaniards a lot. I guess it’s fun to live next to such open and sociable!)))) [people]. I am planning to visit some of my Italian guests during our next vacation. We’ll learn how the country lives. I’ve been to Spain many times, it’s a great country, and yet... there are still many unanswered questions.

Participant **AG** tells the group how she bought a townhouse in Spain near the sea 18 years ago, and later a flat to let, then moved to Sicily where she spent a couple of years and returned back to Spain, and now, she is considering other options. Another discussant is living in Italy but dreams of Scandinavia. Many other countries are compared. A female participant, **TR**, mentions that she would like to die in Mallorca, and **NN** declares that one must die in the country of birth, but **TR** replies that she has problems with her native country.

Such boasting of transnational lifestyles should not be taken at face value. Of course, not everything is as simple and easy as participants in the discussion try to present, and not everything is accessible to everyone who tries. People of various age groups have different chances. Settling down outside one’s home country is increasingly considered to be nothing of the ordinary, and while everyone hopes to succeed, problems and dissatisfaction with one’s lack of achievements are often discussed. Success or failure of a migrant family’s integration is usually measured by the achievements of the second generation: did they manage to attain the same or higher level of education as their parents? How effective are they in the labor market? How much do they identify with the host country and how loyal are they to it? Do they suffer from an overt or covert conflict of allegiances, and who do they support during sports events?

Poet Polina Barskova, who was born in Leningrad, USSR in 1976, first graduated from the Department of Classical Philology at St. Petersburg State University. In 1998, she became an MA student at the University of California (Berkeley) in the United States and received her MA and PhD there. Her research was devoted to Russian prose of the 1930s (Vaginov, Egunov, and others) and the Leningrad culture throughout the 900-day siege of the city during World War II. She is currently a professor of Russian literature at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her interview conducted by Ivan Tolstoy was aired on *Radio Svoboda* (Tolstoy). Polina has taught in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Europe, but primarily at American colleges and universities. America is both the place and the context of her work. Her connection to the United States was some sort of a “marriage of convenience” which evolved into a love story and destiny. Teaching in the United States was the only way for a Russian poet to earn a living. She also found that she did not merely enjoy it, but that it was beneficial for her as a writer. The author comments on the specific features of the American academic milieu she encountered. Students she teaches at the Liberal Arts College in Hampshire study literature, cinema, painting, and art. They are open-minded, highly motivated, and avid learners. They raise unexpected questions, making her think about subjects she has never looked at or thought about before. She is aware that there are many lacunas in her knowledge and understanding of American culture and society and that it will take not only time but also effort to bridge the gaps. Answering the question about her motive for researching the Leningrad siege, she reflects:

This question often arises, and people ask with hope, “Is it [because of] your grandma? Your grandpa?” I had no grandmothers or grandfathers in that city. I grew up close to the memorial in the south of the city², but it did not attract me; rather it upset me. Later, in Berkley I began researching it: my dissertation was about Leningrad life and culture in the period from 1927 to 1934. In some sense, later many of the protagonists of my dissertation find themselves besieged and perish. Why did I deal with that period? Because incredible things were happening there then, and people who were doing creative work were also incredible.

² She refers to the memorial devoted to the defenders of Leningrad erected to mark the thirtieth anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany.

This question also has a lyrical answer. It turned out that the most crucial event in my life was leaving that city. I didn't know it then, because a twenty-year old cannot know such a thing. And in the period of 19 years, I failed to find a replacement for that city in my heart. And if it were just the heart, but it was also the body. I proved to be made for Leningrad, and the separation from this urban form determined my personality, and throughout all the years of separation I tried to compensate for what had been lost by what I study and what I write about.

For the interviewer who is himself a Russian from St. Petersburg living in Prague, it was surprisingly pleasant to listen to these revelations; he just read them aloud as if they were in his head and everything rhymed.

The most important socio-psychological component of the adaptation process is absorbing a new system of values or maintenance of those developed in the pre-immigration life. Yet, in most cases, migrants create a third and hybrid system. When an immigrant group is big, and at least partial maintenance of the value system is possible, the host society gradually starts accepting some of the "imported" values and revises its previous system. Thus, ethnic cookery has become nearly as popular in all countries as the dishes of the local cuisine. The current fashion of wearing a dress with leggings and a scarf also mirrors Eastern design traditions. The emergence of diverse value systems that respect each other and borrow from each other is an indication of a tolerant multicultural society.

Another interview by Tolstoy relevant to what we are discussing here was a conversation with the Berlin-based novelist Igor Shestkov who is a mystical satirist and a creator of new dystopias. His books mix Soviet, Russian, and émigré realities and phobias. Tolstoy asked how different spaces, those of the Soviet Union, Russia, and Germany coexist in the writer's world. This is what Shestkov answered:

It is a very complex thing, Germany and Russia, you know, it is very difficult for me to speak in such global categories. I think in Russian, but sometimes in German. I write in Russian, unfortunately, all my attempts to write in German failed. I realized that I wasn't a language genius, I am not Conrad. And there were some other famous examples of people who wrote in a new language, which is not their own. I am not able to do it, so I remain Russian, a person of Russian culture. And contrary to Nabokov and his arrogance, I perceived the museums of Germany and New York and all those various *Istanbuls* and *Jerusalems* with great joy, just as anything that the western world has to offer. I used to rush from one museum to another, without fearing that I would get lost and exiting would find myself in Leningrad. And should I have found myself in Leningrad, I wouldn't have struggled for the permission to emigrate but would go and find Kharms, who was sitting there writing awesome... As far as I am concerned, he was better than Nabokov. I will not talk about contemporary Russia, because I suffer when I receive news from Russia, it is painful for me to listen to what is happening there. It torments me to hear what's going on there. It's a real torture because, because I oscillate from anger to sympathy and can't find any middle ground. On the one hand, I'd like to see Russia become a beautiful modern and democratic country; on the other hand, I am well aware that this is not possible. Well, and Germany—what can I say about Germany? Germany accepted me and I am grateful for this. Germany didn't want me to come here, but I did come. And I brought my wife and my daughter. Then another daughter was born here. They have already given me three grandchildren here. So, there is some German life going on around us, and my grandchildren can't speak Russian. I don't suffer that they will never read my books; actually, this might be good.

The interviewee says that he started writing out of boredom, although, clearly, it was the desire to find emotional equilibrium that drove him. An intellectual, and a mathematician, he looked for self-expression in painting, but becoming disillusioned with the trends of contemporary art he shifted to literature. He claims that being an introvert, he is not interested in making efforts to popularize his books, but it is the text itself and the life of his protagonists that in some strange way influence his own life that he values most. He admits that when he started writing, he virtually rejected the Russian language. Yet he writes in Russian, because to his chagrin, he failed to master German to the level that would enable creative writing. It is surprising that he has reconciled with the possibility that his grandchildren would not be able to read his books. In most cases, émigrés are eager to keep intergenerational ties. Could it be that in an ironical way Shestkov's books reflect his painful experiences and pessimistic views on contemporary Russia and so, he prefers his grandchildren to remain ignorant about them? Despite his claims that he has few readers and no fans, he did find his niche as a successful émigré writer. Yet, in some sense, he is in limbo, being an observer, rather than an active participant of sociocultural life in either country. Implicitly, he juxtaposes the position of émigré writers who have few chances to be published in Russia but enjoy freedom, and his peers in the metropolis who have access to the readers but have to self-censure themselves not to trigger political disapproval which puts an end to their publications. He does not complain about the fate of a novelist writing in a minority language and having

limited access to the readers speaking the language of his protagonists. Shestkov weighs his gains and losses, and he is at peace with his situation. A wise man, he knows the value of freedom of expression.

Formulating Principles of a New Lifestyle

In the perception of our contemporaries, decent living presupposes a constellation of conditions. Among the primary ones are safe shelter and food, medical care and education, healthy environment, and personal safety. No less important is the recognition of one's cultural values and customs. When migrants alter their way of life, a process of material, social, and psychological adaptation to the new environment starts. Initially, an unfamiliar environment causes fear and rejection and may intensify longing for familiar ways of life and habits which are well understood and therefore do not trigger stress. The same questions pervade in the early period of adaptation: "Was the relocation the right decision? Was the destination chosen wisely? What would happen if I or my family had stayed at home?" Gradually, the newcomers learn what they have to do to obtain the necessary documents and permits. They acquire the knowledge of the basic vocabulary of the local language/s and learn the ways of dealing with their immediate socio-economic needs. They meet members of the host society, learning to work and study with them, asking them for help, and making friends and enemies among them. Throughout the adaptation period, immigrants compare and analyze differences in the lifestyles of their home and host countries. Optimists prefer to ignore the almost inevitable pitfalls awaiting migrants and concentrate on the advantages of their new country; the pessimists, however, may be overwhelmed by difficulties, their downward socioeconomic mobility, and indifference to their plight on the part of the host society.

Dina Sabitova, a writer and philologist by education, spent her early years in Kazan, Tatarstan, and later moved to the Moscow region. Today, her home is in Costa Rica, and she makes a living by renting out rooms on Airbnb. She gained a massive audience on Facebook. On June 10, 2021, she wrote about the joys of staying where you are and appreciating what you have:

Here's a house, let's say. A large, costly residence. The rooms are luxurious, the furniture is handmade, the design is stylish; there is a swimming pool, a garden, and majestic views.

The house owner spends most of the year in the USA. The caretaker's nice little residence stands at the highest point of the site, a vista point. In the morning, this poor and uneducated Nicaraguan leaves his home and walks to a little patio in the yard. He sees something in front of him. He sees that. [a photo with a breathtaking view]

If he wants, he may sit by the pool, listen to Mozart and read at dusk on a lounge beside the pool.

But, quite naturally, he doesn't want to...

What I mean is this. I keep explaining this to my kids. Here is our monthly income.

And here are those who have paid a lot of money as visitors to come here.

In particular, they pay for a chance to spend a week in January in a warm place. To be able to stroll down to the ocean and swim. [They pay] for a chance to see all of it—blue birds, volcanoes on the horizon, the ocean. A certain, and not too small a part of their holiday costs is paid for these very things.

You have everything, my children. And so, this can be included in our monthly revenue.

You're wealthier than you believe.

And likewise, Luis, the caretaker of this home, has a bit more than his payment.

Whether it's precious to him, I don't know.

After all, probably, yes.

The discussion attracted more than a hundred comments. Participant **EK** wrote: "I'm sure it's worthwhile. Even if we consider that a person is used to the place and does not appreciate what it's worth, if you relocate him just for a week to some place with a view, well, say, of an industrial zone, he will recognize the value of his place immediately." Dina Sabitova answers: "The caretaker was born in a mountain city, in a very poor house in Nicaragua, and what he could see under his feet, in the yard, was awful. But he could see the mountains if he looked up." **EK** replies that she understands. She grew up at Yalta [a town in the Crimea], where the mountains

overlooked the town and were magnificent. But what she would see there, was just a dusty wall with no view. “I got it:),” says Dina,

I merely imagined what he could see throughout his whole life. And so – I have the example of an absolute deterioration – a village of five shabby five-floor residential blocks, not very far from *Elektrougli* [a small town near Moscow where heavy industry factories are located]. Then there is a road and something marshy behind it, with stunted trees full of mosquitos, where there has been a fire. It's been so terrible. However, even there – the benefits of Moscow are close by.

AS agrees that in the Siberian cities where she used to live, she knows such dismal, sad neighborhoods. **YA** said that she had talked to a resident of a warm country who was tired of the sea and wished to travel. “I suggested we exchange her sea for my climate. She declined, for whatever reason.” Many countries prohibited access to the sea during the Corona pandemic. A friend who lives in Jerusalem claims that it is crucial to be able to jump on a train and be at the seaside in 37 min. On the other hand, youngsters still need to learn to value what they have. They still exclaim “Why the Mediterranean, oohh, and not the Red Sea? And only one day? Why not now?” This cannot be compared to the kids from Russia who are not allowed to leave the country for the second corona year in a row. A question arises: is everyone living in beautiful places capable of appreciating them? Aren't there more exciting and glorious things to find in our inner world?

NP, who lives in Mexico, remarks:

By the way, the local population is quite patriotic (in a non-political sense). The beauty of their own country is truly appreciated. Most of them are not urban inhabitants (at least their rural origins are testified by their ancestors' blood), and they are romantic. They usually admire flora, fauna, and the weather. It is quite common to hear a macho Mexican spontaneously giving a speech about the magnificence of the full moon or the beauty of the ocean surf. And the dithyrambs to the national food will never stop.

Participants discuss the importance of having a wonderful view from a window and a positive ambiance.

AB says:

When my daughter was 5–10 years old, we lived in Montenegro, where the sky is luminous, the mountains are spectacular, the clouds are airy, and the sea is only 5 min away; everything is gorgeous and bright. Then we came to Berlin with its typically low grey skies and 50 shades of grey all year round. A week later, she wondered: ‘Why are the heavens like this, Mom? Are we on a different planet?’

DV, who lives in Ireland, believes that the sight of the blue sea and palm trees immediately conjures up her images of the south, vacations, and holidays, and this is what every northern country dweller feels. What might be a symbol of rest and relaxation for those who were born and raised in this paradise of sea, sun, and palm trees? **RV**, who lives in California, supposes that in his area, relaxation would be an active vacation: a week in the Sierras, in complete wilderness, or climbing Mount Whitney, for example. This would be most soothing. **LK** from Connecticut remembers her 5-year stay in Montenegro: if there are no problems with work or money, the stress level is generally much lower in such circumstances:

Even if you drink your coffee on a terrace above the Adriatic Sea every day, the opportunity to have coffee on the same terrace above the Adriatic Sea at lunchtime is pleasant and adds comforting peace to your inner life. Moreover, it is much easier to choose something non-casual for recreation. Fly to an opera premiere in Rome, for example, because you adore opera. Visit the Bolzano Christmas market. At Easter go to Split, take a stroll through the Old Town and listen to the bells ringing. And now we are not close to the sea (well, more than 700 meters away from the beach), but when I am on vacation I want to be near the water.

EM, another Russian-speaking Mexican, replies: “My tropical children, who have grown up with the sea, the sun, and the palm trees, imagine an ice slide in the courtyard of their Moscow great-grandmother's house, between the garage and the kindergarten, to be the pinnacle of happiness.” **AL**, who lives in Norway, comes to the conclusion that it would be necessary to calculate the possibility of going every weekend or even every summer evening, climbing mountains, and looking out at the fjord as part of his expenses.

However, a higher standard of living and access to education leads to the access of resources and objects of desire to ‘wide masses of people’ [*ширнамассы*, an abbreviation from the Soviet times] and is embedded in the mass consciousness since birth. Still, in the second corona summer, the ‘wide masses of people’ declare that they have already consumed mountains, valleys, and fjords, and that life (in Norway) is not that cheap, so the beaches of Turkey, Spain, and Greece are already waiting for them. Going to Sweden for low-cost shopping does not count as a holiday for Norwegians. As a result, it is preferable to open the Norwegian border at least for European tourists, while allowing locals to go elsewhere to warm up. Those who live in Canada admire the sky and other natural wonders, but they are disappointed that their children are not as appreciative of these treasures.

NT says that they live in the southern part of the province of Ontario, and this is the same latitude as Sochi. They have a lot of snow in winter, just like in the Moscow region, and the temperature is about the same, but it is more windy and drier there because of the Great Lakes. So, comparisons of the places where you dwell with your country of origin are immanent to immigrants. **RS**, another Russian-speaking inhabitant of Costa Rica, thinks that “after they relocated you, when you return to your hometown in the country of origin, you begin to appreciate everything here [in Costa Rica] with great intensity; after work, you come to the ocean, you are exhausted and sweaty, and the pool is right next to you, it’s like a reassessment of values. It’s a shame you don’t realize this until you’ve altered your life situation.” **IB**, who studied in France and lives in Spain, formulates her view: “I also live by the sea and have enjoyed its beauty every day for the past six years. But my son cherishes his fantasies about a dacha outside Moscow; these are his earliest memories. I hope that in time he will realize how fortunate he is. And he won’t have to give up any of his benefits in order to do so.”

AB from Australia responds to this:

There are two schools of thought: one believes that money can buy everything (and that if you lack something, you are simply earning less than you need), and the other believes that lifestyle is not bought by money (‘You can lie under a palm tree and eat bananas’). Clean air, favorable climate, nature, possibility to work without exhausting yourself, security, legality, and many other things – they are all intertwined. As a result, in many ways Caribbean fishermen can live no worse than many people in the countries of the golden billion.

Dina Sabitova argues that emigration is the same as purchasing a lifestyle, yet it frequently implies downshifting. **IK** from the USA recaps that in reality, to enjoy peace, you must first live without it for a long time: “Children from small towns fantasize about growing up in a metropolis where they can experience a wide range of activities. Only after you are exposed to the urban variety and deafened by it, can you truly appreciate the ocean which is three steps away from you and a quiet life to be enjoyed 24 h a day.”

This debate shows how much the climate change and the natural environment matter for adapting to one’s new country and how important it is for Russian speakers to share their views and feelings with co-ethnics. As Sapienza aptly remarks, Russian-speaking spaces exist in transnational spaces and are translocal. The flow of ideas reveals that those who choose to live abroad have strong transnational ties and maintain links with various regions of Russia. For a long time, pre-emigration experiences served as the basis for comparison. Migrants review their past to evaluate the present, and a similarity of experiences and emotions serves as an adhesive to form migrant communities.

In this thematic issue, we discuss an interplay of instrumental and symbolic functions of the language in immigrants’ cultural and business activities. The authors scrutinize the spaces occupied by multilingual Russian speakers outside of Russia. They primarily apply qualitative research methods based on critical cultural, discourse, and thematic analysis (Litosellini). They deal with issues as diverse as hybridization of identity (Buchatskaya), integration into academic culture (Zbenovich), food (Kabanen, Protassova and Yelenevskaya, Razor), and education (Kanevskaya, Karpava, and Ringblom).

Grinevskaya depicts how an aristocrat who lived in Liechtenstein until the age of 106 structured his life in the West as a successful businessman while keeping his interest in sports and being active in maintaining cultural ties with Russia. These kinds of interests and his way of life could well be emulated by modern immigrants, as Anastasova shows. The lifestyles are copied or emerge anew in the changing environments. Reflections and self-explanations are important.

Russian-speaking immigrant communities may have a variety of lifestyles and everyday practices, depending on their country of origin, the community they are a part of, and their individual circumstances.

However, there are some generalizations that can be made about these communities. One thing that is common among many Russian-speaking immigrants is a strong sense of cultural identity and pride. This may manifest in the preservation of traditional cultural practices, such as cooking and celebrating specific holidays, and speaking the Russian language in the home. Russian-speaking immigrant communities may also have a strong focus on family and a sense of responsibility to support and care for each other. Another aspect of Russian-speaking immigrant communities is the importance of education. Many immigrants place a high value on education and may dedicate a lot of emphasis on their children's academic success.

Funding information: Open access funded by Helsinki University Library.

Conflict of interest: Authors state no conflict of interest.

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