

## **The evolution of Chechen in contact with Russian**

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Chechen and the Russian are both official languages of Chechnya and yet their use is not egalitarian. As its use was publically forbidden for a long time, the Chechen language remained primarily an inter-generational contact language, but also as the language of revolt against Russian domination. If the Chechen community is bilingual, it is interesting, however, to note that those in the minority of monolinguals, there are more Chechens who speak Russian than Chechens who speak their mother tongue.

This permanent and hegemonic contact - this imposition of Russian as the vehicular language that goes back to the end of the eighteenth century - obviously influenced on Chechen. The perceptible impact is the Russification of the patronymics and the toponyms, the total or partial surrender of paradigms in favor of the Russian words as the names of the months, days, as well as the numbers. The increase of the number of phonemes (consonant and vowel) results also from the direct and indirect massive use of Russian loan words. Less easily perceptible but equally frequent are the calques which testify that the speakers, more or less consciously, want to integrate certain structures of Russian into Chechen. This is not to fill a structural gap but to satisfy discursive strategies. This phenomenon is interesting to study because it induces variation that may eventually lead to language shift.

In spite of this strong influence, the Chechen syntactic structure preserves its own identity: it remains an ergative language, with case marking and postpositions. It has not become a Chechen Russified language, it is a language that evolves but does not die.