Mixed language usage in Belarus: the sociostructural background of language choice*

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Abstract

This article reports findings from a survey on language usage in Belarus, which encompasses bilingual Belarusian and Russian. First, the distribution of language usage is discussed. Then the dependency of language usage on some sociocultural conditions is explored. Finally, the changes in language usage over three generations are discussed. We find that a mixed Belarusian–Russian form of speech is widely used in the cities studied and that it is spoken across all educational levels. However, it seems to be predominantly utilized in informal communication, especially among friends and family members, leaving Russian and Belarusian to more formal or public venues.

Keywords: *Belarus; language socialization; language choice; mixed language.*

1. Introduction

The country of Belarus is marked by a divergence between a declared mother tongue, Belarusian, and the languages or varieties that are regularly spoken. Due to a long legacy of Russian-oriented language policies, a vast majority of Belarusians prefers to speak Russian in many contexts. As the official data of the National Census of Belarus (1999) revealed, 62.8% of the population claims to speak Russian in their everyday communication. Only 36.7% of the population described Belarusian as a "language spoken at home," which does not necessarily refer to the Belarusian standard language, but in many cases to rural Belarusian dialects. In contrast, 81.9% declared Belarusian as their mother tongue, without, of course, differentiating between standard language and dialects. This might appear as an instance of cognitive dissonance, but in fact it is not. In countries where language policies led to a repression of the autochthonous mother tongue as a "lingua franca", identification with the

0165–2516/10/0206–0047
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DOI 10.1515/IJSL.2010.048

mother tongue as a part of the national identity is preserved. The mother tongue is a considerable element in self-characterization as part of a nation and exhibits a high symbolic value. Viewed in this light, claiming Belarusian as a mother tongue is a medium to demonstrate the cultural ties to one's country (cf. Mechkovskaja 2002).

In considering the role of the rarely spoken mother tongue and the widespread use of one or more other languages in contemporary speech, i.e., in everyday communication, questions about the motives of language usage arise. In addition, questions about the associated construction of a national (or at least regional) identity arise, which is often connected with spoken languages.

This article reports findings from a survey conducted in Belarus in Autumn 2008 on the sociostructural conditions of language usage. Therefore, we will provide a theoretical background on the political economy of language usage. Because of the huge influence of language policies in Belarus, we will first outline the basic contours of their history and its effects. Then we present some statistics on the sociostructure of language and the ways in which individuals are socialized into language use. Finally, we discuss shifts in language use between age cohorts.

2. Language politics in Belarus

Because of the strong integration into both the Czarist Empire and the Soviet Union it has been characteristic for Belarusians to lack a distinct national consciousness (cf. Abramova 1998; Beyrau and Lindner 2001; Bugrova 1998). The (at some times explicitly, at other times implicitly) Russian-oriented language policies reinforced that tendency. By and large, the development during the past one and a half centuries can be described as a steady Russification of the country. However, in the course of this development, a Belarusian-oriented national movement emerged at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, which fought the politics and the process of Russification with significant success, especially in the first years of Soviet rule. But these attempts were halted by repression, persecution, and elimination of the Belarusian intelligentsia under the rule of Stalin in the early 1930s, which led to a marginalization of Belarusian historical science, literary studies, and linguistic science. Until the end of the 1980s, the communist party organizations attempted to drive the Belarusian language out of public life (cf. Bieder 2001: 458). From the perspective of some Russian linguists and many laypersons, Belarusian was not considered an independent language but rather a Russian dialect (cf. Bieder 1991, 1992, 1995; Holtbrügge 2002: 108). This hostile attitude supported the emergence of a symbolic charge of Belarusian as a mother tongue of the autochthonous population to mark their differences to Russia and its language.

The level of identification with the Belarusian language as a mother tongue is very high among the rural population.[1] Because of the generally low prestige of the rural population and of "ruralness" in general, the Belarusian language was marked as a "peasant language," and many speakers of Belarusian are reported to have developed some sense of inferiority for this reason (cf. Bieder 2001: 465). When the Democratic Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) started a political program to stimulate the reactivation of Belarusian as the official language, a new language law was passed in September 1990 making Belarusian the only state language of independent Belarus. But under the rule of president Lukashenka, in 1995, Russian was made the second state language, which in practice meant that it remained the primary and dominant language, as had been the case under Soviet rule. Thus, to date, the linguistic situation has not changed significantly. In addition to the difficulties in giving Belarusian not only equal legal rights, but also equal chances compared to Russian (e.g., insufficient financial resources and qualified language teachers), the rather weak implementation of Belarusian in society seems to also be caused by insufficient feedback on the national renaissance movement by the Belarusian population. This is most obviously connected with the endeavors to revive the old Belarusian standard from the 1920s (the so-called Tarashkevica) instead of reinforcing the newer standard (Narkoma ka) practiced in later Soviet times. The latter, which is more commonly used in Belarus, is structurally closer to Russian than the former, which discredited this new standard from the point of view of the national renaissance movement.

Currently, the general linguistic situation is roughly as follows: The rural population is reported to still speak Belarusian dialects to a large extent in their everyday rural contexts (Kurcova 2005). Everywhere in Belarus, Belarusian and Russian (the latter more extensively and intensively utilized) are taught in schools, so that all Belarusians have a certain command of both Belarusian and the Russian Standard language. In urban and official contexts, people generally speak Standard Russian or at least try to do so. Today, especially in the capital of Minsk, Russian is widely spoken, apart from a minority of Belarusian *intėlihencyja* with a national (by far not always nationalistic) orientation. This is mirrored in the mass media, where Belarusian plays almost no role in television and a rather marginal or subordinate one on the radio and in print media. Furthermore, the urban population in particular widely practices some sort of mixed Belarusian–Russian speech that can be observed throughout the population in informal and especially family contexts. This Mixed speech has been called "Trasianka" (literally: a mixture of hay and straw, in other words, cattle feed of low quality).

Without any doubt, there must have been some forms of mixed Belarusian–Russian speech at least from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, especially of course, in East Belarus, which after the Polish–Soviet war

in 1920–1921 came under Soviet rule. More decisive for the contemporary form of Mixed speech were nevertheless the 1960s and 1970s when, after the ravages of World War II with the large-scale destruction of the Belarusian urban landscape, the country witnessed a strong industrialization and a rapid (re)urbanization. This was accompanied by a massive migration of the Belarusian rural population into the towns on the one hand and considerable immigration of Russian-speaking specialists and offcials into the country. In order to have any sort of career in these new urban societies and under the political conditions during those years, the new Belarusian town dwellers had to linguistically adapt to Russian, i.e., to use Russian in many, rather offcial situations and with Russian colleagues, superiors, and offcials. The Russian they were able to speak resembled Standard Russian, more or less heavily infuenced by the Belarusian (dialectal) substrata. Since these Trasianka speakers tended to be less educated (although this has never been thoroughly investigated), the Mixed speech became stigmatized as a "language" of uneducated people. Most important for today's language situation was that these new Belarusian town dwellers used the Mixed speech, which they often enough took for Russian, to bring up their children. Therefore, the Mixed speech was the variety of their frst linguistic socialization. From a historical point of view, Trasianka speech thus had a Belarusian foundation: It was spoken by people with (mainly dialectal) Belarusian backgrounds who later turned to Russian.[2]

The linguistic status of the Mixed speech is not quite clear yet. The term "Trasianka" is a layperson's category referring to a variety of linguistic phenomena in which Belarusian and Russian traits are intertwined. As for pronunciation, Belarusian characteristics dominate, but this can vary even in one utterance of a given individual. Apart from phonic phenomena, the speech of Trasianka speakers displays a high variation between Belarusian and Russian in the scope of single utterances (sentences), as well. Firstly, there are alternating patterns at the border of single phrases of sentences (e.g., between subject phrase, verb, object phrase, etc.). Secondly, single phrases or even single words or word forms can be hybrids in terms of their components (word forms or morphs). Furthermore, there is a variation between Belarusian and Russian abstract structures, for example, rules of government of prepositions and cases. Due to the stigmatization of the Mixed speech, it has to date never been systematically investigated by domestic scholars. The frst quantifying empirical studies on linguistic patterns can be found in Hentschel (2008a; 2008b), Hentschel and Tesch (2007, 2009), and Hentschel and Brandes (2009). In many cases, it is hard to tell which of the two languages supplies the basic structural pattern of sentences or utterances (which is normal between strongly genetically and structurally related languages, cf. Muysken 2000: esp. 122–153), and in other cases it varies between Belarusian and Russian.

The decisive empirical question is whether the mixing of Belarusian and Russian in Trasianka speech is only spontaneous or whether there is evidence for a conventionalization of mixed patterns. Only in the latter case, i.e., with at least a partial conventionalization of mixing, could one speak of a new "Mixed language" or mixed system. Such a variety would be a mixed subvariety with roots in mixed new urban dialects under the roof of Standard Belarusian or, for the time being, more importantly, Standard Russian or both. The empirical studies mentioned suggest that, although there is still a large amount of spontaneous mixing, conventionalized patterns have in fact developed.

From a sociostructural point of view, one must discuss the fact that Trasianka is sometimes called a creole language. Cykhun (1998) cautiously named Trasianka the Belarusian variant of a creolized language. In doing so he was referring to the social settings, positioning Russians as the dominating group (the masters) and Belarusians as the dominated group (the slaves in colonial settings). Firstly, regarding linguistic structure, Trasianka mixed speech does not show any structural similarity with typical creole languages except for a widespread preference for the lexicon of the dominating language Russian (for other typical creole patterns, cf. Thomason 2001, 157–195, esp. 174). Secondly, there has never been a phase of pidginization (which typically precedes creolization), although some speakers of Trasianka may acknowledge that "neither language is known properly" (cf. Dingley 1989: 186, who tends to generalize this point inappropriately).

It does not come as a surprise that no process of pidginization can be observed, since this process can be expected in a situation of socially asymmetric contact between structurally and typologically different and mutually noncomprehensive languages. Belarusian and Russian are genetically close languages with a considerable degree of mutual comprehensiveness. There is, however, some degree of asymmetry between the two languages. Speakers of Belarusian — both the standard language and the dialects — have been exposed to the Russian language for many decades and generally understand this language without much diffculty. The same does not hold vice versa: Russian speakers who are not accustomed to Belarusian do not understand all discourses conducted in Belarusian standard language or dialects. Russians' experience of understanding Belarusian seems to be shaped by Trasianka, which is imbued with Belarusian traits but which is closer to Russian in lexical terms and thus easier to comprehend for Russians. Speech differences, hence, are less relevant in terms of comprehensibility than in terms of social distinction, and the development of Trasianka is inherently linked to the adjustment of Belarusians to the Russian language, which started to dominate offcial and public communication as a "legitimate language" (Bourdieu 1991) from the 1950s onward.

The origins and establishment of mixed Belarusian–Russian speech can thus be more appropriately compared with the contact of two (or more) "old" rural

dialects of one language meeting in an urban environment due to the process of migration. It can be likened to the development of a new urban dialect as described by Trudgill (1986) in a process of dialect leveling. Of course there is (apart from the asymmetric social setting) one additional analogy between the development of Trasianka and the process of creolization, which, by the way, Cykhun (1998) obviously did not have in mind: When children and grandchildren are confronted with the spontaneously mixed Belarusian–Russian speech of first-generation mixed speakers in their primary linguistic socialization, they will of course tend to reorder and to restrict the maximally free variation of Belarusian and Russian elements and traits. This process can be roughly compared to the children and grandchildren of first-generation pidgin speakers (especially in plantation contexts) who develop the structurally reduced mixtures in pidgins into a new autonomous creole language.[3] In this respect, the fact that Trasianka is most obviously already spoken in the third generation and has not been replaced (along with Belarusian) by the speakers with the Russian language in all communicative spheres can be considered as external, social evidence for the possibility of the development of a new mixed system.

This article aims to contribute to the exploration of Trasianka by connecting linguistic and sociological arguments. Therefore, a closer interdisciplinary examination of Trasianka as a spoken variety is of interest. Spoken languages in the sense of specific forms of speech or spoken varieties have an important influence on a person's identity. In countries with a multilingual structure, the usage of a language is an expression of membership of a specific group (Rosenberg and Weydt 1992: 224). In this view, Trasianka could be a way to establish a connection between people who want to distance themselves from others (maybe from Belarusian nationalistic inclinations on the one hand and from common Russian feelings of superiority on the other hand). This is often the case in minority groups. The spoken language is a common good to the members of the group and creates a group identity by differentiating itself from the majority in a society (cf. Kulick 1992).

3. The relative prevalence of languages in Belarus

To explore the meaning of Trasianka in social interactions in Belarus it is helpful to take a look at the distribution of languages within the population. The identification and measurement of "language communities," however, has turned out to be a challenging task. After Greenberg's early contribution (1956),[4] the systematic study of the distribution of languages was further elaborated by Laitin (1998, 2000) and De Swaan (2001). Both have proposed aggregate indices of language heterogeneity in a particular unit of analysis.

Whereas Laitin (2000) pleads for a set of indices, De Swaan (2001: 25–40) combines the prevalence and the centrality of a language and constructs a single index which he calls the Q-value.

Both approaches, however, seem to assume that the languages involved in a particular situation are mutually incomprehensible. In Belarus, we are confronted with the situation that the languages involved are close neighbors and that the majority of the population is able to communicate by using existing knowledge of Belarusian, Russian, and Trasianka. Thus, the Q-value cannot serve as a decision rule for learning the language with the highest value. However, restricting the value of a language to its communication potential misses out the important aspect of its value for identification within a social group, distinction, and status (Bourdieu 1991). We therefore use the Q-value as a descriptive tool to show the relative weight of the three competing languages in Belarus while controlling for the existence of multilingual speakers.[5]

The empirical base of this report is a survey conducted in November 2008 that includes 1,400 questionnaires from seven Belarusian cities.[6] In each town (Minsk, Slonim, Smarhon', Shaka shchyna, Khocimsk, Rahacho , Akciabrski) 200 inhabitants were interviewed.[7] A multi-stage, combined, individual sampling, accompanied by the route method of respondent selection, was used to obtain random samples within the seven deliberately selected cities.[8] The survey took place in the Russian language.[9] In the remainder of the article, we will focus only on respondents who hold the Belarusian nationality (n = 1230) because including Russians or other nationalities would add another layer of complexity to the problem. Since we have identified Trasianka as a language that historically evolved in the context of urbanization and Russification, we are more interested in the shift from Belarusian to Trasianka than in the adjustment of Russian migrants who kept their nationality. The first results are summarized in the tables below.

Table 1. *Mother tongue and spoken tongue*

	Mother tongue		Additional spoken tongue used in daily practice	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Russian	29.6	364	44.4	546
Belarusian	48.6	598	20.0	246
Mixed language	37.6	462	37.8	465
Polish	0.2	2	2.3	28
Ukrainian	0	0	1.1	13
Other	0.3	1	0	0

Notes: Sample restricted to Belarusian nationality, n = 1230. Totals do not add to 100% because more than one entry allowed.

The most striking finding of Table 1 is, of course, the fact that the Mixed language has been declared the mother tongue by 462 respondents and that 465 respondents admitted that the Mixed language is the variety used in addition to the mother tongue in daily practice.[10] This means that more than three out of four respondents claim to practice Trasianka in some way.

There are two caveats to be considered at this point. Firstly, one may certainly ask whether Trasianka can be considered a "language in its own right." As mentioned above, to a large extent Belarusian and Russian are mutually — though asymmetrically — comprehensible. Trasianka differs only gradually from the other two variants. Disregarding variation due to regionalism, it is more comprehensible to Belarusians than Russian and to Russians than Belarusian. This means that comprehensibility is no valid criterion. In structural terms, all three varieties could be regarded as variants of one language which would be an abstract diasystem that can only be accessed by learning one of the variants.[11] As a matter of fact, most Belarusians interviewed believe Trasianka to be clearly distinct from both Belarusian and Russian. 484 (39.3%) of the respondents consider Trasianka to be a variant of Belarusian while 230 (18.7%) claim it to be a variant of Russian. However, according to 491 respondents (39.9%) Trasianka is a language in its own right. It is an unquestioned fact that Trasianka does not obtain "overt prestige," but in view of the large proportion of respondents who claim the Mixed language to be their mother tongue, we have to admit a considerable "covert prestige" in Trudgill's (1972) sense.[12]

Secondly, one may question the meaning of "mother tongue" in the Belarusian context. As mentioned above, Belarus has been subject to strong pressures of Russification. As a consequence, the Belarusian "mother tongue" has obtained a mythical status that is not necessarily connected to actual speech. Hence respondents may have very different things in mind when asked about their mother tongue and about the language in which they started to speak. This is clearly demonstrated in Table 2 which cross-classifies the mother tongues mentioned by respondents and their first language of socialization.

Table 2. *Mother tongue and first language spoken*

First language spoken	Mother tongue		
	Belarusian	Russian	Mixed speech
Belarusian	120	15	52
Russian	145	180	113
Mixed speech	213	33	264

Note: $N = 1219$, only Belarusian nationals included, other languages and missings excluded. Not corrected for multiple entries (respondents indicating that they have more than one mother tongue or first language spoken).

If the mother tongue and the frst language spoken were conceptually identical, we would observe a large majority of cases along the main diagonal, while off-diagonal cells would be flled only by cases of multiglossia. We fnd, however, substantially more cases off the main diagonal than we would expect according to the distribution of responses in Table 1. According to a stricter defnition of the mother tongue, which not only requires that a respondent declares a language as her or his mother tongue, but also that she or he indicates that they started to speak in that language, 120 respondents speak Belarusian, 180 speak Russian, and 264 speak Trasianka as their mother tongue. The entries in the off-diagonal cells then indicate the number of respondents who are either multiglossial or differentiate between their mother tongue and their frst language of socialization.

First, we examined combinations of mother tongues (whereby we disregard all languages other than Belarusian, Russian, and the Mixed language) and then we compared these data with the answers to the questions about frst spoken languages and additional languages in daily usage.

There is a clear tri-partitioning of the general tendency to declare one's mother tongue (Table 3). More than 1,000 respondents declared only one language as their mother tongue (cf. columns I to III in rows A to C). These will be called *mono mother tongue* speakers (*mmt*-speakers). Although all three subgroups of the *mmt*-speakers are roughly the same size, the group with Belarusian mother tongue is larger than the group with Russian. The second "macro-group" are *poly mother tongue* speakers (*pmt*-speakers; cf. rows D to G). Three out of four respondents within this group named the two languages as their mother tongues which exist as codifed standard languages: Belarusian and Russian (row D). The second subgroup of *pmt*-speakers consists of speakers who declared one of their mother tongues to be the Mixed language and at least one of the other two languages considered to be further ones (rows E to G).

Another interesting question is, which mother tongue is declared when the Mixed language is said to be regularly used in addition to the mother tongue (Table 4).

The most interesting fnding here is the fact that the Mixed language was declared to be additionally used by 68.2% ($n = 288$) of the 422 Belarusian *mmt*-speakers (cf. Table 3), but only by 43.3% ($n = 91$) of the 210 Russian *mmt*-speakers. Those speaking both Belarusian and Russian, not surprisingly, showed an intermediate value: 53.8% ($n = 71$) of 132.

How can one interpret these data? First of all one has to be aware of the previously mentioned fact that declaring Belarusian as the mother tongue in Belarus is to a large degree a symbolic act and does not imply that the corresponding speakers regularly speak Belarusian. This is mirrored in Table 3 by the fact that only 1.7% ($n = 7$) of the 422 Belarusian *mmt*-speakers declared

Table 3. *Combinations of mother tongues (Belarusian, Russian, and the Mixed speech)*

	Mother tongue				Additional languages in daily usage				
	Mixed language I	Belarusian II	Russian III	*n*	Mixed language IV	Belarusian V	Russian VI	Two combined VII	No other VIII
A	–	+	–	422	116	**	110	172	7
B	+	–	–	412	**	14	95	128	165
C	–	–	+	210	54	54	**	37	61
D	–	+	+	132	71	**	**	**	56
E	+	+	–	30	**	**	18	**	10
F	+	+	+	12	**	**	**	**	**
G	+	–	+	8	**	3	**	**	5
Totals				1226	241	71	223	337	304

Notes: –, not spoken as mother tongue; **, logically excluded. Totals do not add up because of languages not considered (Polish, Ukrainian, other).

Table 4. *Declared mother tongue when Mixed language additional daily used language*

Declared mother tongue	Percent	*n*	cf. in Table 2 Column / Row
Belarusian and Russian	16.0	74	IV / D
Belarusian (only)	64.4	298	IV and VII / A
Russian (only)	19.7	91	IV and V / D
Total	100	463	

Table 5. *Self-estimated use of the two state languages*

Mmt-group	Belarusian			Russian		
	Constantly	Often	*n**	Constantly	Often	*n**
Belarusian	18	98	116	147	142	289
Russian	1	10	11	172	31	203
Mixed language	9	57	66	118	125	243

*, *n* has been calculated on the basis of the sum of values of both left-side columns.

that they do not use any other language in addition to their mother tongue. This is completely different for the two other groups of *mmt*-speakers. Russian and Mixed *mmt*-speakers declared in three out of ten cases that they do not use any other language than their mother tongue: 40.0% ($n = 165$) of the 412 Mixed *mmt*-speakers and 29.0% ($n = 61$) of the 210 Russian *mmt*-speakers. A similar phenomenon was observed in the fact that only 3.4% ($n = 14$) Mixed *mmt*-speakers declared using only Belarusian additionally. This clearly indicates that one can much more easily do without Belarusian than without Russian and/or the Mixed language. Mentioning the latter as not only an additional language but also as a mother tongue is much less of a symbolic act and can be considered to more realistically indicate real language usage.[13] This supports the suggestion above that while the Mixed language has a lower overt prestige, it may have a covert one in Trudgill's (1972) sense. But nevertheless, one can assume that not only those respondents who declared the Mixed language an additional one in regular usage, but even those who named it as their mother tongue, really use it, at least in informal or family contexts.

Before calculating the Q-values, it is interesting to check how the three subgroups of *mmt*-speakers estimate the frequency of their use of the two state languages, Belarusian and Russian (Table 5).

Only 27.5% ($n = 116$) of the 422 Belarusian *mmt*-speakers claimed to speak Belarusian constantly (extremely often) or often. Russian and Mixed *mmt*-speakers speak it less often: 5.2% ($n = 11$) of 210 and 16.0% ($n = 66$) of 412, respectively. The situation is completely different for Russian. 96.7% ($n = 203$) of 210 Russian *mmt*-speakers claimed to use it constantly (an overwhelming

Table 6. *Q-values for the main Belarusian languages*

	1 Russian	2 Belarusian	3 Mixed	4 All three	5 Row sums	6 Number of multilingual speakers of language
Russian	79	95	245	715	1134	1055
Belarusian	95	1	21	715	832	831
Mixed	245	21	72	715	1053	981
Total number of speakers					1230	
Total number of multilingual speakers					1076	

	Prevalence	Centrality	Q-value
Russian	0.92	0.98	0.90
Belarusian	0.68	0.77	0.52
Mixed	0.86	0.91	0.78

Notes: Data from own survey on language usage in Belarus ($N = 1228$). Based on reported actual usage of languages in different social situations. A language is coded spoken if it is used in at least one type of situation.

The cell entries in the upper left 3×3 symmetric matrix (columns 1–3) contain the number of monolingual speakers on the main diagonal and the bilingual speakers in the off-diagonal cells. Column 4 contains the number of speakers of all three languages. The four categories are then summed over the rows for each language, yielding, in column 5, the number of respondents who speak a language in at least one social situation. The sixth row contains the number of multilingual speakers of a language (i.e., column 5 — number of monolingual speakers of a language).

Prevalence is defned as (Number of speakers of a language (col. 5) / Total number of speakers).

Centrality is defned as (Number of multilingual speakers of a language / Total number of multilingual speakers).

The Q-value is the product of Prevalence and Centrality.

4. Sociostructural background of language usage

We now discuss the conditional distribution of language usage for core sociostructural variables. First, we focus on the distribution of mother tongue and the language of frst socialization. Then, we shift to language usage in everyday life.

4.1. *Sociodemographic factors of mother tongue identification*

The respondents were between 15 and 85 years of age. Altogether 46.7% ($n = 575$) males and 53.3% ($n = 655$) females participated in the survey. With regard to the range of educational backgrounds, 7.0% ($n = 86$) had no formal

Table 7. *Distribution of mother tongues across towns*

	Mixed language		Belarusian		Russian		Total
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	*n*
Minsk	19.3	32	40.4	67	56.6	94	166
Slonim	19.0	31	65.0	106	27.6	45	163
Rahacho	39.3	72	42.1	77	36.1	66	183
Smarhon’	48.2	79	40.9	67	20.1	33	164
Shaka shchyna	37.4	70	58.3	109	24.6	46	187
Akciabrski	58.9	109	37.8	70	18.4	34	185
Khocimsk	38.3	69	56.7	102	25.6	46	180
Total		462		598		364	1228

N = 1228, Percentages refer to the share of the total number of respondents per town who indicate that a language is their mother tongue. Rows do not sum to 100 percent because multiple responses for mother tongues were allowed.

Table 8. *Distribution of mother tongue according to education*

	Mixed		Belarusian		Russian	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Incomplete secondary school (8–9 years and less)	6.7	31	7.2	43	8.5	31
Secondary education (10–11 years)	24.0	111	20.2	121	19.2	70
Professional technical (vocational school)	12.3	57	12.7	76	11.0	40
Secondary special (college, technical school)	36.6	169	36.6	219	28.8	105
Higher education	20.3	94	23.2	139	32.4	118
Total	100	462	100	598	100	364

N = 1230, multiple responses for mother tongues allowed.

educational qualifications, 69.1% ($n = 849$) had completed secondary education, and 24.0% ($n = 295$) had completed higher education.[15]

Table 7 presents the distribution of mother tongues across the seven towns. It shows that all three languages considered spread over all towns, whereby it is noticeable that the Mixed language is less often mentioned as the mother tongue in Minsk and Slonim than in other towns. At the same time, the comparison reveals a high concentration of Russian as the declared mother tongue in Minsk. The highest share of the Mixed mother tongue and — concomitantly — the lowest rate of Russian speakers were observed in Akciabrski.

Focusing on the levels of education, Table 8 shows that the Mixed language as a mother tongue is distributed over all classes of the population. Moreover, the figures for Belarusian and Russian are fairly similar. The only clear differ-

Table 9. *Gender proportions of mother tongues*

	Female		Male	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Russian	46.7	170	53.3	194
Belarusian	55.2	330	44.8	268
Mixed	54.1	250	45.9	212

ence to be mentioned is a noticeably higher value for higher education connected with Russian as mother tongue.

There are some gender-related differences in the tendencies indicated in the three languages studied as the mother tongue, though they are rather small (Table 9). Whereas more women than men indicate that the Mixed language or Belarusian is their mother tongue, the distribution is equal for Russian. This could be a hint at the social context in which the Mixed language and the Belarusian language are predominantly spoken. Both languages, which will be further described below, are used more often for family communication, a domain which tends to be dominated by women.

In summary, identifcation with the Mixed language as a mother tongue is distributed over all educational groups and regions in Belarus. Therefore, the widespread opinion of the Mixed language as a phenomenon of uneducated speakers is not supported by our data.

Turning to the issue of intergenerational transmission of the Mixed language, we compared three age cohorts of speakers who claimed the Mixed language as their mother tongue. The classifcation is motivated as follows: The frst age cohort is the one that developed the (post-war) Mixed language during the period of massive urbanization and industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s. We thus defne the frst age cohort as those respondents who were over 50 (51 years and older) in 2008 (hence born before 1958). The second age cohort roughly refers to their children and the third age cohort, to their grandchildren. Row 4 in Table 10 presents the distribution of these groups in our sample.[16]

The effect of urban migration in the 1950s and 1960s is refected in the fndings for the place of residence. Only 32.1% ($n = 85$) of the frst age cohort declared to have lived their whole lives in the same place of residence, whereas the second age cohort answered this question with a proportion of 44.7% ($n = 165$) and the third with a proportion of 71.6% ($n = 427$). Concurrently, 61.9% ($n = 164$) of the frst age cohort reported to have spent their childhood in a village.

Cross-tabulating age with mother tongue (rows 1–3 in Table 10) we fnd the following: Half of the frst age cohort declared Belarusian to be their mother

Table 10. *Mother tongue by age cohort*

Mother tongue	1st age cohort		2nd age cohort		3rd age cohort		Total	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
1 Mixed language	33.6	88	42.3	156	36.6	218	37.6	462
2 Belarusian	59.6	158	49.1	181	43.5	259	48.6	598
3 Russian	19.6	52	24.9	92	36.9	220	29.6	364
4 Total	21.5	265	30.0	369	48.5	596	100	1230

Note: Cell frequencies and column percentages in rows 1–3 relate to totals in row 4 and do not add to 100% because of multiple responses. Cell frequencies and row percentages in row 4 add to 100%.

tongue. From the frst to the third age cohort this share decreases, although only slightly between the second and the third one. Mixed language as mother tongue clearly increases between the frst and the second age cohort, but decreases slightly from the second to the third one. Russian shows an increase only in the third age cohort. The most obvious and unsurprising details are, frst, that Belarusian is the dominant mother tongue among the oldest respondents, and Russian among the youngest ones. Somewhat more surprising is the rather high prevalence of the Mixed language among the older respondents. This highlights a shift away from the symbolic identifcation with the Belarusian language over the generations and an increasing appraisal of language usage in daily conversation for the defnition of the mother tongue.

4.2. *Language socialization*

Table 11, which refers to the question of the frst language learned, revealed the success of Russifcation policies during the Soviet Period. We observe that the proportion of those who started with Russian has almost doubled from the frst to the third age cohort with the clearest increase between the second and the third one. Concomitantly, the number of respondents starting with Belarusian decreased to less than half of the value for the frst age cohort. The proportion

Table 11. *Development of the language of first socialization by age cohort*

Language of frst socialization	1st age cohort	2nd age cohort	3rd age cohort
Russian	57	122	337
Belarusian	81	73	66
Mixed language	150	209	247

Note: Cell frequencies do not add to $N = 1230$ because of multiple response options.

Table 12. *Self-reported normally spoken language*

	1st age cohort		2nd age cohort		3rd age cohort		Total	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Standard Belarusian	1.1	3	0.6	2	0.0	0	0.4	5
Belarusian with some Russian words	4.9	13	5.4	20	2.7	16	4.0	49
Standard Russian	7.2	19	19.0	37	13.7	82	11.2	138
Russian with some Belarusian words	31.3	83	41.2	152	50.2	299	43.4	534
Belarusian–Russian or Russian–Belarusian mixture	55.5	147	42.8	158	33.4	199	41.0	504
Total	100	265	100	369	100	596	100	1230

N = 1230

of the Mixed language also decreased, though rather slightly and only between the second and the third generation.

We now turn to a more detailed analysis of the statements about the languages which the respondents "normally" use, differentiating between the three age cohorts. The most striking detail of Table 12 is the very small number of respondents mentioning Belarusian as the normally used language, even when we combine those who indicated "clean" Standard Belarusian and those who indicated speaking Belarusian with Russian words. The second striking detail is the fact that more than 80% (all age cohorts together) admitted that they normally practice some sort of mix. With almost equal shares, some call this mix Russian with Belarusian words or either a Belarusian–Russian or a Russian–Belarusian mixture. In these two subgroups of speakers we observed the most important change in the comparison of age cohorts: 55.5% of the older age cohort said their normal speech was a "balanced mixture," while 31.3% indicated that they spoke Russian with Belarusian words. For the youngest generation, these proportions are reversed: 33.4% and 50.2%, respectively. The intermediate age cohort shows intermediate values with almost perfectly equal shares of the two variants. This obviously mirrors the observations made by Hentschel and Tesch (2007) and Hentschel (2008b) that the token frequency of Russian elements (words and morphs) is higher in the Mixed speech of younger people. Noteworthy is also the doubling of the reported usage of Standard Russian (from 7.2% to 13.7%).

Note, however, that the quality of the Russian spoken by the respondents who declared it to be the language of first socialization and to use it regularly

Table 13. *Language usage across generations*

	1st age cohort					
	Russian		Belarusian		Mixed language	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Grandparents	17.9	5	28.6	8	53.6	15
Parents	27.0	17	7.9	5	65.1	41
Siblings	30.7	31	5.9	6	63.4	64
Friends	34.0	65	5.2	10	60.7	116
Colleagues	47.5	57	5.0	6	47.5	57
	2nd age cohort					
	Russian		Belarusian		Mixed language	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Grandparents	25.3	23	29.7	27	45.1	41
Parents	34.5	51	16.2	24	49.3	73
Siblings	41.7	55	6.1	8	52.3	69
Friends	47.5	96	6.9	14	45.5	92
Colleagues	58.5	124	9.4	20	32.1	68
	3rd age cohort					
	Russian		Belarusian		Mixed language	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Grandparents	26.8	60	30.8	69	42.4	95
Parents	44.4	127	8.0	23	47.6	136
Siblings	51.3	115	2.2	5	46.4	104
Friends	52.1	161	5.5	17	42.4	131
Colleagues	58.5	117	8.5	17	33.0	66

Notes: The basis for the calculation of these groups is the numbers of speakers who answered that they use Russian, Belarusian, or the Mixed language in everyday life. Due to the possibility to mention more than one language for each category, the column sums and the row sums do not add up to the number of respondents. The cell entries hence refer to interaction situations, not to respondents.

n = Number of respondents in age cohort stating to use a language (columns) in interaction with the particular type of partner (rows).

Percent = Proportion of the respondents in the age cohort that uses the language in interactions with the particular type of partner. Percentages sum to 100 across rows.

is unclear.[17] For some speakers, “Russian” will be much like the “Mixed” language of others. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that many Belarusians, especially those with higher education, speak fuent Russian, although this Russian often contains phonetic Belarusian interferences and maybe some Belarusian words, often for Belarusian realia.[18]

4.3. *Language usage in social contexts*

Knowing a language does not necessarily imply its usage. We therefore asked respondents to report on their language use in different situations. Table 13 shows the results of this analysis. The most striking finding is the reverse distribution of Russian and Belarusian across all age cohorts: Russian is preferably spoken in the more public spheres of friends and colleagues; Belarusian has its stronghold, at a much lower level, in intergenerational communication. Interactions between siblings, however, tend to co-vary with the more public contexts. Interestingly, the use of Russian in the more public sphere has increased more strongly from the first to the second generation than from the second to the third. This shift took place in workplace contexts earlier than among friends, but it has been stronger for the latter contexts (almost 20 percentage points over two generations) than for the former (roughly 10 percentage points).

Focusing on the use of the Mixed language over the generations, we find that it has gradually lost ground against Russian. More specifically, we find the largest drops (starting from high levels) from the first to the third age cohort in the use of the Mixed language in interactions with parents (minus 20 percentage points), while the usage of the Mixed language among siblings, friends and colleagues decreased by roughly 15 percentage points.

In comparison, the use of Russian increases from the first to the third generation in all social situations studied. Whereas speaking Russian with grandparents in the first generation is very seldom, this increased over the generations to more than a quarter. Regarding communication with parents, the increase from the first generation to the third generation was still higher. In summary, we find that in everyday communication the Mixed language is used about as frequently as the Russian language in all social interaction situations, although it is losing ground over the generations.

5. Conclusion

In contrast to previous studies of the language situation in Belarus, this analysis of language usage and language socialization has systematically paid attention not only to Belarusian and Russian but also to the Mixed speech (“Trasianka”). The first important insight has been that the Mixed speech is very common in communication in — at least urban — Belarus. In the towns investigated, roughly two-thirds of the respondents declared the “Mixed language” either as their “mother tongue” or used it regularly alongside another “mother tongue.” The very fact that three out of ten respondents declared the Mixed language to

be their mother tongue hints at the development of a symbolic charge (in the sense of a covert prestige) of the Mixed language. This is clearly opposed to the official stigmatization of “Trasianka” in Belarus.

By measuring the Q-value of the Mixed language and comparing it to the Russian and Belarusian value, we showed that the Mixed language is not only widespread in Belarus, at least in urban contexts, but has (at least as long as no general “Belarusian turn” is taken in governmental language policy) a higher “probability” to survive than Belarusian in everyday usage alongside Russian among the population of the Belarusian towns. This high potential for survival of Mixed speech in Belarus is mirrored by the findings that it is established among speakers of all educational levels (although many would rather deny to use or “love” it, when asked openly and not anonymously as in this study) with only slight differences. This also holds for both sexes. The “popularity” of Mixed speech is nevertheless (rather slightly) declining across generations; Russian, however, shows an increase and Belarusian remains stable at a comparatively lower level. Most significantly, only 5 out of 100 respondents claimed to use Belarusian regularly.

These findings show how it is possible for the Mixed speech to develop into an autonomous Mixed language consisting of Belarusian and Russian. In other words, the mixing in Trasianka may already be conventionalized to some degree and it is the task of linguists to decide how far this has in fact taken place. If Trasianka were to be called an “autonomous” language or mixed system (not just an instance of spontaneous mixing) it would have to be seen as a language in the sense of a subvariety. This subvariety would moreover be heterogeneous, with structural differences in regions around urban centers, because “the mixture” would not be one of Russian and Belarusian standard languages but of Belarusian rural dialects as well. The figures presented in this article hint at the possibility that Belarus may experience a rather complete shift in Belarusian society from Belarusian (dialect and standard) to Russian at the standard level, leaving the subvariety level for Trasianka, which could replace Belarusian dialects in the long run.[19]

The distribution of language usage across generations suggests that the Mixed language has been established alongside Standard Russian, although its fate is not yet clear given the declining usage among younger generations. One scenario could be that it may well continue to be used under the roof of Standard Russian as a form of regional subvariety that preserves Belarusian identity.[20] Another scenario would assume a change in Belarusian language policy similar to the Ukrainian system. A revival of Belarusian (on the standard level) — which today seems to be practiced by very few people — would by no means have to result in a withdrawal of the Trasianka. At the subvariety level, it may survive even under the roof of Standard Belarusian. Then the Mixed language could take on a position in the Belarusian language variations that

may be comparable with the diglossic Czech language: Czech standard is by and large the revitalized Czech of the sixteenth century. When this revitalization took place, vernacular Czech had developed quite differently. Nowadays both are vivid, as in Belarus with the mixed Trasianka and — for the time being — Russian, but much less Belarusian.

Our findings are preliminary in the sense that they rely on simple descriptive statistical summaries and bivariate analyses. They are restrictive in the sense of yielding a representative picture of seven cities and can only be generalized to the extent that the chosen cities are representative of the society as a whole. Future research efforts will be geared toward a more fine-grained, multivariate analysis of the data, including an in-depth study of the validity of claims about language usage made in the present survey by means of a detailed linguistic study of speech acts by the interviewees.

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Notes

* This article reports first empirical findings from the project “Trasianka in Belarusian — a “mixed variety” as a product of the Belarusian–Russian linguistic contact. Language-based structure, sociological mechanisms of identification and language economics,” funded by the Volkswagen-Stiftung (grant no. II/83 371, 14 April 2008). We would like to thank the foundation for its support. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to David Rotman and Natallia Veremeeva, Center for Sociological and Political Research at the Belarusian State University, Minsk, for organizing and conducting the survey. Remaining errors are ours.

1. In 1989, 90% of the rural population and only 30% of the urban population admitted to having the Belarusian language as a mother tongue (cf. Bieder 2001: 462).
2. This is very much the same with Ukrainian “Surzhyk,” i.e., Ukrainian–Russian mixed speech, when Ukrainians had to linguistically adopt Russian under Czarist Russian or Soviet rule. In recent years, on the other hand, a Russian based form of Surzhyk has developed due to the fact that millions of Russian-speaking citizens (be they ethnic Russians, ethnic Ukrainians, or others) had to adapt themselves linguistically to Ukrainian, which was declared the only state language in the independent Ukraine and thus was made obligatory in a large number of official spheres, leaving minority rights for the legal status of Russian. Between 1990 and 1995, when Belarusian was the only state language, it looked as if there could be a similar development in Belarus as well and thus a large-scale Russian-based Trasianka.
3. Morphology has always been considered especially important in the discussion on pidgins and creoles. As Thomason (2001: 168) stated: “most pidgins and creoles lack morphology entirely or have very limited morphological resources [. . .]” and (2001: 172) “no pidgins or creoles have morphological systems as elaborate as those of their most elaborate input languages.” In Trasianka-type mixed speech, no such morphological reduction can

be observed. What can be described is a certain tendency to regularize patterns of morphological form (e.g., Hentschel 2008a), which is typical in dialect contact, completely preserving the highly congruent and complex morphological categories of the two input languages.

4. Greenberg's A-Index assesses the degree of linguistic heterogeneity of a language community. This calculation, however, only relies on the mother tongues spoken in a certain population. It does not address the relative position of a language in a bundle of different language repertoires. See Laitin (2000).
5. An improvement in the signif cance of the Q-value for individual decisions to learn a particular language in the sense intended by De Swaan would require knowing the actual distribution of language usage in the actual social environment of an individual. The effort necessary for such a task transgresses the possibilities of our project. Nevertheless, we consider the calculations based on the self-reporting of speakers of the three languages in seven Belarusian towns we attained to be at least a rough estimate.
6. The sample is thus not representative for the whole country of Belarus but ref ects tendencies in Belarusian cities.
7. Our results are thus based on the statements of respondents about their language usage and are subject to the limitations of self-reported information. This information will be validated in the next step of the project, in which a subsample of the survey respondents will be interviewed by means of a recorded narrative interview in which actual language usage will be coded.
8. The selection of the towns was guided by the following principle: From each of the acknowledged dialectal area of Belarusian (the northeast, the southwest, and the central one) two towns were chosen: one in the west, the other in the east. Additionally, Minsk, the capital, was taken into consideration. A more detailed description of the sampling procedure is available from the authors.
9. We also considered using a Belarusian version of the questionnaire. Because of the semi-off cial f avor of an interview and the ensuing Russian imprint, this idea did not seem practicable. At the time of writing, a series of qualitative interviews with speakers of Trasianka is being conducted in which the mixed language is used if appropriate. This is due to the embedded aim of using the recordings of the interviews for linguistic purposes. This mandates a more trustful environment.
10. In spite of the fact that, for the moment, it is unclear whether Trasianka can be seen as a separate language, i.e., as a more or less stable mixed system from the point of view of a linguist (and not only as a form of spontaneous mixed speech), we used the label "Mixed language" in the questionnaires and will use it from here on informally in the description of the quantitative f ndings.
11. First, it has to be underlined that it is commonly accepted among linguists that not all dialects (varieties) of a given language are necessarily mutually comprehensible. Second, there are many instances of acknowledged languages (not only Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian) that show a certain degree of mutual comprehensiveness, e.g., Czech and Slovak, to give a further Slavic example, or some Scandinavian Germanic languages (cf. Haugen 1966). In other words, comprehensiveness is not an absolute criterion to differentiate languages if the corresponding varieties are genetically related. Public acknowledgment of some variety A being a dialect of B or of A and B being separate languages is often determined (at least partially) on historical, that is, on political and social grounds.
12. An interesting note in this context is that almost two-thirds of the respondents in our survey do not share the opinion of many Belarusian intellectuals that Trasianka threatens the Belarusian language. This suggests that our respondents do not consider Belarusian and Trasianka to be competitors in the social spectrum of language varieties.

13. We say this from the perspective of the generally cited low status of Trasianka in Belarus. It is also possible that we could find evidence for a specific symbolic charge by declaring Trasianka as a mother tongue in further studies, e.g., the narrative interviews with Trasianka speakers, which were ongoing at the time of writing.
14. For this reason, language combinations involving Polish, Ukrainian, and others are not integrated into the calculation.
15. Note that the Census Data of 1999 showed different distributions. 71.2% had completed secondary or basic education, 14% higher education, and 14.8% did not complete basic education. This yields a ratio of one to five of higher educational qualification against basic or secondary education, whereas the present data suggest a ratio of one to three. Consequently, highly qualified respondents are somewhat overrepresented in our sample. We assume that this results from the explicit focus on towns in our sample. The results therefore can only be cautiously generalized to cities but not to rural areas.
16. We acknowledge that there is some arbitrariness in these cut points. We use them primarily for presentational reasons. The exploration of minor changes to these cut points did not alter the findings substantially.
17. As a matter of fact, almost 20% of all respondents declared to know Russian very well, about 60% well, and 20% at least satisfactorily. Surprisingly, there were only minimal differences between the age cohorts.
18. This can be compared with differences in the pronunciation of Standard German in cities like Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart, etc., and even Vienna and Zürich.
19. The authors would like to express their hope that this will not come true.
20. A similar scenario has been observed for Cajun English, which is heavily interfered by French and has replaced local French of the older generation as an index for French identity with the young generation, which is able to speak English perfectly (Dubois and Horvath 1998).

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