

1 Varieties of language and register

1.1 The Russian language and its distribution

The Russian language belongs to the East Slav group of languages, itself part of the Slavonic branch of the Indo-European family. The relationship of Russian to the other modern European languages is illustrated by Figure 1 (which includes only languages still used by substantial numbers of speakers).

It is difficult to give accurate up-to-date figures for the number of people for whom Russian is their native or first language, or at least their first language for some purpose or purposes (e.g. professional or social). This difficulty arises for several reasons. Firstly, we are dealing with several different categories of user, including the following: ethnic Russians who are citizens of the Russian Federation; ethnic Russians who are citizens of other former republics of the Soviet Union; members of other ethnic groups who are citizens of the Russian Federation; and members of other ethnic groups who are citizens of other former republics of the Soviet Union but who continue to use Russian at work or at home, perhaps because their community or family is mainly Russian-speaking. It is not always easy to define whether Russian is the first or second language of at least the latter two groups. Secondly, there has been much migration between the regions and states of the former Soviet Union since the collapse of the Union in 1991, with the result that numbers and proportions of ethnic Russians or other speakers of Russian in each former republic may have changed significantly over the last thirteen years. Thirdly, considerable numbers of both ethnic Russians and members of non-Russian ethnic groups who grew up in Russia or the Soviet Union using Russian as their first language have in the same period emigrated from the Russian Federation to countries outside the former Soviet Union. The number of Jews in the Russian Federation, for example, fell from roughly 540,000 in 1989 to 230,000 in 2002 and the number of Russian Germans has declined over the same period from 840,000 to 600,000. It is difficult to determine how many émigrés continue to use Russian as their first language, or for how long they do so, after their emigration.

The most easily quantifiable group of Russian-speakers, of course, is the citizenry of the Russian Federation, of which Russian is the official language. According to the census of the Russian Federation carried out in 2002, the population of the Federation was a little over 145 million¹, of whom some 116 million (i.e. almost 80 per cent) describe themselves as ethnically Russian.

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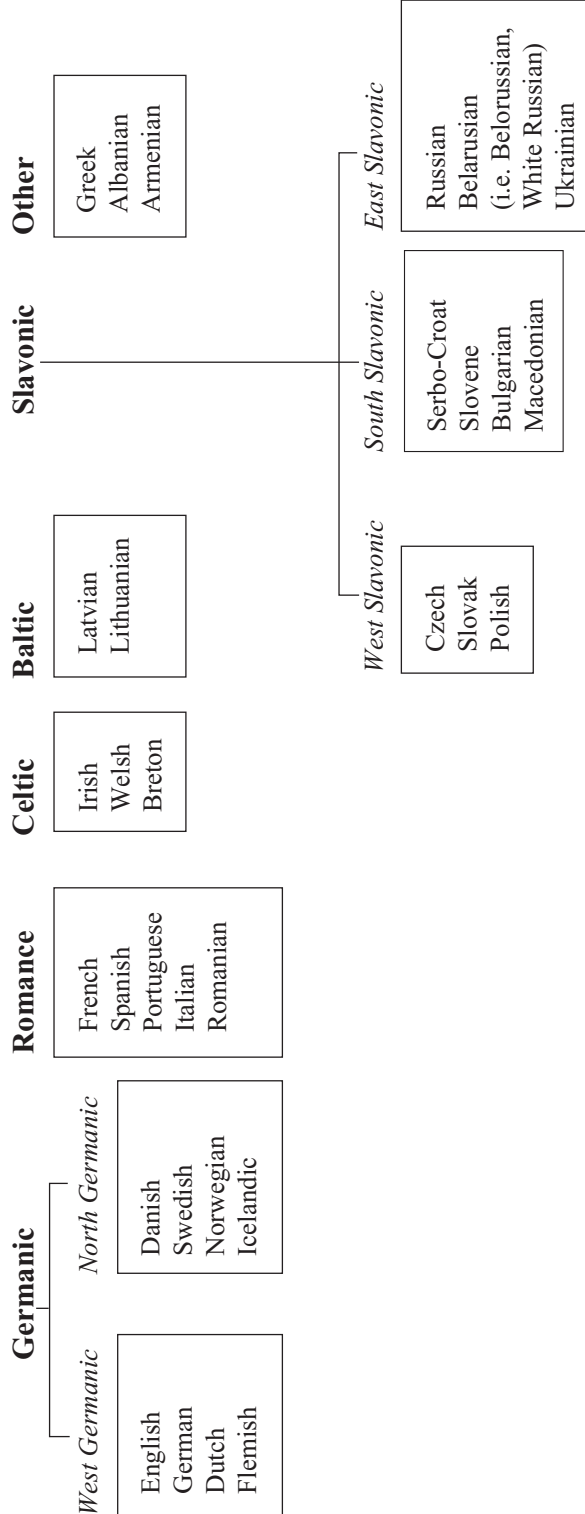


Fig. 1. The Indo-European languages

Among the remaining 20 per cent, or approximately 29 million, of the population of the Russian Federation (many of whom will also consider Russian their first language) 160 nationalities were represented, according to the 2002 census. The largest of these non-Russian groups, in descending order, were Tatars (of whom there were over five million), Ukrainians (almost three million, although their number in the Russian Federation has been decreasing), Bashkirs and Chuvashes (over a million each), and Chechens and Armenians (also over a million each, and their numbers in the Russian Federation have been increasing). Figure 2 shows the composition of the population of the Russian Federation by ethnic group, as revealed by the 2002 census.

Of the non-Russian citizens of the Federation the Ukrainians and Belorussians (whose numbers in the Russian Federation have also been decreasing) are ethnically close to the Russians. Their languages (i.e. Ukrainian and Belorussian respectively) are closely related to Russian, which Ukrainians and Belorussians are likely also to speak with native or near-native facility. However, many of the non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation (e.g. Estonians, Kazakhs, Latvians) belong to quite different ethnic groups from the Russians, including non-European groups. They may therefore speak a language that is only distantly related to Russian (e.g. Latvian, which is also Indo-European) or that belongs to a different linguistic group (e.g. Estonian, which is a Finno-Ugric language, or Kazakh, which is a Turkic language).² These non-Russian citizens of the Federation have varying degrees of command of Russian. A substantial number of them consider Russian their first language.

It needs to be borne in mind, incidentally, that different Russian terms are used to denote the different types of 'Russian' who have been identified in the preceding paragraphs. The substantivised adjective *ру́сский* (f *ру́сская*) denotes a person who is ethnically Russian. Used as an adjective, this word also denotes the Russian language (*ру́сский язы́к*). The noun *россия́нин* (f *россия́нка*), on the other hand, conveys the broader concept of a person who is a citizen of the Russian Federation but who is not necessarily ethnically Russian. The adjective *росси́йский* has a correspondingly broader sense than the adjective *ру́сский*, as, for example, in the name of the country itself (*Росси́йская Федера́ция*), which denotes a political rather than an ethnic, linguistic or cultural entity.

The numbers of ethnic Russian and non-Russian speakers of Russian outside the Russian Federation are more difficult to quantify. Some idea of their number can be gauged from the fact that at the time of the 1989 census (the last census carried out in the Soviet era) there were 25 million ethnic Russians living in other republics of the Soviet Union (see 6.11.1 for a list of these republics), the majority of them in Ukraine. Moreover, since Russian was used as a second language throughout the non-Russian areas of the Union, whose total

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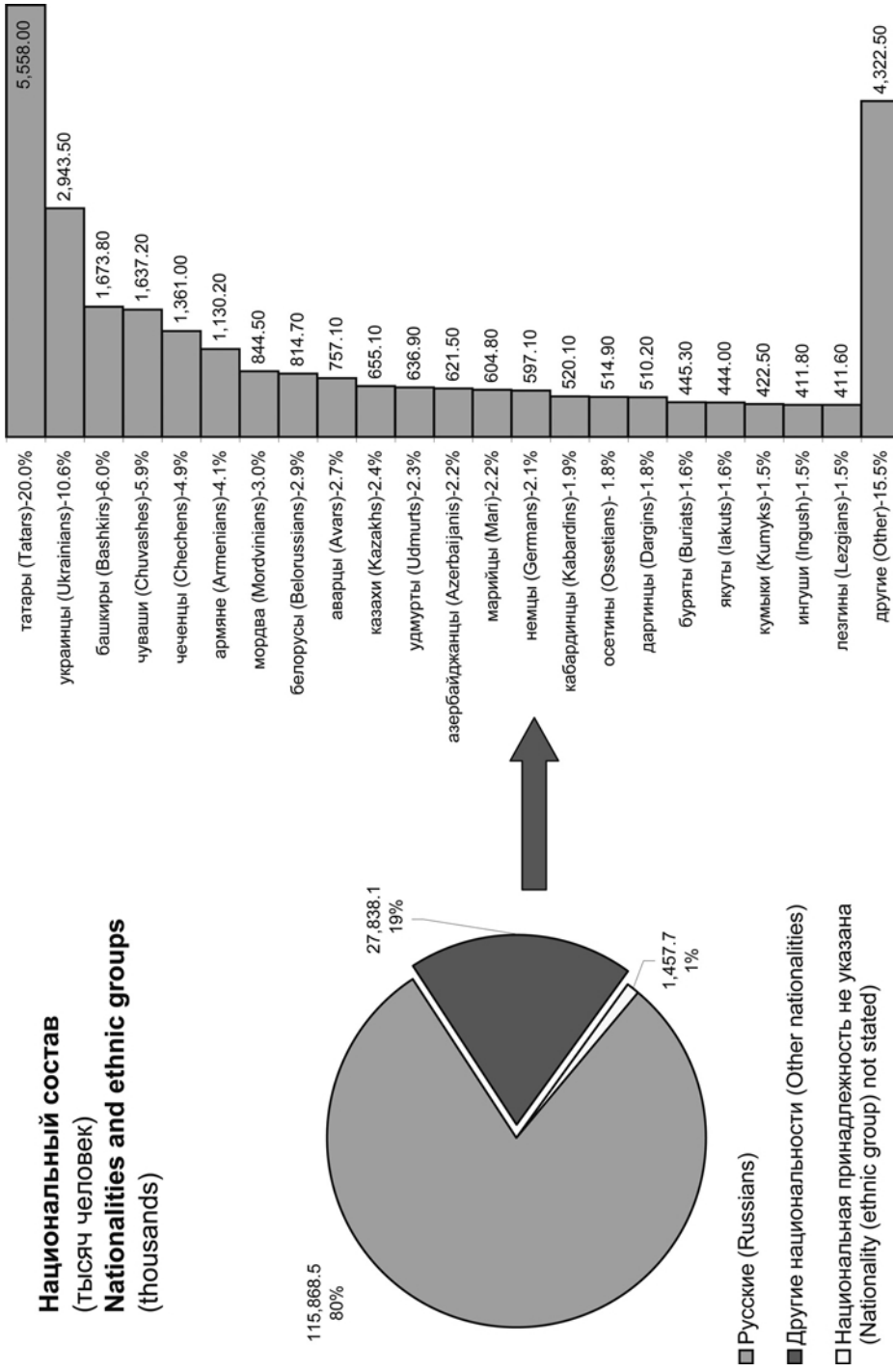


Fig. 2. Population of the Russian Federation by ethnic group, according to the 2002 census

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population in 1989 was 287 million, one may assume that the language was used as a first or second language by at least a further 50 million Soviet citizens. However, the status of the Russian language is now diminishing in the former Soviet republics in proportion as the languages of the ethnic groups that are dominant in the new states (e.g. Kazakhs in Kazakhstan) are promoted, particularly within the educational system. Admittedly Russian remains a lingua franca for commercial and diplomatic transactions in the former Soviet republics, especially among the older generation of speakers who were educated in Soviet times, when Russian was the dominant language throughout the Union. On the other hand, the rise of English as the language of global communication, and therefore the first foreign language to be taught in schools, may further weaken the status of Russian outside the Russian Federation. One may predict that in twenty or thirty years Russian will be less widely spoken in the former Soviet republics than it is today, especially in those countries with a relatively small residual ethnic Russian population (e.g. Lithuania). It is also possible that many people who do speak Russian in those countries will use it less than they do today and that they will have a poorer command of it than non-Russians who speak Russian there now.

Russian is of course also spoken, with varying degrees of fluency, accuracy and proximity to the Russian now spoken in Russia itself, by many émigrés or their descendants in countries outside the former Soviet Union. Russians, or members of other ethnic groups who were formerly Soviet citizens, have left the Soviet Union – or not returned to it – at four main periods in the last ninety years or so: in the years immediately or soon after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917; after the Second World War (1939–45), following their displacement; in the Brézhnev period (especially in the 1970s, after the granting of permission to Jews to leave the country); and from the mid-1980s, following the further relaxation of emigration controls. The principal destinations of these emigrants, at one time or another, have been France, Germany, Britain, the US and Israel. Many members of the Russian diaspora are permanently settled abroad but some – mainly more recent émigrés – are only temporarily resident outside Russia, perhaps because they are working or studying abroad.

Russian is also spoken by millions of people as a foreign language, especially people from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe who received all or most of their higher education in the Soviet Union. Moreover, Russian has been widely taught outside Russia since the Second World War, particularly when the Soviet Union was at its most powerful from the 1960s to the 1980s. Organisations such as the International Association of Teachers of the Russian Language and Literature (Международная ассоциация преподавателей русского языка or МАПРЯЛ) were set up in the Soviet period to support such activity. However, the number of foreigners learning Russian (estimated at some 20 million in 1979) has diminished in the

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post-Soviet period, following the demise of Russian hegemony in the Eastern bloc countries (East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) and the weakening of Russian influence in various states in other parts of the world (e.g. Cuba, Angola, Ethiopia, North Yemen and Vietnam).

It should be added, finally, that Russian is one of the official and working languages of the United Nations and UNESCO.

Although Russian is thus widely distributed, and although it is also the language in which one of the world's great bodies of imaginative literature has been created over the last two and a half centuries, it is with the varieties of Russian that are spoken by ethnic Russians in Russia today that this book is primarily concerned.

1.2 Varieties of language

The student learning a foreign language in a systematic way will generally study a form of it, or the single form of it, which educated native speakers consider normative, e.g. 'BBC English', Parisian French, Tuscan Italian, Mandarin or Cantonese. In the case of Russian this normative form is what Russians refer to as the 'literary language' (литературный язык). However, the term 'literary language' suggests to an English-speaker exclusively the written language, and the expression 'standard Russian' is therefore preferred in this book. Standard Russian embraces the spoken language of educated people as well as the written language, and its spoken form is based on educated Muscovite speech.

Study of the normative form of a language should inculcate a standard pronunciation and vocabulary and 'correct' grammatical rules. It is essential that the foreign student absorb such a norm both in order that he or she should be able to communicate with educated speakers of the language in a way acceptable to the largest possible number of them, and in order to establish criteria in his or her own mind for judging correctness and error in the language.

However, there comes a point in one's study of a foreign language when it also becomes necessary to recognise that the concept of norms is to some extent theoretical and abstract. This is so because a living language is constantly evolving and because innumerable varieties of it exist both within what is regarded as the norm and beyond the limits of that norm.

For one thing, what people consider correct changes with the passage of time. For example, authoritative Russian dictionaries indicate end stress throughout the future tense in the verbs поместить and поселить (поместить, etc., поселить, etc.), but many educated speakers now consider поместишь, etc. and поселишь, etc. normal and correct. As far as the historical evolution of Russian is concerned, the student needs to be aware that while the Russian of Púshkin, Turgénev and Tolstói is easily comprehensible to Russians today, it differs in some respects morphologically and especially lexically from

the contemporary language. Moreover, Russian is undergoing rapid change at the present time. This change is due to some extent to the global technological and managerial revolution of the late twentieth century, with its large new vocabulary, but also to the quite sudden breakdown of the communist order in Russia and the political, economic, social and cultural innovations and dislocations which that breakdown has entailed. The concerns that these linguistic changes have generated among educated Russians are dealt with in section 1.6 below.

More importantly from the point of view of this book, the language spoken in Russia today, while having a common core, has numerous varieties, as do modern English, French, German, Spanish and so on. For native users of a language do not all use their language in the same way. The language they use may vary depending on such factors as where they come from, which social group they belong to, whether they are speaking or writing, and how formal the context is in which they are communicating. In other words varieties of language are, in the terminology of the Romanian linguist Coseriu, diatopic (that is to say, characteristic of a particular place, as are regional dialects), diastratic (characteristic of a certain stratum, as are social dialects), diamesic (determined by medium, e.g. whether the example of language is written or spoken), or diaphasic (determined by degree of formality).

The last two types of variation are particularly important for us here, since no individual speaker of a language, whatever region or class he or she emanates from and irrespective of whether he or she writes and speaks what is considered the standard form of the language, uses the language in the same way in all situations. People make linguistic choices, which are determined by the situation in which they find themselves, selecting certain lexical, morphological and syntactic forms from among the options available in their language. They may even vary their pronunciation (and in Russian, their stress) according to the context. It is important for advanced learners of a language to be aware of this variety in the language's use, both in order that they may be sensitive to the nuances of what they hear and read and in order that they themselves may use language that is appropriate in a given situation and has the desired impact. After all, a sophisticated expression used in the wrong context may sound laughably pompous, while a coarse turn of phrase addressed to the wrong company may cause offence.

Bearing in mind what has been said about variety, one needs when studying language to reflect on the following factors. Who is using the language in a given instance, and with what intent? What form of communication is being used? What is its subject-matter? And what is the context? In other words, one should consider the user, purpose, medium, field and situation.

Factors relating to the speaker himself or herself which help to determine the type of language he or she uses are the speaker's age,

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sex, place of origin (see 1.5), level of education and social position or status. These factors may impinge on language directly, by affecting a person's accent, way of addressing others, range of vocabulary and command of grammar, and indirectly, by shaping and delimiting a person's knowledge and experience.

The purpose of communication in a given instance also has a bearing on the form of language used. One may be using language merely to impart information, as is the case for example in a scholarly article or lecture, a textbook or a weather forecast; or to persuade, as is the case in an editorial article, a lawyer's speech in court or a political broadcast; or merely for social intercourse, as is the case in a conversation with friends. Language used for the first purpose is likely to be logical, coherent, matter-of-fact, relatively sophisticated syntactically and shorn of emotional expressiveness. Language used for the last purpose, on the other hand, is likely to be less rational and less complex syntactically, and may deploy a range of emotional and expressive resources.

The medium used for communication also significantly affects the language used. Perhaps the most important distinction to be made under this heading is the distinction between spoken and written forms of language. The distinction has been defined by David Crystal in the following way. Speech is time-bound and transient. The speaker has particular addressees in mind. Because of the probable lack of forethought and the speed of delivery the constructions used are relatively simple and loose. There is a higher incidence of coordinating conjunctions than subordinating conjunctions. Spoken language may incorporate slang, nonsense words and obscenity. Utterances may be repeated or rephrased and comments interpolated. It is prone to error, but there is an opportunity for the speaker to reformulate what has been said. Such factors as loudness, intonation, tempo, rhythm and pause play an important role. In the event of face-to-face communication extra-linguistic aids to communication might be used, such as expression, gesture and posture. Speech is suited to social intercourse, the expression of personal feelings, opinions and attitudes. Writing, on the other hand, is space-bound and permanent. The writer is separated from the person addressed, that is to say the reader. The written language tends to be carefully organised and its syntax relatively intricate. There is a higher incidence of subordination in it than there is in speech. Documents may be edited and corrected before they are disseminated and format and graphic conventions may strengthen their impact. Writing is suited to the recording of facts and the exposition of ideas. It should be noted, though, that there is no simple correlation between speech and informality, on the one hand, and writing and formality on the other. While the written language tends to be more formal than the spoken language it is not necessarily so. For example, the written language in the form of a letter to a partner, friend or relation is likely to be less formal than such examples of the spoken language as an academic lecture, a radio or television interview, or a political speech.

As for field, language is affected by subject-matter in an obvious way, inasmuch as fields of activity and branches of knowledge have their special terminology, for example, political, philosophical, scientific, medical, musical, literary, sporting, professional and so forth. However, the effect of field on language may go further than terminology. Groups have distinctive ways of expressing themselves: doctors, for example, are likely to describe patients' symptoms in language altogether different from that used by patients themselves.

Finally, regarding situation, one's mode of expression may be affected by the nature of the relationship that exists between the user and the person or people with whom he or she is communicating. Language is likely to vary according to such factors as whether one is speaking, for example, to one's elders (with any one of a range of nuances from respect, deference, sympathy or affection to condescension or intolerance), to children (lovingly, reproachfully, sternly), to a superior or junior at work, or to an intimate or a stranger.

1.3 Registers

The varieties of language that result from the interaction of the factors described in 1.2 represent stylistic levels which, in common with authors of other books in this series, we shall term registers.³ Although the number of registers that may be identified is quite large, for the purposes of this book a scale will be used on which three main registers are marked (low, neutral and high). These registers will be referred to throughout the book as R1, R2 and R3, respectively. Beyond the first of these registers lie demotic speech (1.3.2) and vulgar language (5.6) and within R3 lie various functional styles (функциональные стили) which will be classified here as scientific or academic style, official, legal or business style, and the styles of journalism and political debate (1.3.4).

These registers, which are examined in more detail below, broadly speaking reflect a spectrum ranging from informality, in the case of R1, to formality, in the case of R3. Insofar as this spectrum reveals a view of language as low (сниженный), neutral (нейтральный) or high (высокий), it may be traced back in Russia to the work of the poet, scientist and student of language Lomonósov, who in his *Предисловие о пользе книг церковных в российском языке* (*Preface on the Use of Church Books in the Russian Language*, 1758) famously defined three linguistic styles (низкий, посредственный, высокий) and laid down the genres in which it seemed appropriate to use each of them. To a considerable extent this spectrum of register runs parallel to that which ranges from the colloquial form of spoken Russian at one end to a bookish form of the written language at the other (although, as has already been noted in the previous section, certain spoken media may be more formal than certain written media).

It is important to appreciate that the boundaries between linguistic registers are constantly shifting. In particular it should be noted with

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regard to modern, post-Soviet Russian that what only recently might have been considered improper at a higher level than R1 may now be considered quite acceptable, or at least might be widely used, in R2. Similarly, what was recently felt to be sub-standard may now be widespread in R1. This lowering of boundaries and the broadening of what was previously considered the standard, and also reactions to these changes, are examined in more detail in 1.6 below.

Passages exemplifying the various registers described in this section are provided, with translation and commentary, in Chapter 2.

1.3.1 The colloquial register (R1)

The principal function of this register is social intercourse. Its medium is dialogue or conversation and its field is one's personal relationships and practical everyday dealings with others. It is therefore distinguished by relative spontaneity, simplicity and the absence of forethought or technical or official tone. Non-lexical features, such as intonation, pauses, stress, rhythm and tempo, play an important part in it. Meaning is reinforced by non-linguistic resources such as facial expression and gesture. The function, medium and field of the register account for many of the factors which it tends to exhibit in the areas of pronunciation, vocabulary and phraseology, word-formation, morphology and syntax.

pronunciation

- Articulation is often careless and indistinct, and vowels may be reduced or consonants lost as a result of lazy or rapid delivery, e.g. *grú* (говорю́), *zdrássti* (здрáвствуй), *u tíá* (у тебá), *tóka* (то́лько), *vašš'é* (воо́бщэ), *piis'át* (пятьдесáт). Local accent is marked (e.g. with áканье and associated phenomena or óканье, treatment of *g* as occlusive or fricative; see 1.5). Stress may differ from the accepted norm (e.g. до́говор, при́говор, позво́нишь, разв́илось, разв́ились instead of договóр, приговóр, позвонíшь, развилóсь, развилíсь, respectively).

vocabulary

- This tends to be basic and concrete since the register is concerned with the practicalities of life. All parts of speech are represented in numerous colloquial forms, i.e. nouns (e.g. зади́ра, *bully*; карто́шка, *potato*; толкотня́, *crush, scum*); adjectives (e.g. долговя́зый, *lanky*; дото́шный, *meticulous*; мудре́ный, *odd*; работа́ющий, *hard-working*; расхла́банный, *lax*); verbs (e.g. арта́читься, *to dig one's heels in (fig)*; дры́хнуть and вздремну́ть (pf), *to have a nap*; вопи́ть, *to wail, howl*; впи́хнуть (pf), *to cram in*; гро́хнуть(ся) (pf), *to bang, crash*; ехидничать, *to gossip maliciously*; куро́лэсить, *to play tricks*; мэшка́ть, *to linger, loiter*; огоро́шить (pf), *to take aback*; переба́рщивать, *to overdo (lit to make too much borshch)*; помере́ть (pf), *to die*; прихворну́ть (pf), *to be unwell*; секретничать, *to be secretive*; тарато́рить, *to jabber, natter*; тормоши́ть, *to pull about, pester*); adverbs (e.g. ба́ста, *enough*; вконе́ц, *completely*; втихомо́лку, *on the quiet*; давне́нько, *for quite some time now*; исподти́шка, *on the sly*; ми́гом, *in a flash*; многова́то, *a bit too*