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Imperial legacies, nation building, and geopolitics: ethno-regional divides and the Russian language in Central Asia

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Abstract

Post-imperial ethnic identities and divides are often constructed and construed through direct and indirect references to imperial legacies. In this study, we use nationally representative survey data to examine proficiency, use, and valuation of the Russian language – a major such legacy of the Soviet empire – in Kyrgyzstan, a multiethnic Central Asian nation with a long and complex history of ethnic and regional cleavages. The multivariable analyses produce instructive net variations in Russian proficiency and use across regional subgroups of ethnic Kyrgyz, the titular ethnicity, and between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, a marginalized ethnic minority. The analyses also show that the command and use of Russian increase with community ethnic heterogeneity. Yet, no variations along these axes are found in the perceived importance of Russian language knowledge for success in the domestic labour market. These findings are situated within the interconnected contexts of historical ethnolinguistic legacies, dynamics of nation-building, and geopolitics.

Keywords

Imperial legacies; ethnic divides; language; Central Asia; post-Soviet world; geopolitics

Introduction

Russification through the promotion of the Russian language and of broader cultural norms associated with it among the non-Russian population of the USSR was a key element of the Soviet project of national consolidation. After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's political, economic, and socio-cultural connections and influences in the former Soviet republics have weakened, yet the Russian language continues to be widely used and valued in many of them, even if to varying extent (Fierman 2012; Kosmarskaya and Kosmarski 2019; Pavlenko 2013). These dynamics parallel, with appropriate caveats, those in many post-imperial settings, where the persistence and transformation of linguistic legacies of the colonial eras are shaped by a combination of demographic shifts, political interests, and economic imperatives that are inherent to the process of nation-building (e.g. Le Ha, Kho, and Chang 2013; Mazrui and Mazrui 1993; Ng and Cavallaro 2019).

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In this study we analyze self-assessed command, reported use, and perceived practical importance of the Russian language among main indigenous ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan, a multiethnic post-Soviet country in Central Asia. As elsewhere in the region (e.g. Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2012; Smagulova 2008), Kyrgyzstan's successive governments have continuously pushed the nationalist agenda that included an active promotion of the language of the titular ethnicity (Abashin 2012; Chotaeva 2004) yet have also navigated the country's continuing geo-political and economic dependence on Russia. We employ data from two rounds of a nationally representative survey that collected detailed and diverse data in late 2011 and late 2017, i.e. three years before and three years after the signing in December 2014 of the treaty on the Kyrgyz Republic's accession to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a major watershed in the country's foreign policy that symbolized its embedment in the orbit of Russia's political and economic influence. We compare ethnic Kyrgyz, the nation's titular ethnicity, and Uzbeks, its largest ethnic minority, while also considering historically rooted regional differences among the titular group. We then complement the individual-level analysis of ethno-regional divides with that of the role of community-level ethnic environment for Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation. Finally, taking advantage of the unique timing of our data, we explore possible short-term shifts in these three dimensions in the context of Kyrgyzstan's joining of the EAEU.

Background

Considerable scholarship has examined the persistent importance of imperial linguistic legacies in post-imperial contexts. Much of that scholarship, focused on former colonies, emphasizes a premium associated with a high-status former colonial language, which lasts well beyond the end of the colonial rule. For example, in India having received education in English and being proficient in that language are linked to considerable wage advantage (Azam, Chin, and Prakash 2013; Chakraborty and Bakshi 2016). In South Africa, both natives and immigrants who are fluent in English have higher earnings than their counterparts with no or limited English skills (Casale and Posel 2011; Deumert, Inder, and Maitra 2005; Levinsohn 2007). And in Bolivia, Spanish language fluency was shown to offer a substantial earning premium among indigenous people (Chiswick, Patrinos, and Hurst 2000).

Although the post-Soviet world may not fit neatly within the panoply of post-imperial linguo-cultural experiences, some parallels are apparent. Thus, while most governments in the post-Soviet successor states, as part of their nation-building projects, have sought to diminish the importance of the Soviet-era legacy of the Russian language symbolic and instrumental dominance (Brubaker 2011; Laitin 1998; Pavlenko 2013; Van Elsuwege 2004; Wylegala 2010), this language has retained considerable presence and value. Thus, a study of three post-Soviet countries of South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – has found that Russian language proficiency increased the probability of gainful employment (Duncan and Mavisakalyan 2015). Wage penalties of low proficiency in Russian were found in Kazakhstan (Aldashev and Danzer 2014; Danzer and Aldashev 2016). In Kyrgyzstan, Agadjanian and Oh (2020), using the same dataset that we use in this study, detected an earning advantage of Russian-speaking ethnic Kyrgyz, compared to Kyrgyz with no or

limited knowledge of the Russian language, net of other factors. The Russian language has retained relevance and value even in the post-Soviet settings that have sought to disconnect from the Soviet legacy most aggressively, such as the Baltics (Kulu and Tammaru 2004; Zabrodskaia 2014).

Importantly, the continuing value of the Russian language also reflects the fact that command of that language remains an essential resource assuring access to and advancement in the labour market of the Russian Federation – the main destination for labour migrants from many former republics of the Soviet Union (e.g. Kosmarskaya 2015; Laruelle 2007; Maximova et al. 2018). A recent study in Kyrgyzstan found that ethnic Kyrgyz from the more Russified, northern part of the country are more likely to wish to migrate than their co-ethnics from the less Russified southern part (Agadjanian 2020). Russian language proficiency is also a potential exit tool for groups and individuals that may contemplate permanent emigration to Russia (Agadjanian, Nedoluzhko, and Kumskov 2008; Ivlevs 2013).

The cross-national literature also points to the persistent importance of former colonial languages in multi-ethnolinguistic post-imperial settings. Again, not surprisingly, much of that research has focused on the English language as a medium of interethnic communication in various former British colonies (e.g. Chew 2014; Mazrui and Mazrui 1993; Ng and Cavallaro 2019; Van der Walt and Evans 2017). Similarly, studies on post-Soviet contexts have demonstrated that the Russian language has retained the place of the primary *lingua franca* in communication among individuals of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds (e.g. Blauvelt 2013; Orusbaev, Mustajoki, and Protassova 2008; Pavlenko 2006; Ryazanova-Clarke 2014; Sabitova and Alishariyeva 2015). The term “Russian speaker”, routinely used in that literature, typically defines a supra-ethnic category that lumps together not only ethnic Russians but also people of other ethnicities for whom Russian is either primary or strongly secondary language (e.g. Berg 2001; Ivlevs 2013; Laitin 1998; Van Elsuwege 2004; Wylegała 2010).

This scholarship resonates with research on consequences of ethnic residential segregation. In Western contexts, this research has looked at immigrants’ linguistic integration, typically concluding that residential segregation of immigrant groups limits their interactions with native-speaking majorities and thus hampers their acquisition of the majority’s language (see e.g. Chiswick and Miller 2001; Schlueter 2012; Vervoort, Dagevos, and Flap 2012). At the same time, community ethnic clustering has been shown to yield practical benefits for community residents through ethnic entrepreneurship (Kaplan 1998) or preferential treatment by ethnic political elites (Ejdemyr, Kramon, and Robinson 2018); it may also serve as a protective mechanism shielding disadvantaged ethnic minorities from discrimination and outright violence (Ismailbekova 2018).

Context

As other parts of the Soviet empire, the Kyrgyz Republic (hereafter Kyrgyzstan) gained independence after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Its population is c. 6.5 million, and its annual GDP per capita is c. 1309 USD, one of the lowest among the Soviet successor states

(World Bank 2019a). Kyrgyzstan is a multiethnic country, where the titular group, Kyrgyz, make up about three quarters of the total population. Uzbeks, who share with Kyrgyz Turkic linguistic roots and the Islamic religion, are the largest minority, constituting approximately fifteen per cent of the population. Kyrgyzstan also has a sizeable minority of Russian and other European origins, but their share has been declining rapidly after the country's independence due to high emigration and relatively low fertility. In addition, Kyrgyzstan's population includes several other smaller, mainly autochthonous, ethnic groups (IndexMundi 2020).

The initial exposure of Central Asia to the Russian language and culture dates back to the nineteenth century, when it became a part of the Tsarist Russian Empire. However, in that era, because first Russian settlers in the region were not numerous and typically lived apart from local people and because no major efforts were undertaken by the imperial authorities to spread the use of the Russian language, its role remained very limited (Pavlenko 2011; Weeks 2010). In the early Soviet period, the language policies of the new government emphasized "indigenization" (*korenizatsiia*, in Russian), which was focused on the development and standardization of the local languages (Alpatov 2000; Edgar 2004; Fierman 1991; Martin 2001). However, starting in the 1930s, the policies also increasingly promoted the Russian language as the language of interethnic communication; collaterally, the vocabularies of the local languages were increasingly russified and their scripts were changed to Cyrillic. State-organized large-scale migration of native Russian speakers from the European parts of the USSR further contributed to the proliferation of the Russian language in the region (Ball and Demko 1978). As a result, Russian became the *de facto* official language in Central Asia, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the principal medium of communist ideology and an instrument of state power (Schlyter 2013; Shorish 1984). Eventually, good command of this language became an important individual asset for building career and accruing social status (Anderson and Silver 1991). These formal policies and informal pressures shaped the formation of new ethnic elites, many of whom were educated in Russian and spoke mainly or even solely Russian and had weak or no mastery of languages of own ethnic groups (Fierman 2006; Kosmarskaya and Kosmarski 2019).

In Kyrgyzstan, Russian language use spread particularly widely in the northern part of the country, especially in the capital Frunze (today's Bishkek) and surrounding areas, where the majority of Russian-speaking migrants settled. In comparison, the southern part of Kyrgyzstan was less affected by the Soviet-era linguistic and cultural russification. These regional differences in the Russian language penetration strongly impacted the ethnocultural identity of the titular ethnic group: greater Russian language proficiency and corresponding cultural russification of northern Kyrgyz, compared to their southern co-ethnics, became an important factor in the cultural North–South divide. Although like any regional boundaries, this divide does not describe the Kyrgyz ethno-regional panoply exhaustively, this divide has remained culturally and politically meaningful and consequential, impacting regional identities and politics (e.g. Agadjanian 2020; Faranda and Nolle 2011; Ryabkov 2008). Also, while ethnic Kyrgyz have settled throughout the territory of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks have been traditionally concentrated in the South, where Russian language use has been historically relatively limited.

Starting in the late Soviet period, the language policies in the region were reversed again. In the end of the 1980s, Kyrgyzstan, like the other four Soviet republics in Central Asia, proclaimed the language of the titular ethnicity to be the sole state language while Russian was given the role of the language of interethnic communication (Huskey 1995; Pavlenko 2008; Schlyter 2013). With the breakup of the USSR in 1991, the governments of the newly independent states engaged in linguistic and cultural de-russification which varied by country in speed and scale but typically included the elimination of or restriction on Russian use in state administration, state-sponsored media, official communication and public signage; replacement of Russian loanwords in titular languages; the closure of Russian-language schools and reduction in the number of Russian-language classes (Abashin 2012; Bengard 2018; Chotaeva 2004; Fierman 2012; Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2012; Smagulova 2008). Most Russian names of settlements and streets were hastily changed to local-sounding ones (Pavlenko 2008). In Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere in Central Asia, where decades of Russian linguistic and cultural exposure during the imperial era led to the loss of competence in the language of own ethnic group among a significant portion of the titular population, especially in the northern region of Kyrgyzstan and in its urban centres, the post-imperial linguistic nationalization has been primarily directed toward the titular ethnicity, with the aim of restoring the congruence between titular ethnic status and language (Laruelle 2012; Osmonov 2006). The government's efforts to titularize the country's linguistic and cultural milieu have been further facilitated by massive emigration of ethnic Russians and other native Russian speakers (Schlyter 2013; Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008). The process of linguistic cultural kyrgyzification has also been enhanced by internal migration of ethnic Kyrgyz, especially from historically less russified rural areas to cities (Agadjanian and Gorina 2018; Fryer, Nasritdinov, and Satybaldieva 2014; Hatcher and Thieme 2016; Murzakulova 2020; Nedoluzhko and Andersson 2007).

However, the Russian language has far from disappeared in Kyrgyzstan. In fact, as early as in 2000, Russian was granted the status of an "official" language. The Russian language has continued to be used in legislative organs and government offices, on par with Kyrgyz, and has retained strong positions, especially in higher education and academia (Aminov et al. 2010; Gul 2019; Korth 2005; Orusbaev, Mustajoki, and Protassova 2008), and the Kyrgyz government has repeatedly asserted the language's importance (e.g. AKIpress 2019; Kosmarskaya 2015). The enduring prestige of Russian also translates to persistent practical benefits, as illustrated by the positive association of ethnic Kyrgyz's Russian language proficiency with their earnings detected in the earlier cited study by Agadjanian and Oh (2020). The enduring presence and premium of the Russian language reflect both the depth of the Soviet-era russification and independent Kyrgyzstan's continuous geo-political and economic connections with the Russian Federation. Although the Kyrgyz Republic has had several successive governments, often changed through violent transitions, all of them have had a consistent pro-Russian orientation. As early as 1992, Kyrgyzstan joined the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In an even more conspicuous pro-Russia move, in late 2014, Kyrgyzstan's government formally committed to the nation's membership in the EAEU, a trade agreement that is effectively controlled by Russia and currently also includes Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Importantly, Russia has been the primary destination for Kyrgyzstani labour migrants: the scale of labour migration, particularly from rural areas, has grown significantly since the early 2000s (Abashin 2014; Murzakulova 2020; Sagynbekova 2016). Migrant remittances, accounting for 29 per cent of the country's GDP just before the Covid-19 pandemic (World Bank 2019b), are critical for local social and economic sustenance and development (Isabaeva 2011; Murzakulova 2020; Reeves 2012; Rubinov 2014). Although after Kyrgyzstan's official entry into the EAEU in August 2015 its citizens seeking formal employment in the Russian Federation are no longer required to take Russian language exams, Russian language proficiency is a key precondition for Kyrgyzstani migrants' success in the Russian labour market (Critelli et al. 2020; Kosmarskaya 2015).

While the Russian language has retained considerable presence and official support in Kyrgyzstan, the languages of the indigenous ethnic minorities have been increasingly marginalized. Specifically, the Uzbek language, despite the large number of its native speakers, has never gained the official recognition even at the regional level, even though the Uzbek community has occasionally made such demands (Aminov et al. 2010; Fumagalli 2007; Orusbaev, Mustajoki, and Protassova 2008; Osmonov 2006). The linguistic exclusion of the Uzbek minority has been exacerbated by pervasive ethnic tensions, discrimination, and occasional outbursts of mass anti-Uzbek violence (Agadjanian 2020; Faranda and Nolle 2003; Ismailbekova 2013; Ismailbekova 2018; Tishkov 1995). The overrepresentation of Uzbeks in the outmigration flow from Kyrgyzstan (NSC 2020) may also reflect this group's ethnic and linguistic marginalization (see, e.g. Ismailbekova 2013).

Conceptualization and hypotheses

In this study, we seek to investigate the symbolic meaning and actual use of the Russian language by members of indigenous ethnic groups in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan as a manifestation of historically shaped, yet rapidly evolving ethnic and regional identities and cleavages. We compare ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks, while also differentiating between northern and southern Kyrgyz. In addition, we examine the role of community ethnic environment, represented here by the degree of community ethnic homogeneity. Our analyses investigate how the ethno-regional characteristics and the community ethnic milieu may be related to self-assessed command of Russian and to the use of this language for everyday oral communication outside the home, as well as for reading, writing, and watching TV. We also examine the corresponding variations in perceived practical value of the Russian language by looking at individual assessments of its importance for successful employment in Kyrgyzstan.

Guided by the reviewed cross-national and country-specific evidence, we formulate and test the following hypothesis. First, we expect that northern Kyrgyz, given their more extensive experience of cultural and linguistic russification, will report better knowledge and greater use of the Russian language, and will see greater value of it for succeeding in the labour market, compared to their southern co-ethnics or ethnic Uzbeks, net of other individual- and household-level characteristics (Hypothesis 1). At the same time, from the perspective of defensive language strategy, we argue that for ethnic Uzbeks, i.e. a minority that has experienced continuous ethnic hostility and periodic violence,

the Russian language could serve as an important means of resistance to linguistic and cultural dominance of the majority as well as a potential exit facilitator, by enhancing their prospects of emigration to Russia, which is a more likely destination than ethnically similar neighbouring Uzbekistan, given Russia's greater economic attractiveness and also Uzbekistan government's nationalist narrative effectively denying Uzbek identity to co-ethnics residing in neighbouring countries (Abashin 2012, 164). Hence, we hypothesize that Uzbeks will demonstrate higher levels of Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation, compared to southern Kyrgyz, i.e. overwhelmingly their regional neighbours (Hypothesis 2). We then complement the analysis of individuals' ethno-regional identity with that of the ethnic composition of their community environment. Considering Russian's historical function as a language of inter-ethnic communication, we hypothesize that it will be better known and more used and valued in more ethnically mixed contexts, regardless of ethnicity and other individual and community characteristics (Hypothesis 3).

In addition to testing the above hypotheses, we explore temporal trends in Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation. We take advantage of our data which come from two rounds – one conducted in late 2011 and the other in late 2017 – of a nationally representative survey that used the same sampling design and instrument. Although we acknowledge that the interval between the two rounds is not large, it may still be sufficient to capture continuous de-russification in all indigenous segments of Kyrgyzstani society, especially if we assume that this trend accelerates over time. On the other hand, the timing of the two rounds – one implemented three years before and the other three years after Kyrgyzstan's signing of the EAEU accession treaty – may correspond to a stalling or even a reversal of this long-term trend, at least in the symbolic importance of the Russian language. Specifically, one could expect the self-reported proficiency, as a subjective indicator impacted by social desirability, to increase between the two surveys, with the largest increase concentrated among southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the two groups whom we expect to have relatively low Russian proficiency, compared to northern Kyrgyz. At the same time, a rise in the prestige of the Russian language, triggered by the reassertion of its status through Kyrgyzstan's EAEU membership, may not be accompanied by a commensurate increase in its actual use. Likewise, while the country's membership in the EAEU may have facilitated Kyrgyzstani citizens' access to Russia's labour market, and accordingly the valuation of the Russian language as indispensable for success in that market, it may be less relevant to the perception of that language's value for the domestic labour market.

Data and method

Data

We use data from the nationally representative household survey "Social, Economic, and Migration Processes in Kyrgyzstan" (SEMPK). The SEMPK included two rounds: Round I was conducted in the last trimester of 2011 and Round II was conducted in the last trimester of 2017. In Round I, the two-stage stratified cluster sampling was used. In the first stage, 102 primary sampling units (clusters) were chosen with probability proportional to size; these clusters represented villages in rural areas and boroughs in urban areas. Then, in the second stage, in each cluster, twenty households were randomly selected. In Round

II, the same communities were used but the households were again randomly selected. In each household one adult resident aged 18–49 was randomly chosen for an interview. The interviews, conducted face-to-face by interviewers of matching gender in the Kyrgyz, Uzbek, or Russian languages (depending on respondent's choice), collected diverse and detailed information on individual characteristics of the respondents as well as on their family and household characteristics. Among other questions, respondents were asked how well they could speak Kyrgyz, Russian, and other languages. They were also asked to identify the language that they mainly used at home and the language that they mainly used outside the home. In addition, they were asked in which language they last read something, wrote something, or watched a TV news programme. The content of the survey interview, including the questions of primary relevance to our study, were nearly identical in both rounds. The design and content of the survey were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Arizona State University (Round I) and the University of Kansas (Round II). Both rounds were implemented by SOCECONIC, a Bishkek-based research agency.

Our analyses include members of two autochthonous Central Asian ethnicities: Kyrgyz, the country's titular majority, and Uzbeks, its largest ethnic minority.¹ Guided by our theoretical interest and following the established regional classification (e.g. Agadjanian 2020; Faranda and Nolle 2011; Ryabkov 2008), we subdivide the titular subsample according to the region of residence – southern or northern. We exclude members of other autochthonous ethnic groups as their number is too small for sound comparisons, as well as members of the groups of extra-regional origins, who are overwhelmingly native Russian speakers. The analyses combine data from both survey rounds.

Outcomes

To test our hypotheses, we use the following outcomes. The first outcome is self-reported speaking proficiency in the Russian language. It is based on responses to the following question: “How well do you speak Russian: fluently, well, not well, not at all?” In multivariable tests, we operationalize it as a three-level variable that combines the “not at all” (a very small fraction of the total) and “not well” into one category and contrasts it with “speaks well” and with “speaks fluently”.

The next four outcomes describe different aspects of Russian language use. The first outcome in this category is derived from responses to the question “What language do you mainly speak outside the home?”; it is operationalized as a dichotomy – only Russian or Russian and other language equally vs. another language. The other three outcomes in this category are based on the responses to the questions about the language in which respondents most recently read something, wrote something, and watched a news programme on TV.² All three variables are also operationalized as a dichotomy: Russian vs. another language.

¹-Notably, although respondents could choose more than one ethnicity, all, except one respondent in Round I, chose only one.

²-The wording of the questions on the language of reading and writing was slightly different in the two rounds. Whereas the Round I questionnaire asked about the language in which respondent last time read a newspaper, in Round II, the corresponding question also covered other printed and digital media such as a book or a text on the Internet. Also, to reflect the growing access to new technologies, in Round II the question about writing specifically mentioned digital messages. We do not believe, however, that these differences greatly impact the comparability of the two datasets.

The last outcome addresses the perceived practical benefit of knowing the Russian language and is based on responses to the question: “Do you think that knowledge of the Russian language is very important, somewhat important, or not important for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan?” Accordingly, this outcome is operationalized as an ordered variable with three levels: (1) not important, (2) somewhat important, and (3) very important.

Predictors and controls

We use two predictors for testing our hypotheses. For Hypotheses 1 and 2, the predictor is ethno-regional group membership: northern Kyrgyz, southern Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. The predictor for testing Hypothesis 3 is the ethnic makeup of the community of residence defined as the share of the numerically dominant ethnicity in the survey cluster subsample. We use a three-level operationalization: (1) fully ethnically homogenous community (100 per cent of the cluster subsample are of same ethnicity); (2) community where the dominant ethnic group constitutes two thirds or more of the subsample (but fewer than 100 per cent); and (3) community in which the largest ethnic group makes up less than two thirds of the subsample.

All the models control for individual and household features that might be associated with Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation. These include basic demographic characteristics such as respondent’s gender (male vs. female) and age. The models control for respondent’s education (at least some higher vs. less) and their parents’ education (at least one parent has higher education vs. neither parent has higher education). Another control is respondent’s current marital status, which includes three categories – not in marital union, in an arranged marriage (i.e. marriage that was decided by parents and/or by other relatives of either spouse, without a joint involvement of bride and groom), and in non-arranged marriage (the two “married” categories include respondents who are either officially married or married only through religious ceremony). The models control for respondent’s number of children (0–4 or more). They also control for self-assessed level of religiosity of this Muslim sample (very religious vs. somewhat religious vs. non-religious). Together with the type of marriage and fertility, religiosity is a marker of cultural traditionalism which may be negatively associated with knowledge and use of the culturally “alien” Russian language. We acknowledge that this variable is a basic proxy for respondent’s religious profile. The models also control for respondent’s employment sector, as the nature of the employment environment is likely to be related with language choice and use. This covariate includes the following four categories: not employed; employed in state, private and foreign organization or firm; employed in family business; and self-employed. The level of household income per capita is grouped into four categories: low, medium, high, and unspecified (including refusals). The type of community of residence – urban vs. rural – is also included as a control. Given the strong connection between Russia-bound labour migration and Russian language proficiency, the models also control for respondent’s experience of temporary migration to the Russian Federation (migrated at least once vs. never migrated), and for whether respondent has close relatives or friends permanently residing in that country (at least one relative/friend in Russia vs. none). Finally, to explore possible temporal variations in Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation

the models include the survey round as a covariate. The distribution of the predictor and control variables in the analytic sample are shown in Table 1.

Depending on the operationalization of the outcomes of interest, we estimate multivariable logistic regression models for ordered and dichotomous dependent variables. After excluding cases with missing values, the combined two-round analytic sample for the models of language proficiency and models of perceived importance of the Russian language for finding a good job in Kyrgyzstan is 3526 cases. The models of language use outside the home are restricted to respondents who can speak at least some Russian, which results in a smaller sample – 3400 cases. All models control for the survey sampling design.

Results

Descriptive results

Table 2 shows the distribution of the outcome variables across the three ethno-regional groups in the analytic sample. It also disaggregates the total analytic sample by survey round to capture possible temporal variations. As the table shows, the majority of respondents in each group report fluent or good command of the Russian language. As predicted, self-reported Russian language proficiency is by far highest among northern Kyrgyz: only 16 per cent of that group reported that they spoke no Russian or spoke it not well, compared to 37 and 44 per cent among southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, respectively. Notably, when we compare self-reported proficiency between the two rounds, the share of those who report no or poor command of Russian is lower in Round II than in Round I in all groups, but the between-round contrast is particularly large among southern Kyrgyz, followed by Uzbeks. At the same time, both southern Kyrgyz and (especially) Uzbek show a dramatic increase in the share of those who reported speaking Russian fluently.

As expected, northern Kyrgyz report much greater use of Russian, compared to both their southern co-ethnics and Uzbeks, even though this contrast is more pronounced in the language spoken mainly outside the home, compared to the language used for reading, writing, or watching TV news. The variations between two southern groups are also noteworthy: despite their relatively low self-reported command of Russian, Uzbeks, were more likely to report using it as a primary language outside the home than were southern Kyrgyz. These overall ethno-regional patterns are generally consistent across the two rounds (except for the reversal in the relative shares of Russian language TV news watchers between southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks). Most notably, however, the cross-round trends in Russian language use do not conform to those in reported Russian language speaking proficiency (which is, arguably, more likely to be affected by social desirability bias). Thus, among southern Kyrgyz, who display a big rise in Russian language speaking fluency between Round I and Round II, the use of Russian outside the home actually declined, while its use for reading/writing/TV watching rose very modestly between the two rounds. In comparison, Uzbeks, who had a particular large between-round spike in self-reported Russian fluency, demonstrated some modest increase in Russian language use outside the home but also showed declines in Russian language reading/writing/TV watching in Round II, compared to Round I.

The last section of Table 2 displays the distribution of respondents in each ethno-regional group on their assessment of the importance of the knowledge of the Russian language for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan. The results show a relatively modest overall variation across the ethno-regional groups. As a sign of persistent value attached to Russian, only a small share of respondents deemed that its knowledge is not important for success in the domestic job market. This share is smallest among northern Kyrgyz, even though it increased among that group between the two survey rounds. Yet, interestingly, northern Kyrgyz, despite their much stronger connectedness with the Russian language, were slightly less likely than their southern co-ethnics to think that the knowledge of Russian is very important. Notably, while the proportion of those in the very-important category increased between the two rounds among all three groups, this increase was particularly pronounced among Uzbeks, who lagged behind either titular subgroup in Round I but effectively caught up with northern Kyrgyz in Round II.

Table 3 presents variations in the outcomes of interest by community ethnic composition. As the table shows, respondents living in ethnically homogenous communities were more likely to report no or poor command of Russian than those residing in ethnically mixed communities. The same contrast emerges on the other end of the Russian proficiency continuum, with respondents in homogenous communities being distinctly less likely to speak Russian fluently than those in more heterogeneous communities. At the same time, no major variation by ethnic composition of community is noticeable for good command of the Russian language. Residents of mono-ethnic settings were also least likely to use Russian for any of the listed purposes. However, Table 3 also shows a noticeable difference between communities with higher and lower levels of ethnic diversity. Finally, no strong differences according to community ethnic composition transpires with respect to practical valuation of knowing the Russian language, even though those living in ethnically homogeneous environments were somewhat more likely than other respondents to consider the knowledge of Russian as unimportant for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan. A comparison between two rounds suggests a general decrease from Round I to Round II in the share of those reporting no or poor command of Russian, as well as a general increase in the share of those reporting full fluency across the three types of communities, with the share of those fully fluent rising most noticeably among those living in ethnically homogenous communities. In comparison, cross-round changes in Russian language use and valuations are generally quite modest across the three types of communities.

Multivariable results

Table 4 shows the results of the multivariable ordered logit model predicting self-reported Russian speaking proficiency. The results are presented as odds ratios. As we expected under Hypothesis 1, Kyrgyz from the russified North of the country reported better Russian speaking ability than their co-ethnics in the South, regardless of other characteristics. In contrast, we do not see the expected advantage of Uzbeks over their regional neighbours of the titular ethnicity; in fact, contrary to Hypothesis 2, southern Kyrgyz reported significantly better speaking proficiency in Russian than did Uzbeks. Finally, the ethnic composition of a cluster is associated with reported Russian language proficiency in the direction predicted by

Hypothesis 3: net of other factors, speaking fluency in Russian increases as does the ethnic diversity of the community.

Table 5 shows the results of the binominal logistic regression models for the different aspects of Russian language use. The first section (5.A) presents the odds ratios from the model that predicts speaking Russian as a primary language outside the home. The results strongly support Hypothesis 1: net of other factors, northern Kyrgyz have much higher odds of usually speaking Russian only or equally with Kyrgyz outside the home, compared to southern Kyrgyz. Conforming to our expectations under Hypothesis 2, Uzbeks are significantly more likely to speak Russian outside the home than are their Kyrgyz neighbours. This result is particularly notable as it contrasts with the earlier presented results for Russian speaking proficiency. Also, generally in line with our Hypothesis 3, we find that speaking Russian is significantly less common in ethnically homogenous communities than in communities where ethnic minorities constitute at least one third of the population.

Sections 5.B, 5.C, and 5.D show the results of the models for three specific aspects of Russian language use. As expected under Hypotheses 1 and 2, northern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were significantly more likely to have their latest reading in Russian than were southern Kyrgyz (5.B). A similar pattern transpired with respect to Russian being the language which respondents used most recently for writing (5.C), but in this case the net difference between southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks is only marginally statistically significant ($p < .10$). Finally, with respect to watching TV news, the predicted gap between the two regional subgroups of the titular ethnicity persists, but no difference between Uzbeks and southern Kyrgyz can be observed (5.D). While we do not find consistent support for Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3 is strongly supported for all three specific Russian language use outcomes: regardless of individual ethnicity and other factors, greater ethnic diversity of the community of residence is associated with higher odds of using Russian for reading, writing, or TV news watching.

The results of the last model that predicts the perceived importance of the Russian language for obtaining a good job in Kyrgyzstan are presented in Table 6. These results echo the patterns observed at the bivariate level (Table 2): no ethno-regional differences in the valuation of the Russian language's importance for successful employment in the domestic labour market can be observed. Similarly, in congruence with the descriptive results (Table 3), the ethnic composition of the community of residence shows no net association with this outcome. In sum, this part of our analyses does not support any of the three hypotheses.

Next, we turn to the exploration of possible temporal shifts in knowledge, use, and valuation of the Russian language. With respect to self-reported Russian speaking ability, the multivariable analysis aligns with the pattern detected in the bivariate comparisons: we see a statistically significant increase between the two rounds, net of other factors (Table 4). However, again reflecting the bivariate patterns, no difference in actual use of the Russian language (Table 5) or its perceived value for getting a job in Kyrgyzstan (Table 6) can be observed. In additional exploratory analyses we tested for possible interactions of ethno-region and of community ethnic composition with round years, but these explorations did not detect any clear patterns (the results are not shown but available upon request).

The effects of several control variables also merit mentioning. Thus, we find a strong positive association of knowledge/use of the Russian language with higher education of the respondent and of their parent(s). Net of education, knowledge and use of Russian displays a strong income gradient. Similarly, residence in urban areas, compared to rural areas, increases knowledge and use of that language. Interestingly, religiosity is negatively associated with the likelihood of speaking Russian outside the home, and with reading, writing, and watching TV news in it; yet, it shows no significant association with self-reported Russian language proficiency. Also noteworthy, respondent's connection to Russia – through own migration experience, or through relatives or friends who live there – has only a marginally significant association with Russian language speaking proficiency and no association with its actual use. Finally, no gender differences emerged from the analyses.

Discussion and conclusion

The transformation of the ethnolinguistic landscape in the post-Soviet world has attracted considerable attention in the literature. This transformation is typically linked to broader dynamics of continuity and change of post-Soviet political, economic, and socio-cultural transitions (e.g. Agadjanian and Oh 2020; Brubaker 2011; Danzer and Aldashev 2016; Duncan and Mavisakalyan 2015; Laitin 1998). These transformations and transitions, despite their many unique qualities and manifestations, find parallels with similar processes of post-imperial development in other parts of the world (e.g. Azam, Chin, and Prakash 2013; Casale and Posel 2011; Chakraborty and Bakshi 2016; Le Ha, Kho, and Chang 2013; Levinsohn 2007; Mazrui and Mazrui 1993; Ng and Cavallaro 2019). In this study, we sought to contribute to a better understanding of post-Soviet ethnopolitical and linguistic realities of one of the post-Soviet places, Kyrgyzstan, by also situating them with a cross-national context of ethnolinguistic identities and expressions in the process of post-imperial nation-building.

Our analysis produced clear evidence of enduring intra-ethnic distinctions in Russian language proficiency and use, regardless of such other potentially confounding factors as education or urban-vs-rural residence. The gulf separating northern and southern Kyrgyz in Russian fluency and use after at least two decades of intensive nationalist policies aimed at constructing and asserting the titular primal ethnic identity is truly impressive, even if we acknowledge the inevitable relativity of this regional divide. At the same time, the comparison between southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, their regional neighbours produced a more complicated picture. Thus, net of other factors, Uzbeks reported a much lower ability to speak Russian than did southern Kyrgyz. Yet, they were distinctly more likely to report using Russian outside the home, even though for reported specific applications of the Russian language the advantage of Uzbeks over southern Kyrgyz was forcefully present only in reading. Several explanations may be proposed for the detected patterns. They may reflect the marginalization of the Uzbek language in the national language policy and corresponding contraction of Uzbek-language education and use (Aminov et al. 2010). As the space for Uzbek language use continues to shrink, the use of the ethnically neutral Russian language may serve at least for some Uzbeks as an instrument in the arsenal of defensive strategies against the imposing dominance of the ethnolinguistic majority (cf. Liu 2012). As we also argued, this language may also facilitate potential exit to Russia if the

level of ethnic hostility becomes unbearable (cf., Ismailbekova 2013). At the same time, some southern Kyrgyz may have overstated their speaking proficiency in Russian because it may help to enhance their self-positioning on the ladder of ethnic hierarchy. This subjective tool for asserting superiority over a rival ethnic group may also be influenced, however indirectly, by the enduring role of the Russian language in the de-facto construction of “kyrgyzness” in the country’s more economically developed North (cf., Kosmarskaya 2015).

The second, and complementary, axis of variation that we examined in our analysis was community ethnic composition. Although ethnic groups tend to cluster residentially, the ethnic makeup of the community shows a clear gradient with regard to Russian language proficiency and use: both increase as does the community ethnic heterogeneity. Importantly, this gradient is present after controlling for urbanity, a common correlate of ethnic diversity and mixing. These findings illustrate the continuing role of the Russian language as the *lingua franca* in Kyrgyzstan and similarly multiethnic post-Soviet settings.

In contrast to the association of ethno-regional identity and of community ethnic composition with Russian language proficiency and use, on either ethnic plane no significant variations in the valuation of the Russian language knowledge for success in the domestic labour market were detected. While we found no differences in the value attached to the Russian language for domestic employment, we should note that across the sub-groups of interest at least half of the respondents believed that knowing Russian is very important for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan. This general attitude reflects the labour market reality, as exemplified by Agadjanian and Oh (2020) in their analysis of the earning premium of Russian language proficiency.

Finally, our analyses sought to explore possible short-term temporal variations in the detected patterns. We found a substantial jump in self-reported Russian language proficiency from Round I to Round II, and this jump was comparable, at least in the statistical sense, in all ethno-regional groups once other factors were accounted for. At the same time, no significant changes in Russian language use could be observed. Following our conceptualization, we propose to interpret these findings through the prism of subjective importance of the Russian language, galvanized by Kyrgyzstan’s entry into the EAEU. Yet, the boosted prestige of that language, while possibly impacting individuals’ assessment of own proficiency in it, may, understandably, not have as strong an impact on its actual use, at least in the short term. The lack of temporal changes in the valuation of the Russian language’s benefits for the domestic labour market also conforms to this explanation: Kyrgyzstan’s EAEU membership, however symbolically impactful for perceptions of the country’s connection with Russia and the Russian-speaking world, may have little relevance to how individuals evaluate employment prospects inside Kyrgyzstan. Yet, we also note that the lack of temporal changes in Russian language use and in its perceived relevance for domestic market success suggest that the practical and perceived value of this language is not declining, as would be expected under an accelerating, or even continuous, derussification scenario. Again, we acknowledge that our interpretations of the short-term temporal trends detected through this two-round comparison remain tentative, and we expect that the next round of the survey will allow for a more assertive and nuanced assessment of these trends.

Although we are unable to examine longer-term tendencies in Russian language proficiency, use, and valuation with the SEMP data, our findings shed uniquely important light on ethnolinguistic complexities in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, and by extension, in other parts of the former Soviet empire. More broadly, they provide valuable illustrations of how enduring yet evolving imperial linguistic legacies may shape, enhance, or blur ethnic identities and divides well into the post-imperial epoch.

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Data availability statement

De-identified survey data and coding programs are available upon request.

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Table 1.

The distribution of the study variables in the analytic sample (per cent, unless specified otherwise).

<i>Russian language speaking proficiency</i>	
Does not speak at all	3.5
Speaks not well	26.3
Speaks well	39.0
Speaks fluently	31.2
<i>Russian language use^a</i>	
Mainly/equally uses Russian outside the home	28.1
Last time read something in Russian	17.6
Last time wrote something in Russian	19.8
Last time watched TV news in Russian	25.0
<i>Perceived importance of Russian language knowledge for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan</i>	
Not important	10.3
Somewhat important	34.8
Very important	54.9
<i>Ethno-regional group</i>	
Not important	10.3
Somewhat important	34.8
Very important	54.9
<i>Ethno-regional group</i>	
Northern Kyrgyz	41.1
Southern Kyrgyz	39.4
Uzbek	19.5
<i>Community ethnic composition</i>	
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	15.2
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	35.7
100% homogeneous	49.1
Age (mean)	32.8
Male	47.5
At least one parent had higher education	22.5
<i>Marital status</i>	
Not married	34.6
In non-arranged marriage	48.0
In arranged marriage	17.4
Number of children (mean)	1.87
At least some higher education	29.4
<i>Employment status/sector</i>	
Not employed	43.3
Employed in the public sector	16.4
Employed in the private sector	11.5
Self-employed or family business	28.7

Household income per person, tier

Low	31.0
Medium	30.0
High	27.6
Doesn't know/refused	11.3

Religiosity

Not religious	19.1
Somewhat religious	71.8
Very religious	9.1

Lives in urban area	33.4
Has migrated to Russia	9.4
Has kin in Russia	28.4
Has friend(s) in Russia	18.2

^aExcludes those who cannot speak Russian at all.

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Table 2.

The outcome variables by ethno-regional group and survey round (per cent).

	Both Rounds	Round I	Round II
Russian language speaking proficiency			
<i>Does not speak at all</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	3.0	4.8	1.4
Southern Kyrgyz	2.5	3.1	1.9
Uzbek	6.5	6.9	6.2
<i>Speaks not well</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	13.0	13.5	12.5
Southern Kyrgyz	34.5	43.1	25.7
Uzbek	37.8	40.4	35.3
<i>Speaks well</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	32.8	34.2	31.6
Southern Kyrgyz	45.4	40.8	50.1
Uzbek	39.4	43.1	35.9
<i>Speaks fluently</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	51.2	47.5	54.5
Southern Kyrgyz	17.6	13.0	22.3
Uzbek	16.3	9.6	22.6
Russian language use ^a			
<i>Mainly/equally uses Russian outside home</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	53.8	52.3	55.1
Southern Kyrgyz	7.4	8.5	6.3
Uzbek	15.6	13.6	17.5
<i>Last time read something in Russian</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	31.0	32.7	29.5
Southern Kyrgyz	6.4	6.0	6.7
Uzbek	12.2	13.0	11.4
<i>Last time wrote something in Russian</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	36.2	38.6	34.1
Southern Kyrgyz	7.0	5.4	8.6
Uzbek	10.9	12.9	9.0
<i>Last time watched TV news in Russian</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	39.2	42.5	36.4
Southern Kyrgyz	14.6	11.4	17.9
Uzbek	15.8	20.1	11.7
Perceived importance of Russian language knowledge for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan			
<i>Not important</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	7.2	5.2	9.1
Southern Kyrgyz	13.7	16.3	10.9
Uzbek	12.2	12.9	11.6

	Both Rounds	Round I	Round II
<i>Somewhat important</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	39.5	43.5	36.0
Southern Kyrgyz	28.7	28.3	29.2
Uzbek	38.5	42.8	34.4
<i>Very important</i>			
Northern Kyrgyz	53.3	51.3	54.9
Southern Kyrgyz	57.6	55.4	59.8
Uzbek	49.3	44.3	54.0

^aExcludes those who cannot speak Russian at all.

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Table 3.

The outcome variables by community ethnic composition (per cent).

	Both Rounds	Round I	Round II
Russian language speaking proficiency			
<i>Does not speak at all</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	1.3	1.4	1.1
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	2.4	3.5	1.6
100% homogeneous	5.0	6.5	3.6
<i>Speaks not well</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	14.1	14.9	12.6
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	17.5	23.7	13.4
100% homogeneous	36.4	41.8	31.2
<i>Speaks well</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	36.5	36.6	36.3
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	37.6	42.0	34.7
100% homogeneous	40.8	37.4	44.1
<i>Speaks fluently</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	48.0	47.0	50.0
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	42.4	30.8	50.3
100% homogeneous	17.7	14.3	21.1
Russian language use ^a			
<i>Mainly/equally uses Russian outside home</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	48.1	47.7	48.9
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	39.9	34.4	43.5
100% homogeneous	12.9	12.7	13.0
<i>Last time read something in Russian</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	33.3	32.7	34.4
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	23.4	23.2	23.5
100% homogeneous	8.3	8.1	8.5
<i>Last time wrote something in Russian</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	39.4	38.6	41.1
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	26.1	26.0	26.2
100% homogeneous	8.7	7.9	9.5
<i>Last time watched TV news in Russian</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	41.7	39.4	46.1
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	30.8	33.5	29.0
100% homogeneous	15.2	14.0	16.3
Perceived importance of Russian language knowledge for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan			
<i>Not important</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	7.3	9.3	3.3
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	9.9	11.6	8.8
100% homogeneous	12.4	11.8	13.0

	Both Rounds	Round I	Round II
<i>Somewhat important</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	34.4	32.9	37.4
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	39.6	43.2	37.2
100% homogeneous	31.9	35.2	28.7
<i>Very important</i>			
Largest group less than 2/3 of total	58.3	57.7	59.3
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	50.4	45.2	54.0
100% homogeneous	55.7	52.9	58.3

^aExcludes those who cannot speak Russian at all.

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Table 4.Speaking proficiency in Russian, ordinal logistic regression, odds ratios (*t*-statistics in parentheses).

Predictors and controls	
<i>Ethno-regional group [Southern Kyrgyz]</i>	
Northern Kyrgyz	2.38 (3.90) ***
Uzbek	0.64 (-2.88) **
<i>Community ethnic composition [largest group less than 2/3]</i>	
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	0.70 (-1.78) +
100% homogeneous	0.36 (-4.74) ***
Survey Round II [Round I]	1.36 (2.32) *
Age	1.00 (0.54)
Male [female]	1.04 (0.47)
At least one parent had higher education [neither had]	1.83 (5.34) ***
<i>Marital status [in arranged marriage]</i>	
Not married	1.20 (1.14)
In non-arranged marriage	1.46 (2.79) **
Number of children (0–4+)	0.90 (-2.18) *
At least some higher education [no higher education]	3.25 (12.09) ***
<i>Employment sector [not employed]</i>	
Employed in the public sector	1.49 (3.31) ***
Employed in the private sector	1.56 (2.75) **
Self-employed or family business	1.19 (1.29)
<i>Household income per person, tier [low]</i>	
Medium	1.41 (2.99) **
High	1.97 (4.75) ***
Doesn't know/refused	1.85 (2.54) *
<i>Religiosity [not religious]</i>	
Somewhat religious	0.88 (-0.98)
Very religious	0.98 (-0.08)
Lives in urban area [rural area]	2.11 (4.53) ***
Has migrated to Russia [has not migrated to Russia]	1.30 (1.85) +
Has kin in Russia [has no kin in Russia]	1.20 (1.70) +
Has friend(s) in Russia [has no friends in Russia]	1.35 (2.55) *
<i>F</i> -statistic	21.31 ***
Number of observations	3526

Notes: Reference categories in brackets. Significance level:

+ $p < 0.10$ * $p < 0.05$

**
 $p < 0.01$

 $p < 0.001$.

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Table 5.

Use of the Russian language, binomial logistic regressions, odds ratios (t-statistics in parentheses).

Predictors and controls	A. Mainly/equally uses Russian outside the home	B. Last time read in Russian	C. Last time wrote in Russian	D. Last time watched TV news in Russian
<i>Ethno-regional group [Southern Kyrgyz]</i>				
Northern Kyrgyz	11.32 (6.82) ***	3.90 (4.90) ***	4.70 (5.60) ***	2.34 (3.57) ***
Uzbek	2.40 (2.05) *	2.24 (2.59) *	1.63 (1.68) †	1.06 (0.22)
<i>Community ethnic composition [largest group less than 2/3]</i>				
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	0.75 (-1.14)	0.64 (-2.06) *	0.52 (-2.69) **	0.65 (-2.01) *
100% homogeneous	0.26 (-3.36) ***	0.38 (-3.44) ***	0.27 (-4.38) ***	0.44 (-3.63) ***
Survey Round II [Round I]	0.99 (-0.05)	0.83 (-0.93)	0.85 (-0.85)	0.79 (-1.25)
Age	1.01 (0.95)	1.01 (0.64)	1.02 (1.72) †	1.00 (0.20)
Male [female]	1.11 (0.85)	1.22 (1.72) †	1.07 (0.53)	1.14 (1.22)
At least one parent had higher education [neither had]	1.54 (3.04) **	1.52 (3.06) **	1.65 (3.67) ***	1.47 (3.28) ***
<i>Marital status [in arranged marriage]</i>				
Not married	1.81 (2.72) **	1.94 (3.06) **	1.49 (1.74) †	1.31 (1.35)
In non-arranged marriage	1.39 (1.72) †	1.30 (1.51)	1.03 (0.14)	1.19 (1.00)
Number of children (0-4+)	0.90 (-1.50)	0.95 (-0.68)	0.83 (-2.84) **	0.95 (-0.93)
At least some higher education [no higher education]	2.05 (4.31) ***	2.53 (6.42) ***	2.69 (6.83) ***	2.15 (6.06) ***
<i>Employment sector [not employed]</i>				
Employed in the public sector	1.37 (1.7) †	0.83 (-1.01)	1.08 (0.47)	0.86 (-0.91)
Employed in the private sector	1.59 (2.46) *	1.19 (1.09)	1.52 (2.30) *	1.33 (1.94) †
Self-employed or family business	0.82 (-1.09)	0.85 (-1.10)	0.98 (-0.13)	1.08 (0.50)
<i>Household income per person, tier [low]</i>				
Medium	1.55 (2.42) *	1.34 (1.68) †	1.71 (3.08) **	1.16 (0.80)
High	1.67 (2.37) *	1.70 (2.36) *	1.57 (2.31) *	1.74 (2.84) **
Doesn't know/refused	1.60 (1.57)	1.82 (2.25) *	2.14 (2.89) **	1.99 (2.82) **
<i>Religiosity [not religious]</i>				
Somewhat religious	0.94 (-0.32)	0.72 (-2.50) *	0.59 (-3.72) ***	0.60 (-3.60) ***
Very religious	0.51 (-2.31) *	0.53 (-2.85) **	0.59 (-2.06) *	0.52 (-3.05) **
Lives in urban area [rural area]	3.04 (3.88) ***	2.38 (3.93) ***	2.17 (3.61) ***	1.80 (2.85) **
Has migrated to Russia [has not migrated to Russia]	0.88 (-0.52)	1.21 (0.69)	1.37 (1.36)	1.41 (1.68) †
Has kin in Russia [has no kin in Russia]	1.24 (1.72) †	1.10 (0.64)	1.08 (0.51)	1.28 (1.95) †
Has friend(s) in Russia [has no friends in Russia]	0.95 (-0.31)	1.00 (-0.02)	1.05 (0.28)	0.98 (-0.14)
F-statistic	13.30 ***	9.28 ***	11.90 ***	7.25 ***
Number of observations	3400	3400	3400	3400

Notes: Excludes those who cannot speak Russian at all. Reference categories in brackets. Significance level:

⁺
 $p < 0.10$

*
 $p < 0.05$

**
 $p < 0.01$

 $p < 0.001$.

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Table 6.

Perceived importance of the Russian language for getting a good job in Kyrgyzstan, ordinal logistic regression, odds ratios (*t*-statistics in parentheses).

Predictors and controls	
<i>Ethno-regional group [Southern Kyrgyz]</i>	
Northern Kyrgyz	0.83 (-0.92)
Uzbek	0.80 (-1.04)
<i>Community ethnic composition [largest group less than 2/3]</i>	
Largest group more than 2/3 but less than 100%	0.70 (-1.45)
100% homogeneous	0.91 (-0.36)
Survey Round II [Round I]	1.22 (1.14)
Age	0.99 (-2.72) **
Male [female]	1.03 (0.38)
At least one parent had higher education [neither had]	0.98 (-0.21)
<i>Marital status [in arranged marriage]</i>	
Not married	1.05 (0.29)
In non-arranged marriage	1.10 (0.60)
Number of children (0-4+)	0.98 (-0.54)
At least some higher education [no higher education]	1.18 (1.65)
<i>Employment sector [not employed]</i>	
Employed in the public sector	1.07 (0.54)
Employed in the private sector	1.01 (0.06)
Self-employed or family business	0.77 (-1.75) †
<i>Household income per person, tier [low]</i>	
Medium	1.17 (1.15)
High	1.22 (1.18)
Doesn't know/refused	0.74 (-1.35)
<i>Religiosity [not religious]</i>	
Somewhat religious	0.91 (-0.65)
Very religious	1.09 (0.44)
Lives in urban area [rural area]	1.32 (1.59)
Has migrated to Russia [has not migrated to Russia]	0.73 (-1.83) †
Has kin in Russia [has no kin in Russia]	0.87 (-1.33)
Has friend(s) in Russia [has no friends in Russia]	1.14 (1.15)
<i>F</i> -statistic	2.96 ***
Number of observations	3526

Notes: Reference categories in brackets. Significance level:

† $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

 $p < 0.001$.

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