

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****IDENTITY REPRESENTATION OF THE RUSSIAN GERMANS OF  
OMSK REGION IN THE LITERATURE**

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**Abstract**

Recent process of globalization leads to the development of generally accepted laws, standards, and values, on the one hand. On the other hand, it stipulates the necessity of preservation of different ethnic groups' history, culture, and language. Investigating ethnic and regional identity is a continuing concern of ethnologists, historians, sociologists, and linguists. The past few decades of philological research have seen an increasing interest in “transnational literature”. We suppose that “transnational literature” evinces the perception of the author's identity, namely, its ethnic and regional aspects. The objective of our research was to identify and describe regional and ethnic identity elements represented in the literature of Russian Germans when describing their life in Omsk region. According to the data of sociological and ethnographic investigations, the Russian Germans on the territory of Omsk Region are mainly villagers. Most studies of German traditions and language preservation are carried out in rural districts. An interdisciplinary approach integrating discourse, contextual and semantic analyses, as well as linguocultural interpretation, is applied. Investigations of ethnic groups' identity and literature studies of the Russian German authors living in Omsk region became a theoretical basis of our research. The analysis allows us to conclude that regional and ethnic identity is presented mostly in the description of Omsk region as a native land. We identified four thematic groups: territorial, social, language, cultural. Every group consists of both regional and ethnic identity components. Regional identity prevails in territorial and social semantic groups, while ethnic identity predominates in language and cultural ones.

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*Keywords:* Ethnical identity, regional identity, transnational literature, Russian Germans' literature, Omsk Region



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## 1. Introduction

At present, the study of ethnic communities living on the territory of the multinational Russian Federation is of particular importance. In spite of different approaches to the definition of an ethnic group, the researchers recognize the significance of ethnic self-identification by every ethnic community member (Barbashina, 2003). Ethnic self-identification as a complex system construct includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. However, according to Erokhina (2017), “it is only the top of an iceberg hidden from empirical observation and available for description only through the analysis of cultural artifacts, texts, and every day practices” (p. 76).

The investigators of ethnic problems define different markers indicating a person’s belonging to a certain ethnic group. They are the historical past, culture, endonym, language, and religion. At the same time, language and its dialects contribute to the transfer of cultural and social standards and values between different generations of an ethnic group (Smirnova & Schlegel, 2018; Schermerhorn & Francis, 1970). However, in the course of time migration processes lead to the transformation of such an ethnic component as a mother tongue. The fluency of a mother tongue lowers, and the spheres of its use narrow (Smirnova & Schlegel, 2018).

The problems of the Russian Germans in the Russian Federation are explored from the period of their first migration till present. Ethnic and language identity of the Russian Germans of Kirov region is examined in the works of Baikova and Berezina (2015). Several studies investigating the ethnic identity have been carried out on the Russian Germans of Orenburg region (Tolmacheva, 2014). Distinctive features of the Russian Germans living in Chelyabinsk region are presented in the study of Avdashkin (2015). Smirnova (2018) provides a detailed analysis of the living conditions, migration processes, culture and social activity of the Russian Germans in Siberia.

When the national and regional identity of the Germans in Russia is discussed, it should be mentioned that they are representatives of German culture speaking both German and Russian. Such bilingualism developed due to the historically long residence of the Germans (from the beginning of the 18th century) among the predominant Russian population. Traditionally, the historians determine several periods of voluntary and forced migration to Russia from the territory of Germany, the historical homeland (Smirnova, 2018). Interestingly, that in 1991 the State Committee on the Issues of the Soviet Germans was instructed to create favourable conditions in the places of traditional and current residence of the Soviet Germans. This act aimed at preserving German national identity and the development of their culture. In the same year, a German national district was founded in Omsk region. Today, maintaining the German language as a mother tongue in the district is of utmost importance. It is learned in all kindergartens and most schools in the district. In order to promote the unification and cooperation of more than 50 centers of the German culture and 20 clubs for the German youth in the region, the Russian German House (a cultural and leisure center) was founded in 2016. Also, the information website of the Germans of Priartyshye ([rusdeutschomsk.ru](http://rusdeutschomsk.ru)) provides people with up-to date activity of the ethnic community.

The present paper addresses the experience of the Russian Germans of Omsk region reflected in their literature. Literary works of the described ethnic group can be referred to as transnational literature (Beutel, 2018; Bakhtikireeva et al., 2018; Jay, 2021; Kim, 2017). Not all the authors are bilinguals, most of

them write either in German or in Russian. Autobiographical manner of writing is a distinctive feature of their novels and poems. According to some researchers, autobiographical literature plays a key role in formation of a parametric model of self-identification because it includes ethnic, cultural, confessional, linguistic, territorial and temporal components (Karayeva, 2013).

The variety of genres of the Russian Germans is a result of coexistence of two cultures, two world views. “The road home” is the keynote element of the Russian Germans' literature. The authors use both short fiction forms such as a song, a ballad, a schvank, a spruh, and epic ones, for instance, novels (Valikova & Demchenko, 2020)

## **2. Problem Statement**

The analysis of the literary works of the Russian Germans of Omsk region will reveal the linguistic representations of the authors' ethnic and regional identity. We believe that the elements of the regional identity are manifested mostly in describing the territorial, social and everyday components of the native land image. The ethnic identity is reflected in the description of cultural and linguistic components of the image.

## **3. Research Questions**

- This research seeks to address the following questions:
- What are the markers of the Russian Germans ethnic group?
- What are the composition and genre peculiarities of the literary works of the Russian Germans of Omsk region?
- What features of life in the Omsk region do the literary works convey?
- How are the elements of the ethnic and regional identity represented in the literature of the Russian Germans of Omsk region?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine and describe the elements of regional and ethnic identity verbalized in the literary works of the Russian Germans living in Omsk region. In this regard, our research tasks are as follows:

1. To define the characteristic features of the Russian Germans ethnic group.
2. To determine content and genre characteristic features of the literary works of the Russian Germans of Omsk region.
3. To describe the components (thematic groups) of the native land image.
4. To define the elements of regional and ethnic identity in the components of the native land image.

## **5. Research Methods**

The study uses an interdisciplinary approach including the methods of discourse, contextual and semantic analysis, the elements of linguocultural interpretation.

## 6. Findings

There are a large number of published studies in Russia dealing with the problems of ethnic identity from ethnological and historical viewpoints (Drobizheva, 2010); through sociological and psychological aspects (Stefanenko, 2009). Ethnic identity is defined as the consciousness of the community of people based on the ideas of the nationality, language, culture, history, territory, interests, and the emotional attitude towards them. Under certain conditions, this community is ready to act guided by these ideas (Drobizheva, 2010). At the same time, the ethnic group as a psychological community should be successful in performing man's key functions: orientation in the world around and provision of well-structured information; setting universal life values; defending and being responsible for social and physical well-being (Stefanenko, 2009). We believe that ethnic identity is a common system of representation of ethnic and cultural world components integrating an individual with a community (Namruyeva, 2018).

Interdisciplinary studies, mainly linguistic ones, contribute to the investigation of ethnic identity issues. Literature has always been used to convey peoples' life and reflect the specific world perception by different ethnic groups. In this regard, the study of transnational literature is becoming increasingly important in linguistics. Transnationalism becomes "a structural bridge" between the beyond borders of a single nation and state from the point of view of international migration and the borders of the "other" state, thus becoming a space where transcultural experience is doubled (Kim, 2017). At the same time, transnational literature investigation is characterized by "subfield conglomeration including multicultural, world, postcolonial, diasporic, and borderline one" (Jay, 2021, p. 99). The works of the Russian scholars view transnational literature as a layer of literature that cannot be unambiguously referred to this or that culture (Bakhtikireeva et al., 2018).

'The Russian sector' of German transnational literature attracts both Russian and foreign scientists. In their literary works, the Russian Germans convey the stereotypes about the Russian and German cultures. In this case, with a certain degree of irony some of the authors describe the relative character of culture stereotypes and narrow-minded perception of culture based on them. The others focus readers' attention on negative features of Russian culture (Barbashina, 2003).

The given study analyzes the literary works of the Russian Germans whose lives are connected with Omsk region in of the latter half of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century. They are V. Geynts, A. Genshel, V. Gergenreder, A. Iordan, V. Kaizer, G. Tsilke, E. Mater, A. Raizer, M. Rot, S. Felde, V. Shtrek, V. Eisner, P. Blume, A. Vaits, E. Gamm, A. Tsilke, A. Vormsbexer. Most authors are not widely-known among the readers. However, we believe that literature discourse of regional self-identification presents itself in the literary works of the regional writers representing local perception of the worldview (Bahor et al., 2017). When the authors belonging to the same ethnic group are considered, it is possible to talk about the literary discourse of ethnic identification.

Analyzing literary works, we distinguished four groups of components describing the life of the Russian Germans in Omsk region (Table 01):

1. Territorial (a native land, a place of living, the nature)
2. Social (activities, daily routines).
3. Language (communication).

#### 4. Cultural (traditions, customs, religion)

**Table 1.** Components of identity

Group	Regional identity	Ethnic identity
Territorial	Flora and fauna <i>Lark, fir-tree, birch</i> Weather conditions <i>Snow, wind, rain</i> Landscape <i>Steppe, forest</i>	Settlements with predominant German population/founded by German immigrants <i>Tsvetnopolye, Mirolyubovka</i>
Social	Agricultural labor typical for the region <i>Field work, shepherd, cows, geese</i>	The attitude of Russian Germans to the Russian banya <i>"well-thought in a German way, without Russian dash."</i>
Language	-	Mixture of the Russian and German languages <i>Lampade - Lambada (lampad)</i>
Cultural	-	Religion, German religious holidays: <i>Mennonites, die Heiligen drei Könige</i> German cuisine <i>Strudel, Nudelsuppe</i> German writers, poets: <i>Eichendorf</i> <i>Mörike, Uhland</i>

The spatial component is represented by the images of a house, village, nature, weather. The Siberian region in the perception of Russian German authors is their homeland, a favorite place, a beautiful place. This aspect is expressed in such word combinations as *mein liebes Dörfchen, mein Schöntal, Sibirien, mein Heimatland, Bildschön ist mein Steppenland*. Empathy is expressed with the help of diminutive words (diminutives), possessive pronouns, evaluative connotations. Due to the diminutives and specifying adjectives, the authors emphasize that their homeland is not a huge space but a small place in Siberia. For instance, *kleines Dörfchen ...* Bilingual authors create an image of their native land both in Russian and in German: In the native land named Siberia, there is My father's house and forefathers' graves. The image of the Siberian village is specified through such toponyms as the names of villages indicating geographical location. For instance, *Tsvetnopolye, Novoskatovka, Keizes, Alexandrovka, im Süden Sibiriens, my taiga village, in the north of Omsk region, Siberian hinterland*. The name of the Irtysh River is also an element of regional identification. For example, *I still miss Siberia, those native Irtysh banks*. The manifestation of regional identification can also be traced in the description of nature, i.e. the names of the plants: a birch, a fir-tree, a maple, a poplar: *Seht die Birkedort! And the fir-trees spreading their paws wide, Are ready to start an unequal battle with dear winter. And the old maples have quieted down because of the cold; the birds and animals (larks, das Trillern der Lerchen, Lerchen schwingen sich in blaue Gründe)* typical of Omsk region. The authors describe the weather phenomena (rain, snow, wind) in different seasons, the landscape. *Neblig ist die grüne Wiese, Doch die Sonne geht bald auf. Tropfen hängen an dem Grase, Blumen – wie ein bunter Traum, ein rauer Wind. Mein Steppenland, du hast aus Schnee Dir angetan ein weißes Hemd.*

Thus, the regional identity can be clearly traced in this component; the names of the villages where a large number of Russian Germans live also indicate the ethnic identity.

The social and household component is mainly represented by a description of everyday work and leisure time (elderly people sit on the benches in the evening, the residents like visiting each other, singing a lot, dancing, boys steal apples, men go fishing). Many memories of the life in the post-war period contain such events in the life in a Siberian village as going to the banya, the cinema (the films were brought to the country from town, so there was an expression "a movie was brought") or going to the countryside barber's. The work period (and the whole life) in rural areas is determined not only by the time of day but also by the time of the year. In the winter, life subsides; in the spring, a new cycle begins again. In many works, there is a collective image of a shepherd (a boy, a man) who gathers cows into a herd early in the morning, and brings the cows back "Jede Kuh zum eigenen Tor" late in the evening. The characters of the literary works (the villagers) have both German and Russian names (shepherd Ivan, Ivan and Emma, Vasily and Louise). The characters of fairy tales also represent the two cultures. The regional component can also be traced here – in the social conditions of life in Russia, the Germans begin to address each other by their first and patronymic names - Elsa Petrowna Obholz. It should be noted that in the social and household component, not only are the elements of regional identity but also the ethnic ones explicitly expressed. For example, when the banya is described, it is specified that the Russian Germans wash in the banya "thoroughly, in a German way, without Russian dash."

Primarily, the linguistic component is reflected in the humorous discourse, and it is a mixture of Russian and German. This component is a bright manifestation of ethnic identity. For instance, A. Jordan's schwanks describe the comic situations in which the representatives of Russian Germans who have a poor command of the Russian language (speaking mainly in dialect) incorrectly perceive or pronounce the Russian words. The Russian expression "I arrived blagopoluchno (safe and sound)" as a result was transformed into "I arrived plokhopoluchno/unsafe." The lexeme "blagopoluchno" has a seme "good/blago" meaning "well". The word "plokhopoluchno" has a seme "bad" (the antonym of the word "good"). Moreover, the word used by the Russian Germans does not exist in the Russian language. However, the comic nature of this situation led to the fact that the villagers began to form antonyms for the words having this "good/blago" component such as "blagoverny/blessed", "blagolepie/beauty", "blagovonie/incense", "blagozvuchie/euphony" by analogy.

The comic situation in another schwank is based on the consonance of the Russian and German words Lambada und Sex (lambada (dance) and sex) – Lampade, sechs (lampada, six), The example of mixing languages are "Sie faste Mut und sagte: "Net, Maxim! Male Karowa rapotai (melkte), otin Karowa tui na Tabak – to geest rem, to geestraus... Dr Tabak is propal..."

The cultural component in the analyzed material is represented by several thematic groups, one of which is the old German holidays, for example, Die heiligen drei Könige, Karfreitag, Ostern, Christi Himmelfahrt, Pfingsten und Weihnachten (The Three Wise Men, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost and Christmas). It is noteworthy that this component remains the most preserved one in the minds of the representatives of this ethnic group in its original form (all Russian Germans know these traditions and rituals). As a result, traditions can be traced in the literary sources of all time periods. Rituals also play a big role in preserving identity: weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, wedding ceremonies and communion services. Most holidays, customs and ceremonies are of a religious nature, which most likely ensures their intactness in the culture of the Russian Germans living in Omsk region.

There are cases of the names of religious nature used in the literary works; namely, the religious movements, the vocabulary pertaining to the church arrangement, for example, Baptists, Mennonites, a pastor, der Gottesdienst, der Predigt, die Gemeinde, das Bethaus, Kirchenlieder, deutsche Bibel, Glockenstuhl mit zwei Glocken. There was a time when Miroljubovka was under increasing influence of the Renaissance of Baptism, and a large or overwhelming part of the population was affected by that reviving religious trend. The well-known puritanism, the strictness of morals, which were borrowed by it largely from traditional Mennonite, literally divided the countryside into movie-goers and movie rejectors. The Mennonites, like the Germans in Russia as a whole, did not have their own banyas, and the cult of banya with bath besoms and dry steam, which, unlike Russian villages on the banks of the rivers and the shores of the lakes, was not typical for them.

The cultural component of ethnic identity is also manifested in the national cuisine of the Russian Germans. The literary works mention such dishes as Mehlbrei, Strudel, Nudelnuppe. The last dish is an integral element of the wedding ceremony. On the second day of the wedding, the bride and the groom treated the guests to the noodles made by the bride the night before.

A characteristic feature of the cultural aspect is the connection with another Homeland, i.e. Germany. Russian Germans know and respect the German literature. Thus, their literary texts contain the names of such German poets as.....: Under zitiert Eichendorf in Bezug auf das Waldesrauschen, er zitiert Mörike, Uhland...

The analysis of the literary works proves the opinion that "the ethnic identity of Russian Germans is multi-component, and its various elements are actualized depending on the environment" (Kurske & Smirnova, 2011, p. 124).

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, on the basis of transnational literature written in the latter half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, we have attempted to describe the components of the regional and ethnic identity of the Russian Germans who lived and are living in Omsk region. We presumed that it is local writers and poets whose works are most often thematically autobiographical texts. Those texts not widely-known to the reading public represent the awareness and experience of Russian Germans' identity (ethnic identity) and develop regional self-awareness at the same time.

Despite the ongoing activities to maintain the culture and the language, the researchers note that Russian Germans among whom are those living in Omsk region, are going through a national and cultural crisis – the signs of ethnic identity are being lost, the ritual culture and the national cuisine are disappearing. The German language is also undergoing changes: the dialects are disappearing; the young people are learning German only as a foreign language.

The ethnic identity of Russian Germans is a complex multicomponent phenomenon, the significant features of which are historical destiny, common culture and the German language. It is noteworthy that the genre variety of literary works of Russian Germans is due to the coexistence of the two cultures, the two worldviews. In the literary works of the writers belonging to the same ethnic group and united geographically on the case study of the Siberian region, the elements of regional and ethnic identity were identified. Discourse, contextual and semantic analysis allowed us to determine the following components

of this worldview: spatial (native land, place of residence, the nature), social and household (routines, household activities), linguistic (communication), cultural (customs, traditions, religion). In each component, both regional and ethnic identification of Russian Germans are manifested. Regional identification prevails in the spatial and social and household components; ethnic identification prevails in the linguistic and cultural components.

On the whole, the obtained results contribute to the study of “transnational literature” and highlight the need for further investigation of Russian Germans' identity.

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