

Translingual Textures in Contemporary Russophone Prose: Code-Switching, Ethnocultural Markers, and Identity in Guzel Yakhina and Narine Abgaryan

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*This study examines literary multilingualism and translingual practices in contemporary Russophone prose, focusing on Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* and Narine Abgaryan's *Three Apples Fell from the Sky* and *People Who Are Always With Me*. Bridging linguistics and literary studies, the analysis situates these works within debates on code-switching, ethnoculturally marked language, postcolonial reflection, and identity formation. Building on theoretical insights into written code-switching, multilingual literacy practices, and the paradox of language boundaries in literature, the study shows how authors deploy embedded foreign words, dialectal forms, accented Russian, and culturally specific lexicon as representational strategies. In Yakhina's novel, Tatar, Russian, Mari, Chuvash, German, and French elements create a polyphonic narrative that foregrounds Soviet-era multilingualism, minority language challenges, and the sociocultural work of glossaries and untranslatable terms. Abgaryan's prose showcases Armenian village lifeworlds through lexicon drawn from cuisine, kinship, ritual, material culture, and blessings, alongside Cyrillic transliterations, Armenian script, and playful Russian interjections. These translingual devices function not merely as stylistic ornamentation but as sites of negotiation of power, cultural memory, and belonging. Russophone literature, especially by women writers, mobilizes multilingual repertoires to represent superdiverse realities, interrogate colonial legacies and linguistic hierarchies, and reconfigure readerly perception through deterritorialized language use. The conclusion advances a translingual perspective that views language as dynamic, emergent, and locally reconstituted, demonstrating how these works exemplify the re-localization of meaning and writerly agency in the post-Soviet and diasporic contexts.*

Keywords: *code-switching in modern prose; cultural heritage; ethnocultural legacy; literary multilingualism; Russian as a lingua franca; Russophone literature; translingual practices*

Introduction

Research on multilingualism in literature bridges linguistics and literary studies, forming a multidisciplinary area of inquiry (Deganutti 2024, Hoffmann & Mastelotto 2023, Taylor-Batty & Dembeck 2023). As interest in multilingualism and code-switching has grown in recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on how multiple languages function in fiction and how literary practices relate to spoken code-switching and other written multilingual forms (Cano 2016, Mona 2024, Ramaila 2025). Literary texts provide a unique lens for examining how languages

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interact within individuals and societies, as well as how authors use language choice to shape texts and guide readers, raising questions about cultural depiction, characterization, stylistic strategies, representational techniques, and the sociolinguistic implications of languages in contact (Benaglia & Smith 2022).

In an era defined by globalization and heightened mobility, contemporary literature increasingly foregrounds minority experiences and transcultural identities, reflecting shifting local and global interdependencies that reconfigure both individual and collective allegiances (Bakalova 2024, Pahta et al. 2018, Schulze-Engler & Helff 2009, You 2016). By contrast, relatively little attention has been devoted to such processes in contemporary Russian prose, although recent studies have begun to address this gap (Kulieva 2020, Proshina 2024). The traces of multilingualism in diverse literary works can be found by treating translation as a key mode of experiencing the world and as an expression of Europe's cultural richness and examining how deterritorialization and translation reshape literary form, cultural memory, and readers' perceptions (Laukkanen & Parry 2017).

This article argues that the repertoire of inclusions identified in the works of Russophone authors frequently mirrors shared cultural knowledge from the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, while also introducing regionally specific and emotionally resonant material. Dialectal forms, distinctive speech styles, and representations of accented Russian further enrich these texts, capturing the verbal texture of the environments they depict. By embedding foreign words and phrases (elements that appear to the protagonists as alien, unfamiliar, strange, or incomprehensible) within otherwise Russian-language narratives, writers simultaneously celebrate linguistic diversity and emphasize continuities of human experience amid the complexities of contemporary communication. In this sense, translingualism emerges not only as a distinctive artistic device but also as a critical lens for analyzing evolving cultural and linguistic identities in Russian literature.

Research Questions

This article investigates the complexities of literary multilingualism and translingual practices in contemporary Russophone prose, with a focus on Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* and Narine Abgaryan's *Three Apples Fell from the Sky* and *People Who Are Always With Me*. By integrating the above mentioned perspectives, I try to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the narrative and ideological functions of multilingualism in contemporary Russophone prose, and how do these functions contribute to the readers' understanding of the text?

RQ2: How do intra-linguistic shifts and cross-linguistic insertions interact to create heteroglossia, and what impact does this interaction have on character development and thematic depth?

RQ3: In what ways do the authors' strategies for translation and glossing mediate access to meaning and shape the ethical considerations of reading their texts?

RQ4: How do Yakhina and Abgaryan uniquely employ translanguaging to articulate concepts of history, community, and identity, and what distinctions can be made between their approaches?

Literature Review

The present study is situated at the intersection of literary multilingualism, code-switching, postcolonial reflection, and ethnoculturally marked prose, drawing on research that conceptualizes language not only as a medium of representation but also as a site of tension, negotiation, and meaning-making. Prade (2013) addresses a central paradox of literary criticism: while distinguishing between languages is essential for reading, literary texts simultaneously destabilize this distinction by revealing the interconnectedness of languages, cultures, and the estrangement inherent even in one's mother tongue. Drawing on texts from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, Prade argues that literature transcends linguistic norms both formally and semantically and thus serves not merely as evidence of cultural transition but as a privileged site where language itself is questioned and reshaped. By examining works in several European languages, the study demonstrates that linguistic boundaries are both demonstrably precise and irreducibly uncertain, with the separation between "mother tongue" and "other tongues" defined by this productive uncertainty.

Research on code-switching has traditionally focused on spoken language, leaving written language alternation comparatively underexplored despite its long historical presence and widespread use in both traditional and digital media. Sebba et al. (2014) address this gap by examining multilingual writing across time, media, and language pairs, using diverse empirical and interdisciplinary methods. Treating written code-switching as a distinct discourse phenomenon, they emphasize literacy practices, multimodal semiotics, and the interaction between textual and visual environments. Complementing this perspective, Kannadhasan and Ganesan (2019) collect contributions that examine how global circulation, reception, and translation shape literature, emphasizing the rise of world literature amid globalization and the formation of a relatively stable canon. Their volume explores how literary texts and debates expand in response to rapid cultural change, covering literature across historical periods, travel writing, reception and translation studies, exile and diaspora, colonialism, and postcolonialism. It argues for the value of marginalized literatures and underscores how cultural encounters shape literary production and interpretation, advocating a more inclusive and globally aware literary scholarship. Bakić and Škifić (2017) examine how bilingualism relates to a person's identity and the ways they express emotions and thoughts, exploring both theoretical foundations (definitions of bilingualism and its link to identity, emotion, and cognition) and empirical research that investigates whether bilingual individuals prefer their first or second language or a mix of both when expressing feelings and thinking, showing that language choice varies by context and influences identity construction.

In literary depictions of travel to foreign-language settings, interactions between linguistic minorities and majorities, and the lived experiences of immigrants, the presence of borrowings and code-switching is almost inevitable in constructing

characters' speech (Danilina & Khromova 2021, Hausbacher et al. 2025, Lebedeva 2022, Sorvari 2016). At the same time, the extent and manner of employing these devices vary considerably across authors. Contemporary Russian women's prose, in particular, examines a female perspective on the formation of new identities, language use, and self-positioning in a superdiverse world (Protassova & Yelenevskaya 2024).

Multilingualism has also been interpreted differently in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In the USSR, interaction among the peoples of the Soviet Union was encouraged, and books by ethnic minorities were translated into Russian as the language of interethnic communication, with culturally specific vocabulary preserved and explained as exoticisms (e.g., Arutyunova 2012, Pomerantseva 1979). In the post-Soviet era, newly independent states began to pay greater attention to their own cultural identities, and Russian came to be perceived as a language that belonged to them but also partially hindered the development of national literatures and administrative practices (Krasnykh 2011, Smyth & Opitz 2013). Gradually, scholars recognized that varieties of Russian functioning in different cultural contexts needed to be understood and described in different ways, and Russian increasingly began to be interpreted as a colonial legacy (Fedorova & Protassova 2024). Through this process of self-reflection, a new literature emerged that connects past and present while critically reassessing linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

Within this framework, numerous scholars have explored recurrent motifs in ethnically marked prose, particularly in Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*. Bogumil and Pobivaylo (2020) analyze transformations of hunting motifs in the novel, while Oshchepkova and Sleptsova (2023) examine its mythological and folkloric poetics. Wang (2020) systematizes color metaphors, and Kondakova (2019, 2020) focuses on motifs of dream and death. Cuiying and Nesterova (2019) compare women's communicative practices in traditional lifestyles in China and Russia through a cross-cultural reading of works by Yakhina and Lu Xun, demonstrating how verbal and non-verbal communication reflects the dual, which means constructive and destructive, role of ethnocultural traditions amid tensions between established norms and socio-cultural change. Kravtsova (2022) further argues that *Zuleikha* legitimizes Russian (neo-)colonial and (neo-)imperial narratives by portraying Soviet-era assimilation as emancipation, reinforcing an image of harmonious Russian-Tatar coexistence while obscuring inner coloniality. She situates this reading within contemporary expansionism, civilizational nationalism, Islamophobia, and liberal intellectual complicity, against which decolonial feminist and indigenous movements propose a transformative counter-vision.

A substantial body of scholarship also addresses the novel's narrative and linguistic style. Karaeva and Minibayeva (2022) examine the use of exoticisms, arguing that foreign lexical items reflect the social structure and everyday life of the Tatar people while contributing to the novel's artistic concept. They conclude that non-equivalent vocabulary lends a literary text a distinct national flavor by enabling readers to perceive national intonation, visualize everyday life and culture, and metaphorically enter a foreign cultural space—either discovering common ground or recognizing cultural uniqueness. Sirota (2020) focuses on linguistic and stylistic features, highlighting the blend of realistic and romantic tendencies, the interaction of prosaic and poetic principles, and the role of syntax in conveying ideological and artistic meaning. Gareeva (2017) analyzes the Tatar worldview through untranslatable

vocabulary, while Arzjamova (2015) demonstrates how Yakhina constructs an ethnoculturally marked idiolect through domestic and material culture lexemes (mainly Turkisms and Tatarisms), mythological and folkloric figures, customs, rituals, religious terms, culturally mediated formulas, and onomastics. Arzjamova identifies three types of markers (ethnosemantic, culturally mediated, and transposed) and shows how their interaction encodes Tatar cultural consciousness while inflecting Soviet realities with specific connotations. Salimova and Solunova (2019) describe the speech portraits of the novel's main characters, and several authors focus on the mythology of the bird Semrug (e.g., Kukleva 2020). At the same time, Zhuchkova (2020) offers a sharply critical view, claiming that Yakhina commits numerous linguistic errors in every language used in the text.

Some articles address Narine Abgaryan's *Three Apples Fell from the Sky* and *People Who Are Always with Me*. In reviews, the first novel is described as an account of an exotic, memory-laden place and as an extraordinary, near-miraculous narrative (May 2020, Prindiville 2020, Zilberbourg 2021). Osiecki (2023) critically evaluates the Polish translation from an Armenological perspective, noting the lack of reliable linguistic research in Armenology and the frequent incorrect transliteration of Armenian terms. Zimina (2024) analyzes the challenges of translating the text into English, while Sargsyan (2023) emphasizes the importance of translating works rooted in Armenian cultural and linguistic specificity from Russian into Armenian, highlighting the need to preserve dialectal wordplay and stylistic richness through shared humanistic values. The second novel is characterized as a comforting and intimate depiction of everyday life (Hayden 2015). Molodtsova and Vertinskaya (2024, 2025) argue that Abgaryan's work illustrates how national language, mythology, rituals, and religion preserve cultural heritage and strengthen ethnic identity, demonstrating literature's vital role in transmitting cultural and spiritual values in the context of globalization. They highlight the use of native language, the description of customs and vernacular realities, the value of ethnic roots, family, lineage, and memory, as well as connections with mythology, ancestors, omens, God, and nature; they also note the inclusion of local recipes and the polyphonic character of the text. Kurchastova (2024) focuses on the notions of home and family, while Pavlova (2023) analyzes Abgaryan's works through the lens of gender, demonstrating that the representation of female genealogy, memory, and women's psycho-emotional experience shapes the narrative structure, artistic concept, and aesthetic potential of her texts, while underscoring the gender specificity of her writing and women's literature more broadly.

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that literary multilingualism, code-switching, and ethnoculturally marked language function not merely as stylistic devices but as sites where power relations, identity formation, and cultural memory are negotiated, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for the present analysis. All quotations from the novels discussed are translated by the author of this article.

Guzel Yakhina's "Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes"

In recent scholarship on multilingualism in contemporary Russian-language literature, increasing attention has been paid to how linguistic diversity functions as a narrative and ideological resource. Within this context, the work of Guzel Yakhina offers a particularly productive case for examining the intersection of language, identity, and historical experience.

Guzel Yakhina, a Tatar-born Russian writer currently residing in Kazakhstan, offers in her novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (Yakhina 2018) a sophisticated exploration of linguistic and cultural diversity, capturing the complex interrelations of identities in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s. Tatar, Russian, Mari, and Chuvash voices intersect in Tatarstan, where protagonist lives in the village Yulbash. Another constellation of human destinies happens in Siberian settlement with representatives of twenty-one nationalities. The narrative unfolds through the perspectives of a Tatar woman, a Russian man, and a German professor.

The novel portrays the linguistic challenges confronting minority groups who had to acquire Russian, while Tatar words, customs, and worldviews serve as salient cultural markers throughout. A glossary at the end of the book defines fifty-six Tatar terms, encompassing clothing and footwear (e.g., *yaga*, *tulup*), objects, pagan spirits, Islamic practices, forms of address, animal names, and even insults. Many Tatar words are intelligible from context, for instance, "It's impossible to pass silently in felt kota" or "To slip quietly behind the chintz charshau." However, intuition alone can be misleading, as these terms carry culturally specific meanings. In ambiguous cases, expressions are translated with the Tatar word italicized, e.g., *Ubyrly karchyq* (female ghoul), *zhebegän tavyk* (wet hen), while others remain untranslated, e.g., *eni* (mother) and *janyım* (my soul). Exclamatory interjections, such as *Oy-ya-a-a...*, and Muslim prayers are similarly left in the original.

Zuleikha's struggles with Russian linguistic barriers: she hears *kolkhoz* as *kalkhuz* and *yacheika* (cell) as *yashcheika*. The grain requisitioning campaign is rendered as "more frightening with each passing year—like an *albasty* [female demon], greedier than a *dev* [evil giant spirit], more insatiable than a *zhalmavyz* [giant old woman, man-eater]." Soviet authorities adapt traditions, renaming the pagan holiday *Saban-tuy* ("Plow Festival") as *Traktor-tuy*.

Even in Siberia, Zuleikha remains connected to the spirits of her native place, such as *shurale*. She recalls household rules arrangements, where "children sleep on the chests, and adult women are allotted a small part of the *säki*, separated from the men's section by a thick *çibildak* [curtain or partition]."

In the world of the Russian-German Doctor Leibe, code-switching extends to German words (*Januar*, *Mein Gott*) and Latin phrases, e.g., *Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae* ("This is the place where death rejoices to help life"). The arrival of Leningrad aristocrats introduces French as a coded language, with phrases like "Votre Grand Hôtel m'impressionne, mon ami" and "Messieurs, ne vous disputez pas!" signaling irony or exclusivity.

Prison slang features prominently in the speech of the thief Gorelov, including terms such as *amba* (the end of it all), *shkety* (kids), and prison songs with lines like

“Done two stints, bro. Did time in Sakhalin, soaked in Solovki.” GULAG official Kuznets occasionally employs rustic or regional expressions.

Italicized terms signal concepts that are new to Zuleikha, such as railway terminology *rukav*, *bokobaia vetka*, *otstoinik* (“sleeve,” “side branch,” and “settling tank”). For Ignatov, neologisms include euphemisms such as *ubezhat’ na tu storonu* (“escape to the other side”), *vybit’* (“beat out”), and *kulackii rost* (“kulak growth”). For Leibe, Sovietisms function as neoplasms, for example *vakhtovyi metod* (“rotational work system”). Each new activity introduces specialized vocabulary, enriching the narrative with practical and culturally grounded lexicon. The cook Ashkenazi, called *maître*, incorporates culinary terminology such as *passer* and *blanchir*, as well as *bouillon* for soup, *goujon* for pieces of fish, and *grenki* for rusks, terms that were previously unfamiliar to Zuleikha. Similarly, when a painter decorates the local club, colour terminology is introduced, culminating in the declaration, with an Italian touch, *Finita la comedia* (a misspelled variant of *commedia*).

Through this intricate layering of languages, registers, and discourses, Yakhina constructs a richly textured and polyphonic narrative in which multilingualism functions as a key mechanism of representing identity, power, and cultural memory. The novel not only reflects the historical realities of linguistic contact in the Soviet context but also demonstrates how language mediates experience, shapes perception, and encodes ideological transformations. In this sense, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* contributes to a broader literary rethinking of multilingualism as an essential component of narrative form and as a critical lens for understanding the entanglement of individual lives with larger historical and cultural processes.

Narine Abgaryan’s Novels

Within the broader discussion of multilingualism and translingual practices in contemporary Russian-language literature, particular attention has been given to how authors represent culturally marked spaces through linguistic diversity. In this regard, the prose of Narine Abgaryan provides a compelling example of how multilingualism operates as both a narrative strategy and a means of cultural preservation.

Narine Abgaryan, an Armenian-born Russian writer currently residing in Germany, offers in her works *Three Apples Fell from the Sky* and *People Who Are Always With Me* (Abgaryan 2018) a vivid literary exploration of life in highland Armenian villages, particularly those situated along the Armenian–Azerbaijani border. Her narratives unfold against a backdrop dense with historical and cultural nuance, shifting between places such as Kirovabad and Moscow while engaging with the complex history of the South Caucasus, including references to events such as the rise of the Musavatists in Baku. These novels poignantly depict the experiences of repatriates from regions as diverse as Europe, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and the United States, foregrounding their linguistic challenges. Although many of these characters are fluent in Western Armenian, English, French, Greek, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, they struggle with Eastern Armenian and the Berd dialect, illustrating the deep cultural and linguistic diversity that permeates Abgaryan’s prose.

Abgaryan's characters embody the influence of multiple cultures, which is reflected in their environments, thought patterns, and dialogues. Her texts frequently incorporate foreign-language elements, often rendered in Cyrillic transliteration and occasionally in the Armenian alphabet. For example, a carpet is embroidered with lines from Grigor Narekatsi's *Word to God from the Depths of the Heart* in classical Armenian. The author herself provides translations and glosses, such as *Tsavt tanem* ("I will take your pain"), or "little black bricks of bread — for some reason people called it 'klooch'" thereby facilitating the reader's access to idiomatic expressions and cultural realities. However, some concepts are explained much later than when they first appear in the text, or even in a different work, and some are not always translated at all (*mintana*, *skhtor*, *karas*, *alabai*). "Es ko tiroj mery!" is spoken during a children's ring game, which is presented both in Russian and in Armenian (in the Armenian alphabet with a translation).

Eating habits include chasing hot bean soup with pickled Solomon's seal and a crescent of homemade bread. "The memorial menu is strict and unadorned, with no frivolous salads or pickles." For a woman who has just given birth, one must prepare a tarragon pie, lightly salted bryndza, a peppered meat appetizer, and sweet havets—a dish made from wheat flour. Bread is made with sourdough, not yeast. There are mentions of cherry plum compote, goose baked with dried cornelian cherries, a salad of boiled chicken with crushed walnuts, and slices of lightly salted bryndza fried in a batter of cornmeal and white wine. Foods and dishes include: matsoni ("a fermented dairy product similar in taste to clabber"), kamats matsoni, lavash, wedding baklava with nuts and honey with a lucky coin tucked inside, basturma, sujukh, spas ("a fermented dairy soup with wheat groats, eaten cold in summer and hot in winter"), sali—layered flatbreads with sugar, "sali should be eaten hot," arisa—wheat porridge with meat, tsipul—dried slices of potato, zhengilov hats—"flatbreads filled with herbs," pohindz—"flour made from roasted wheat." "When the bread gets stale, she makes konchol—country bread soup on fried onions." Also: gata, krkeni—gata for important occasions ("For dessert they chose krkeni—a special gata baked exclusively in ashes and served on the most important dates"), khokhobe made with turkey (a dish of poultry, onion, and pomegranate seeds; one dough baked within another), beef khashlama, a Persian-style omelet with onion, mint, cheese, and black pepper, tsogol—unripe apricot eaten with salt, dzaval—"wheat groats," with its porridge called kashika, one of the obligatory Easter dishes (as are "last year's aged bryndza in dried mountain herbs, a spinach and red bean pâté, and buttermilk-scented butter," etc.), and kchakhash—an autumn porridge of corn, beans, and spelt with salted cabbage.

Plants (e.g., *lalazar*, *aveluk*, *kotem*, *sindruk*, *shushan*), clothing, and everyday objects further enrich the cultural landscape. References include *gulpa* socks and *trekh* shoes, traditional garments such as *arkhaluk* and *mintana*, *mutaka* – an elongated divan cushion (declinable), *tonir* – a traditional oven, *chipot* – a stick used for beating wool. The reader learns geographic names (e.g., *Manish-kara*, *Khali-kar*) and musical instruments (*zurna*, *doohl*, *duduk*). Characters are named *Ano*, *Nazeli*, and *Tatevik*; kinship terms include *ayric* ("father"), *babo* ("grandmother"), and *dayi* ("uncle") etc. The addition of *-jan* ("my soul", term of endearment conveying

affection and intimacy) in forms of address occurs after the name, as in *Vano-jan*, *Volodya-jan*.

The text is interwoven with blessings (invocations such as *May my foot step onto your threshold with goodness! I have brought sweet things, so that your work may go easily! May your hands never know weariness, and your eyes never know tears! May the sun always shine in your home's windows!*) and descriptions of rituals, including the ways to utilize every part of the walnut and the burning of incense in an iron bowl on graves. Specific mythological names include *azhdaak* (giant); the four sons of the Heavenly King, *Arevelk* (East), *Yusis* (North), *Arav* (South), and *Arevmut* (West); the evil *dēv* *Aslan-Balasar*.

Interjections coordinate the phrases: *Ohai!* (a satisfied exclamation accompanying each sip of tea); *Ohaaa-ai!* (an address to God); *vuy* (horror), *vaime* (regret, apprehension), *uy?* (surprise) etc. A lot of expressions are notable for their cultural nuances, e.g., “It’s as if *zahremar* [Persian: snake venom] is dripping from his eyebrows!” — a sign of respect toward a strong man, accompanied by clicking the tongue. Some curses are written in the Armenian alphabet.

The narrative also incorporates Russian playful rhymes that capture the rhythm of accentuated colloquial speech, such as *Ligushka – bitaya kruzha* (“Little frog – broken mug”), *Komu griaz, a komualmaz!* (“What is dirt to some is a diamond to others”) and *U ptitsi gusi – belye trusi!* (“That bird goose has white underpants”) [some words are orthographically/grammatically incorrect].

Abgaryan’s novels constitute a celebration of cultural distinctiveness, offering a richly textured mosaic of traditions, languages, and histories. Through her narrative strategies, she demonstrates how multilingualism functions as a lived and embodied practice, shaping perception, memory, and social interaction. From a translingual perspective (Lu & Horner 2013), her work exemplifies how meaning emerges through the dynamic interplay of languages rather than through adherence to fixed norms. This observation aligns with Pennycook’s (2010) view of language as continuously re-localized and produced across centers and peripheries.

Discussion and Conclusion

A translingual approach views language as a dynamic, evolving practice shaped by time, context, and user interaction, emphasizing that meaning and difference emerge through repeated language use rather than fixed standardized rules, thereby challenging monolingual ideologies and recognizing writers’ agency in shaping language (Lu & Horner 2013). What we have observed supports the idea that language is continually re-localized in different locations, reconstructed spontaneously and produced not only from one center, but from periphery as well (Pennycook 2010). Contemporary Russian literature demonstrates a rich interplay of language, culture, and identity, with authors employing diverse stylistic strategies to explore these intersections.

Narine Abgaryan and Guzel Yakhina foreground the cultural and linguistic specificity of their settings. Abgaryan evokes the layered heritage of Armenian highland communities through language, rituals, food, and folklore, while Yakhina

captures the multilingual complexity of Soviet multiculturalism, illustrating identity formation amid Tatar, Russian, German, and other voices.

Yakhina's historically grounded narratives and Abgaryan's autobiographically inflected realism differ substantially in genre, but each is a marker of identity, a stylistic resource, and a cultural or historical trace. Taken together, these works demonstrate how Russophone writers mobilize translingualism across genres to feature self-reflection, critique, and cultural hybridity.

In comparison with Guzel Yakhina, whose historically colored narratives foreground multilingual Soviet realities, Abgaryan emphasizes the micro-level of community life and cultural continuity. Despite differences in genre and narrative scope, both authors employ translingualism as a key literary device: it serves simultaneously as a marker of identity, a stylistic resource, and a repository of cultural and historical meaning. Taken together, their works demonstrate how contemporary Russophone literature mobilizes multilingualism to articulate hybridity, enable cultural self-reflection, and challenge monolingual frameworks of interpretation.

In the works discussed, multilingualism operates, beyond stylistic ornamentation, as a narrative mechanism for identity construction, power negotiation, and cultural memory. Foreign insertions, dialectal forms, and accented Russian index social positions and cultural affiliations; they also stage tensions of center/periphery and majority/minority relations. In Yakhina, Tatarisms, German and Latin formulae, prison argot, and Sovietisms map the social stratigraphy of 1930s–40s Soviet space; in Abgaryan, Armenian lexicon and blessings enact a lived ethnolinguistic world, preserving ritual knowledge and communal bonds. Culinary terms, blessings, and object lexicons are dense repositories of cultural knowledge, anchoring language in practice. They scaffold memory and identity (e.g., Armenian and Tatar dishes, ritual formulas), enabling the prose to “show” culture rather than “tell” it. These domains facilitate naturalistic insertion of non-equivalent vocabulary, reinforcing the sense of place and communal ethics. Thus, multilingualism is constitutive of plot world-building and ideological critique, not mere decoration.

Intra-linguistic mixing (e.g., colloquial, argot, regional speech) calibrates social evaluation and character voice within Russian; cross-linguistic mixing (Tatar, German, Latin, Armenian) foregrounds intercultural contact, otherness, and translation as experience. Together, they produce a layered heteroglossia that both reflects historical multilingual realities and creates interpretive friction, prompting readers to navigate partial intelligibility and cultural distance. Paratextual tools (Yakhina's glossary) and typographic cues (italics for new concepts) scaffold comprehension while preserving cultural specificity. Deferred or absent glossing (Abgaryan) sustains immersion and invites inferencing, fostering an ethics of hospitality/strangeness: readers are asked to inhabit uncertainty, accept partial understanding, and learn culturally situated meanings over time.

The texts align with research that treats translation and deterritorialization as central to modern literary form. Yakhina's glossary and selective translation practices dramatize the reader's movement between linguistic regimes; Abgaryan alternates explanation, delayed glossing, and non-translation to simulate immersion and estrangement. Both models turn translation into a narrative event, making readers feel the pressures of mobility, diaspora, and cultural mediation.

The inclusions mirror shared Soviet/post-Soviet cultural knowledge, like Sovietisms, prison slang, and bureaucratic terms, while adding region-specific, affectively charged lexicon (Tatar household terms; Armenian foodways, blessings, and interjections). This combination encodes collective memory (e.g., GULAG discourse, collectivization) and local particularities (rituals, cuisine, kinship terms), demonstrating how post-Soviet literature integrates macro-historical frames with micro-ethnographic textures. Yakhina dramatizes Soviet center-periphery dynamics via Russian as *lingua franca* and Tatar as local identity marker, showing both coercive assimilation and resilient cultural practices. Abgaryan recenters the periphery: Armenian village life becomes the epistemic core, with Russian serving as relay while Armenian carries ritual authority and affective intensity. Both thereby complicate the notion of a singular “center” of Russophone culture. Yakhina’s historically grounded, multi-perspective narrative uses multilingualism to map institutional power (state, imprisonment, medical discourse) and to track identity formation amid coercive modernization. Abgaryan’s community-focused realism foregrounds continuity, ritual, and naturalness; multilingual elements preserve microcultural memory and intimacy rather than adjudicating imperial structures. Both rely on translanguaging, but with distinct emphases: Yakhina toward sociopolitical stratification; Abgaryan toward cultural preservation and affect.

By situating Russian alongside Tatar, Armenian, and other languages, the texts expose Russian’s dual role: a shared interethnic medium with translational reach and a language historically implicated in domination. The interplay of Russian with minority lexicons and rituals makes visible both assimilationist pressures and countervailing local sovereignties, supporting current scholarship that reads Russian as a colonial legacy variably reappropriated across contexts. Distinguishing intra- vs. cross-linguistic mixing clarifies semiotic functions, while integrating historical sociolinguistics and translation studies situates textual devices within broader language ideologies and mobility regimes.

In the classroom, the texts enable multiliteracies: students can practice interpreting code-switching, register shifts, and culturally laden lexicon; they learn how language indexes identity and power, and how translation mediates meaning. Centering such texts advances critical literacy by requiring evidence-based inference, contextual research, and reflection on monolingual ideology, aligning with calls to integrate authentic, translanguaging materials in advanced classrooms. Close reading should be paired with paratext analysis (glossaries, typography), reception studies (how readers process multilingual cues), and light quantification (distribution of code-switching by narrator/character/scene) to avoid impressionism. Such texts normalize partial comprehension, require readers to explore multiple codes, and problematize any single authoritative voice. The result is a reading practice attuned to ambiguity and heterogeneity, aligned with translanguaging: meaning emerges from use-in-context and circulation across centers/peripheries, not from fixed linguistic norms.

Answers to the Research Questions:

RQ1: The narrative and ideological functions of multilingualism in contemporary Russophone prose serve to enrich character development and thematic depth. In Yakhina’s work, multilingualism conveys the complex identity struggles faced by minority groups during the Soviet era, underscoring the challenges of language

acquisition and cultural retention. Conversely, Abgaryan's use of linguistic diversity emphasizes cultural continuity and the significance of communal memory. Both authors employ multilingualism to create textured narratives that reflect the sociopolitical landscapes of their respective cultures while providing readers with a nuanced understanding of identity formation.

RQ2: Intra-linguistic shifts, such as the use of different registers within Russian, and cross-linguistic insertions, including Tatar or Armenian lexicon, contribute to heteroglossia by foregrounding the diverse voices and identities present in the narrative. This interaction enhances character development by allowing for a more comprehensive portrayal of their backgrounds and cultural conflicts. For instance, Yakhina's characters express their identities through various languages, demonstrating how language use reflects their social positions and experiences. Abgaryan achieves similar effects by integrating the Armenian language and cultural references, which creates deeper emotional connections for readers and illustrates the characters' struggles and joys.

RQ3: The authors' strategies for translation and glossing play a critical role in mediating access to meaning. Yakhina provides a glossary that facilitates understanding of Tatar terms, allowing readers to engage with the text while preserving cultural specificity. On the other hand, Abgaryan's approach often introduces foreign terms without immediate glosses, creating a sense of immersion and prompting readers to infer meanings through context. This invites an ethical reading practice where readers must grapple with cultural nuances, fostering a sense of curiosity and engagement with the narrative's linguistic diversity.

RQ4: Yakhina and Abgaryan employ translingualism distinctively to represent history and community. Yakhina's narrative hinges on a nuanced portrayal of Soviet-era language encounters, using linguistic diversity to juxtapose various cultural identities and to critique historical power dynamics. In contrast, Abgaryan's narratives focus on the intimate realities of Armenian village life, emphasizing continuity, cultural rituals, and everyday experiences. The distinctions in their approaches praise different aspects of identity formation: Yakhina interrogates historical trauma and assimilation, simultaneously Abgaryan celebrates cultural heritage and community resilience. Together, these works underscore the importance of translingual practices in articulating complex social realities and challenging monolingual paradigms.

In sum, literary multilingualism constructs identity, negotiates power, and preserves cultural memory, shaping world-building and reader positioning. Register shifts calibrate social evaluation within Russian; insertions foreground intercultural contact and alterity; together they create layered, partially intelligible worlds. Glossaries, italics, and deferred explanations balance accessibility with immersion, inviting readers into translational labor and cultural hospitality. Yakhina maps multilingual Soviet modernity and institutional power; Abgaryan centers communal continuity and ritual, both challenging monolingual interpretive norms.

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