

**Title:** The Russian Language in Belarus: On the Road to Pluricentricity?  
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Belarus is unique among the post-Soviet states with respect to the weak linkage between national self-identification and use of the “titular” national language. While the percentage of the country’s citizens identifying themselves as ethnic Belarusians has continued to increase (in 2009 reaching 83%), and while a significant majority of Belarusians now favor independence over a political merger with Russia, the dominant position of Russian in virtually all social domains in Belarus has been maintained and, in some respects, even enhanced since Russian became the country’s second official language in 1995. Yet there are also signs that the Russian language in Belarus is beginning to diverge from the dominant Russian standard of the Russian Federation, under the influence of a variety of factors: the Belarusian linguistic substratum and the parallel use of standard Belarusian in at least some social domains, decreased population flows across the Belarus-Russia border, and different socio-political and cultural conditions and institutions in the two countries.

In this paper I examine the linguistic characteristics and sociolinguistic distribution of nativized varieties of Russian in contemporary Belarus, and explore how perceived divergence from the metropolitan norm is deployed in the construction of “Belarusian Russian” as a discursive object. Data on the linguistic features of Belarusian Russian and attitudes toward it are drawn from previous descriptive studies, online media sources and interviews, as well as from an internet survey of 200 Belarusian citizens, both monolingual Russophones and Belarusian-Russian bilinguals, that I conducted in 2011–2012. I show that, with regard both to language use and language attitudes, Belarus constitutes a distinct, if still emergent, national speech community within the larger Russophone space, and discuss some of the implications of the Belarusian situation in the broader context of linguistic pluricentricity in modern Europe.