



Russian Language History

Spoken by the tsars and by renowned artists like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Pasternak and Prokofiev, **Russian is the native language of some 160 million citizens** of the Russian Federal Republic. It is **one of the six official languages of the UN** and ranks with English, Chinese and Spanish as a major world language.

What is more, Russian remains the unofficial lingua franca of the former Soviet republics, an indispensable communications tool across all of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russian accounts for one-quarter of scientific publications, and it is an increasingly important language for business and trade as Russian institutions, both public and private, integrate with their European and American counterparts.

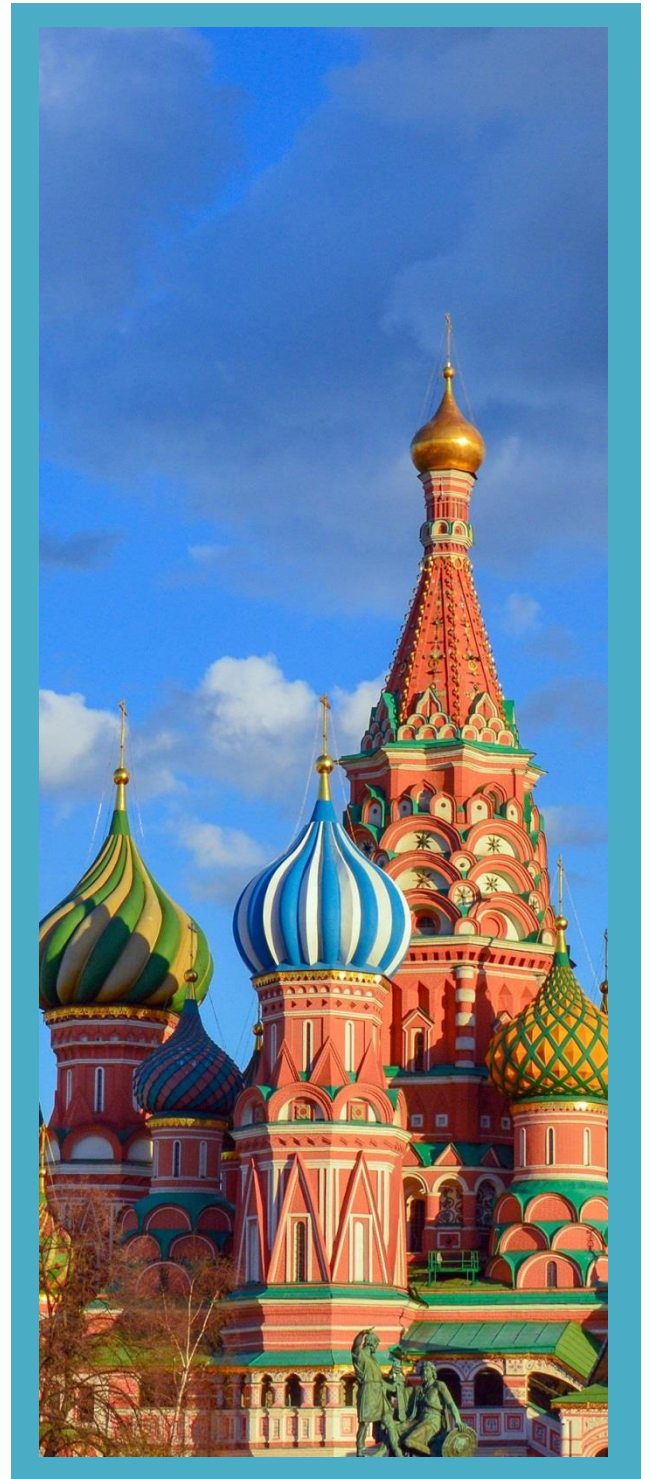
Low, Middle and High Style

Old Church Slavonic remained the written language until the middle of the eighteenth century in Russia. By this time, the need was felt for a written language which was closer to the educated spoken norm.

The famous **M. V. Lomonosov**, after which the Moscow State University is named, distinguished three styles:

1. **High Style** – Church Slavonic, to be used for poetics and religion.
2. **Middle Style** – to be used for lyric poetry, prose and science.
3. **Low Style** – to be used in personal correspondence and in low comedy.

The Middle Style, which combined features of both East Slavonic and Church Slavonic is the style which came to form the basis of the modern standard language. In the mid-1800's, Standard Russian based on the Moscow dialect became the official language.



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Roots of the Russian Language

The sixth century AD saw the migration of the **Slav people** from old Poland. The Slavs expanded westwards to the **river Elbe** and southwards to the **Adriatic Sea** where they gradually occupied much of the **Balkans**.

By the 10th century, three Slavonic language groups had emerged: **Western, Southern and Eastern**. Eastern Slavonic gave rise to the modern languages known as Ukrainian, Belorussian and Russian. The Slavonic languages retained many features in common especially in grammatical structure; therefore, the separate groups were able to use one common written language. This language was known as **Old Slavonic or Old Church Slavonic** (the language was used in its written form only). In the 9th century, two missionaries – **Constantine** (who on his deathbed took the monastic name Cyril) and **Methodius** – were required to write down the scriptures in Old Church Slavonic and to preach Christianity to the people of Moravia.

Before they set out for Moravia, Constantine invented a Slavonic, now known as **Cyrillic**, alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet is closely based on the Greek alphabet, with about a dozen additional letters invented to represent Slavic sounds not found in Greek.

In Russia, Cyrillic was first written in the early Middle-Ages in clear-cut, legible *ustav* (large letters). Later a succession of cursive forms developed. In the early eighteenth century, under Peter the Great, the forms of letters were simplified and standardised, with some appropriate only to Greek being removed. Further unnecessary letters were expunged in 1918, leaving the alphabet as it is today.

Introductions

The Russian language allows an interesting way of addressing people to whom you have just been introduced. The person's first name is combined with a modified form of his or her father's first name. If a man's first name is Ivan and his father's first name is also Ivan, you would call him **Ivan Ivanovich** (Ivan, son of Ivan), and if Ivan had a sister, she would be called **Natasha Ivanovna**, (Natasha, daughter of Ivan). The **-ovich** and **-ovna** suffixes are always appended to the father's first name and not to the mother's.



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