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The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment
LANGUAGE UNITY AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract

The article follows the following research question: What is the future of multilingualism in the multinational Russia? The Russian Federation belongs to the category of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual countries, traditionally characterized by a significant linguistic diversity. In Russia there are over 150 languages, functioning with a different degree of efficiency, representing different language groups and having different repertoires of social functions, which depend on the number of their speakers and their legal and functional status. Therefore the authors consider de-jure and de-facto language policy in Russia in the context of language unity and language diversity strategy. The de-jure and de-facto language policy is in an intensive area of tension in Russia. It is demonstrated in Russia's history but also in its immediate presence: we remember here the amendments to the Federal Law 'On the Education in the Russian Federation' adopted in 2018 that gave the national languages an optional status in the education system. To answer the research question, the article concentrates on the dynamics of language policy and models of language policy in present-day Russia.

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Keywords: Language unity, language diversity, Russian, Russian Federation



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1. Introduction

The modern world is characterized by two types of language communities: monoethnic (Iceland, Japan, Korea, etc.) and polyethnic (European Union, Russian Federation, etc.). The polyethnic language community in the Russian Federation, in its turn, comprises smaller regional polyethnic language communities (republics) and monoethnic language communities (oblasts). In the monoethnic language communities one language, Russian, is chiefly spoken, its functions on these territories being that of the native tongue of the population and that of the language of the whole state, the factor promoting the unity of the polyethnic country. The polyethnic language communities are often characterized by the use of multi-componential social-communicative systems, i.e. communities where two, three and even more languages are used in various degrees and forms for different spheres of communication. In this case the language policy present special complexity, because language policy should obligatory consider two aspects, from one hand, linguistic rights of a variety of ethnic groups, on the one hand, the unity of these ethnic groups should be promoted in the context of a single language, which includes them at the same time into a larger and even more linguistically diverse community. Hence it is quite obvious in this case that alongside the linguistic rights of particular ethnic groups being provided, their commitment to the state interest, i.e. the linguistic uniformity within the whole country is secured.

2. Problem Statement

In 1990s in most polyethnic countries as well as in the Russian Federation there was declared the principle of "the equality of all the languages". Well-known is the fact that languages and even dialects are potentially multifunctional, i.e. they may be used in different spheres of communication, but in reality the number of developed written languages is limited (Franklin & Widdis, 2006; Suny, 1999/2000).

In the modern world there is "division of labor" between languages on the international scene, with world languages being employed by international organizations (UNO, UNESCO, etc.), as well as in interstate communication (English, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, French). Similarly, there is "division of labor" within the polyethnic Russian Federation, where the majority language (Russian) is a linguistic means for promoting the unity of a large community where a multitude of different languages is spoken. At the same time, the languages of particular ethnoses are used in the same function on the level of respective regional ethnic communities. Parallel to these were the processes in the development of the linguistic situation of the polyethnic state in the Soviet time, and the Russian language, even if its status was not defined at the time, was in fact the language promoting the unity of the country and functioning as a means of interethnic communication while the languages of different nationalities were used to a various degree in different spheres to satisfy the social needs of respective language communities. This practice corresponded to the linguistic situation in the country, although quite often the national intelligentsia was dissatisfied with the limited use of national languages in different spheres of communication. In 1990th there dominated the opinion that language management required legal regulation. Hence the process of legal interventions into the social functions of languages by way of passing special laws and other legal acts concerning the speaking practices was initiated. It is accepted now that language laws are a sign of advanced societies in the field of ethnic and linguistic interactions

because they are helpful in correctly organizing the linguistic practice in the communication spheres, which yield to regulation in terms of their social functions (education, science, business, literature, mass media, etc.) in contrast to everyday interpersonal communication, where this kind of regulation is impossible and in fact inappropriate because it will thus interfere with the linguistic rights of an individual (Bitkeeva et al., 2019; Filippova & Sokolovskij, 2020; Martynova & Stepanov, 2019).

3. Research Questions

The article follows the following research question: What is the future of multilingualism in the multinational Russia? The de-jure and de-facto language policy is in an intensive area of tension in Russia. This is not only demonstrated in Russia's history but also in its immediate presence: we remember here the amendments to the Federal Law 'On the Education in the Russian Federation' adopted in 2018 that gave the national languages an optional status in the education system. This was and is accompanied by heated debates in the society. To answer the research question, the article concentrates on the dynamics of language policy and models of language policy in present-day Russia.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the article is to systematically explore and elaborate strategies for the language policy in the Russian Federation. We answer the following questions: What functional, social, and political factors affect the Russian minority and lesser-used languages' development, and how? What is the language competence of ethnic groups in both minority and majority languages? Is the current national policy pursued in the country expedient and effective? What are the prospects for Russian minority languages?

5. Research Methods

Language policy is a combination of ideological principles and practical measures aimed at resolving language problems in society or in a state (Spolsky, 2004) "language practices", "language management", "language ideologies"), it is always a part of the national politics of the state. Consequently, language policy is formed and studied in a theoretical aspect and implemented in a practical way. Therefore, the article combines expert knowledge of both the theory of sociolinguistics and related disciplines, and the knowledge of the language situation in polyethnic Russia in the period after the 'mobilized linguisticism', when a new model of language policy is being formed by and large spontaneously. This approach is based on the intersection of theory and practice and complemented by an interdisciplinary approach.

6. Findings

The modern world is characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity, their preservation depends on conscious efforts on the part of society to promote languages and cultures. Almost every state has its own functional model of language policy that corresponds to the specificity of the language situation in the

country - the ethnic composition of populations, the settlement patterns of various ethnic groups, their linguistic loyalties, values etc. These aspects are to be taken into consideration when legal acts on language planning are worked out and initiated. Also of importance in this respect is the level or degree of the development of those languages, which are granted the legal status of state languages. In sociolinguistics besides the notion of a legal status there is also that of a factual (functional) or communicative status of languages, which is associated with the level of their development, their capacity to be of use in different spheres of communication, as well as their real performance in different spheres of communication. In the Russian Federation it is quite often that ethnic languages, which have been given the status of state languages, are not sophisticated enough to perform in all their potentially possible functions.

The state languages have special development programmes adopted for them, as well as some governmental financial support for their development and promotion. The state languages were given state status out of the factor of the maximum number of the ethnic group within a given administrative territorial unit of the RF. It was according to this parameter that the national republics received their official titles while their status of those enjoying the state sovereignty, according to their constitutions adopted during the perestroika period, raised the issue of legal regulation of languages. Therefore, the laws on languages were initiated in the RF national republics.

In the present-day Russian Federation there is a multi-componential model of language policy that includes 36 components - languages that have status of state ones. Russian as the official language of the Russian Federation functions on the whole territory of the country, in the national republics of the Russian Federation there are local state languages. In this situation sometimes there take place rivalry between languages, for example in case of increase/decrease of teaching hours given to Russian or regional state language instruction, or in some republic the requirement towards the candidates for presidency in the republic to have a command of the regional state language, etc.

The multi-componential structure of the model of language policies in a polyethnic state is nothing exceptional. It is characteristic of many states in the world because it guarantees peaceful coexistence of languages, preventing ethnic and linguistic conflicts. These are, for example, such countries as Switzerland (4 languages; 3 of them are official and 1 state), Belgium (2 languages), Singapore (4 languages), etc. (Mikhailchenko, 1994, p. 12). Multi-componential is also the model of language policies in the European Union (about 30 languages). However, the identification of so many functional dominant languages, their successful cultivation and promotion in a variety of language communities require substantial financial resources, as well as take significantly long periods of time to allow their spread over respective territories.

Given the need to implement the adopted laws, which require the promotion of state languages in different spheres of communication, there is a social need for rational management of real functions between the official language of the state and regional national languages of particular republics. It is obvious that every regional language granted the state status in the republics faces a crucially important mission - to ensure its full-fledged performance as the language of its own respective language community and only at a later stage to plan its promotion among other communities. Hasty decisions towards imposing state languages on the speakers of other language communities through compulsory

instruction or their mandatory use in the administrative area are fraught with conflicts. As an example of such a decision one can cite the fact when a number of republics of the Russian Federation turned to the Constitutional Court of Russia to claim their right to nominate only those presidential candidates who had a command of the regional state languages (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Mari El, etc.). Meanwhile, as a conflict-free option for promoting a regional state language can be seen the so called "zero" variant of implementing the language laws, i.e. the situation when the older generation remains with their level of language skills, the middle generation is provided with optional language courses, receiving additional benefits for the knowledge of a state language, while the young should have a clear social perspective: only if they successfully learn the state language at school they will be provided with jobs in the given republic. However, this strategy of implementing the language laws was not to be realized even in some "civilized" Baltic republics, where they preferred urgent promotion of the state languages, imposing them on speakers of other languages, using such methods as refusing them the citizenship, stripping them of their right to hold public offices or to privatize housing, issuing them "non-citizen" passports, etc. Thus, employed as a means of excluding certain groups of population from public life (depriving them of their right to vote in the elections), languages known as powerful means serving the unity and cooperation of communities may become an equally powerful political factor when used as a means of confrontation and fragmentation of a given larger community, thus acquiring a significant role in the conflicts caused by the issues of nationalities and languages.

Some words about languages in the Russian Federation and language diversity and unity in the country. The Russian Federation belongs to the category of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual countries, traditionally characterized by a significant linguistic diversity. In Russia there are over 150 languages, functioning with a different degree of efficiency, representing different language groups and having different repertoires of social functions, which depend on the number of their speakers and their legal and functional status (Alpatov, 1997; Bitkeeva & Mikhhalchenko, 2020). Such linguistic diversity is greatly appreciated in the modern world as a great value, worthy of support and protection. According to current sociolinguistic classifications, languages are grouped into written and unwritten ones, as well as those with a recent writing tradition and newly created written languages. It is obvious that the languages with written forms have more opportunities for their functional development, especially old written ones which have developed a variety of functional styles required for use in different areas of communication. On the other hand, it is a common observation that there are far greater social needs for the use of native languages on the part of language communities whose numerous speakers form clustered settlements. Besides these conditions required for the use of languages, there are also subjective factors, such as the linguistic competence of members of a given community, their loyalty to mother tongues and own cultures, their values and exposure to other languages. Also, of current significance is the role played by globalization factors, under which one often has to choose to learn one of the international languages (Russian or some other language of international communication), which may offer more opportunities than one's native language. All of these factors influence the decisions of individuals in choosing languages to study and, later, the languages of communication, depending, accordingly, on their specific milieus and professional and other activities.

The more popular languages are those which have the greater number of speakers. The most widely spread language of the Russian Federation is Russian, which is the official state language of the multinational country spoken by 98.2 percent of the population. Its social functions are broad: it is the language of the Russian people, the language used for official purposes in the government structures, the language of science, culture and education, as well as one of the languages of interethnic and international communication. The majority of the ethnic groups in Russia are micro social units. The majority of languages spoken by over 50,000 people are granted the status of state ones within their respective national administrative territories of the Russian Federation and have preferences in terms of governmental financial support for their promotion. Therefore, in Russia there is, on the one hand, *linguistic uniformity* associated with the Russian language spoken by the population on the whole territory of the country, and, on the other hand, *linguistic diversity*, ensured by the support provided to the languages of different ethnic groups in terms of their social functions. One can have an idea about the present state of languages in Russia in terms of their functional development, taking into account the number of their speakers, in accordance with the census data, as well as the speakers' own estimations of their command of the native languages.

In accordance with ethnographic criteria, less numerous (minority) peoples are those ethnic communities which have their territories where they traditionally settle and are less than 50 thousand in number. In fact, some of the less numerous ethnic communities speak dialects, or varieties of certain languages, rather than respective languages. For example, the language of the Bessermyan is a dialect of the Udmurt, one of the Finno-Ugric languages. On the other hand, there may be a controversy over the linguistic status of their languages, and depending on the linguists' points of view one and the same language may be recognized as a distinct language and as a dialect; this is, for example, the case of Kaitagsky. As compared with dialects, languages, as a rule, have a somewhat wider social basis in terms of both a larger number of speakers and their wider spheres of functional use.

This category of the Russian Federation minority languages includes 54 of them. Linguists are involved not only in their study but also work on elaborating their writing forms. However, before these are created and recommended into practice, it is always appropriate to conduct a sociolinguistic study of a given language community to find out whether writing is what the people want and ready to use. It should also be pointed out that the statistics of language communities and ethnic communities do not necessarily coincide, because there are cases when individuals may be well aware of their ethnic identity and keep their loyalty to a given community but at the same time their functionally first language may be that of another ethnic group. On the other hand, some of them may continue to cultivate their ethnic identity even if they do not speak their own mother tongue any longer. Hence there is an issue of how to identify and interpret the conceptual limits of the notion of a language community, as well as its correlation with that of an ethnic community. It is obvious that the former is somewhat a narrower concept than the latter. It may tend to expand and become wider than its respective ethnic community only when a given language manages to spread its influence on other ethnic communities. There must be certain social conditions for this kind of development like, for example, at present thanks to globalization factors there is a steady expansion of the language communities of those languages which are used as a means of international communication, especially that of English. There are also other examples when a language community

grows to include other ethnic groups into its sphere; for example, in accordance with the census, the community of people speaking Ukrainian and Turkish in Russia is wider than that of their respective ethnic groups.

There is certain complexity in the problem of identifying and measuring these processes, in particular, as far as the correlation between ethnic and linguistic parameters of the population are concerned, though such measurements are of great importance in understanding the processes characteristic of the multinational and multilingual country. Of these most relevant are parameters of the *demographic power* and the *communicative power* (Vinogradov, 1990, p. 616). The parameter of the demographic power is used to identify and describe the statistical characteristics of ethnic communities, which form the basis of language ones. Those members of ethnic groups who do not speak their respective languages are of immediate and relevant interest in terms of the potential growth of these languages and hence in terms of increase of their demographic power. Policies aimed at promoting languages, even if they have an official status, to expand their influence on other language communities while in practice there is still room for developing their functional efficiency within their own community, may lead to misunderstanding on the part of these other language communities.

Of crucial importance in implementing the language legal acts in the republics is the *size of their language communities*: the more numerous their titular nations, or the speakers of status languages, the easier it is to implement them in practice.

On the contrary, when the number of a titular people in the population of a region is small, the functional development of this ethnic language faces a number of problems. Such a language, even if it is declared as the state one, can hardly expand its functions in view of the fact that the polyethnic population speaks first of all the state language of the country (Russian) while the social need in another language as a common means of regional interactions, i.e. the state language of a republic, is limited. The situation is especially complicated in those cases when the level of knowledge of a given ethnic language is low even among its own ethnic community.

Another parameter which plays a significant role in the functional development of a language is the *character of settlement* of this or that ethnos, which may be either compact or dispersed. Most favorable for the expansion of the social functions of a language is the case when the speakers form clustered settlements. In Russia there are various types of regions where they have a variety of objective conditions for the functional development of titular languages legally recognized as state ones: in some republics the titular nation may constitute the prevailing majority of its population (e.g. in Chechnya - **95.3 percent**), in other republics it comprises over half of the population (e.g. in Chuvashia – **65.1 percent**; in Kalmykia – **56.2 percent**; in Tatarstan – **53.2 percent**); in still others it is less than 40 percent (e.g., in Mordovia – **39.9 percent**; Altai – **33.4 percent**; Bashkortostan – **28.8 percent**). In some republics the portion of the titular ethnic group is very low (e.g., in Karelia – **7.1 percent**; in Khakassia – **12 percent**). Characteristic of the Nogai is an enclave pattern of settlement: in Dagestan they constitute 39 percent of the population, 15.1 percent of them live in the Nogai Region in Karachay-Cherkessia and 21.2 percent live in the Neftekumsky Region of the Stavropol Krai. The Adyghe, on the other hand, live in municipal units of a mixed character, dispersed among the Cossack traditional settlements on the lands that later became part of the Adyghea.

Today as a result of migratory processes the proportion of mixed settlements tends to increase; a dispersed pattern of settlement is becoming characteristic of some ethnic groups, such as the Kumyks whose pattern of residence has acquired an increasingly dispersed character.

The country's widespread languages belong those which are spoken by its most numerous nationalities, including the Tatar language with the largest number of speakers (5.3 million), as well as the Bashkir language with its 1.4 million speakers. Quite representative is also the portion of the population speaking the Ukrainian language (1.8 million). Then, in terms of the number of their speakers follow Chechen, Chuvash, Armenian and Avar. However, it should be noted that the number of speakers of a particular language may actually be lower in respect to the size of the population: thus, one-third of Ukrainians do not speak Ukrainian while in the case of Udmurt a quarter of the people do not speak their mother tongue. About one fifth of the Chuvash, Bashkir, Armenian do not speak mother tongues either. These statistics indicate, among other things, *the internal demographic power* of these languages, i.e. wide potentialities for their growth within their own language communities. On the other hand, the opposite phenomenon may also take place as some local languages may spread beyond their language communities. For example, in Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Russians, Buryats, etc. speak the Yakut language along with the Yakuts. This is the indicator of the *external demographic power* of languages. Most likely, additional language skills result from contacts between speakers of respective languages.

Therefore, the main trends of language development in the Russian Federation are as follows:

- 1) increased interest in ethnic languages and cultures;
- 2) restoration of previous cultural and language traditions;
- 3) enhancement of social functions of titular languages;
- 4) increased attention to languages of smaller ethnoses.

This may be interpreted as the extension of the role of these languages, but there is also a discrepancy between their status and functional repertoire. In terms of the revival and promotion of national languages in Russia one may point out a number of facilitating factors, such as the following:

- 1) conspicuous efforts on the part of most of the native speakers to expand their functions;
- 2) some resources of the previous periods, developed in these languages (published literature including textbooks, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, grammars etc.);
- 3) some experience in teaching these languages as a school subject, as well as their use as languages of instruction;
- 4) the opening of social perspectives for their use in various areas of communication, given the current status of the state languages in the republics (Borgoyakova & Bitkeeva, 2020).

However, at the same time one has to point out a number of factors that do not contribute to the optimal development of the national languages, including the following factors:

- 1) a limited use of most of the languages in public administration, education, mass communication spheres;
- 2) some "linguistic nihilism" characteristic of some speakers of the languages in the republics, i.e. their lack of mother tongue competence, as well as lack of interest in acquiring it because of "low social prestige" of the languages;

3) a tendency towards linguistic expansionism manifest in an effort to impose the languages, declared as having a state status, on other language communities in an attempt to exert an influence on them, and finally;

4) deficiencies in the linguistic basis characteristic of the majority of the languages in question .

At present, there is no questioning the importance of the Russian language, spoken almost by everyone, because competence in it is a path to educational opportunities and social mobility across the country. Fluency in Russian, along with knowledge of foreign languages, is often seen as a criterion of a person's good education and intelligence. However, for all the prestige of the Russian language there is an understanding that competence in it should not be achieved at the expense of mother tongues. The way out of this problem seems to be in seeking optimal solutions allowing for an equal use of the languages, the promotion of bilingualism in the republics, as well as in an optimal combination of the functions of the state titular languages and of Russian as the language of all-national importance.

It should also be noted here, though, that most regional languages, now accorded the status of state languages of the republics, are lacking, for example, sufficiently developed functional styles, hence difficulties arise in using them for certain public functions; then, higher education in these languages still remains a goal to be attained due to inadequate development of their terminological systems and of their academic style. Also, the methodological and professional level of titular language instruction, as well as that of the Russian language, is still rather inadequate: the curricula do not meet modern requirements, effective training techniques are absent, and there is a shortage of necessary tutorials and manuals, as well as of qualified teachers. Apparently, these issues are hard to deal with, if there is neither a special social demand nor motivation on the part of the state structures in the republics. Here then, is the paradox that despite the fact that all of these factors, including appropriate legislation, regulating the functional performance of languages in various spheres of communication are present in the regions, and efforts on a national scale are made to promote motivation – so far no radical changes in the linguistic processes have followed. This may be explained by the fact that often there is no language environment outside the schools for students to develop their speech habits, making use of their knowledge of native tongues for real purposes.

7. Conclusion

Today, as in the early twentieth century, the issues and prospects concerning the RF nationalities and their languages continue to be discussed. Much has changed in the socio-cultural character of the peoples, but some of their problems persist, including that of the revival of the lesser-used and minority languages, as well as the issues of promoting the titular languages in many national republics where the real linguistic situation is critical. However, slowly but surely, the tendencies towards a greater ethnic awareness and positive trends in saving the language area are growing; the younger generations of the national intelligentsia, interested in making accessibility to and facilitating their cultures and languages, are stepping onto the scene to make a difference. At this point the question arises: What else should be done to support these positive changes. According to researchers in the field, the building of areas where titular languages may be used should be the main objective, because even speakers with an excellent command of the languages find it difficult to employ their mother tongue competence for real

communication needs. Besides, there should be "spatial" language support, i.e. the speakers should be immersed in the information offered in their own languages, including notices, toponyms, advertisements, newspapers, TV, and radio. It is also necessary to create social zones conducive to the use of the mother tongues, including working places, public transportation, and public facilities. All of these recommendations are quite plausible to implement. In other words, what is required at this point is the promotion of languages and their environments, where they can thrive, with mother tongues becoming an integral part of the ethnic groups' life, which is in fact the main factor for their survival.

Thus, by way of concluding it may be noted that with the civil society growing in the country, the "unified Russian nation", as it is sometimes called, the current linguistic situation is characterized by tendencies towards increased efforts on the part of the society to impact the language issues through special legislation. The success at this stage of language planning and language policy measures will depend not only on the implementation of the principles in the field of linguistic rights declared by the state, but also on the willingness of the peoples themselves – the speakers of given languages – to realize their potential functions in various areas of communication.

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