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**FORECASTING EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS DEVELOPMENT
BETWEEN CIS COUNTRIES
(THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE FACTOR)**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the role of the Russian language as an important factor in forecasting the development of educational, cultural and scientific relations between the countries of the post-Soviet space. The contribution of educational institutions, in particular, Slavonic Universities to the formation of the unified (common) educational space of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is considered in the article. The Slavonic Universities in the CIS, as centres of education and culture, facilitates not only the development and mutual enrichment of the culture of peoples, formation of unified educational space but also the integration in the field of economy and science. These educational establishments also play a specific role in the spread of Russian literature and culture in the countries of the post-Soviet space. This provides the preservation and promotion of the Russian language - the language promoting the development of information and cultural space of the CIS, the language of international communication, traditionally playing an important role in the integration processes.

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1. Introduction

Since its foundation, for about a quarter of a century now, the Commonwealth of the Independent States has been actively seeking for the ways to boost its integration model of development, which is designed to meet the interests of all the member states. At the same time, on each stage of its development, the CIS makes progress both on the national and international level. Some former Soviet Republics that favour a closer mutually beneficial cooperation have founded and are now member states of various consolidation providing unions, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), and the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU). The success of the organisations mentioned above and similar unions, to a certain extent, depends on the cooperation in the field of education and culture, which is expected to become an effective integrating tool within the Commonwealth. This type of collaboration is not to be based on declarations and agreements, but to exist as a living entity that promotes the feeling of fraternity and initiates intercultural dialogue (Itogovyy document, 2011).

For the last several years, the cooperation of the post-Soviet states in education and culture has tended to increase. The tendency is supported both by some of the decisions on the international level, as well as by the cooperation of educational institutions, cultural centres, and diplomatic organisations. In the framework of humanitarian collaboration, the post-Soviet countries pay specific attention to the cooperation in the sphere of education, the quality of which predetermines the development of the country as a whole (see about the education in the global world, for instance, see (Ivanova, Ivanov, 2016; Sorina, 2016).

2. Research Questions

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the former Soviet Republics started to work on their individual national educational systems, with some of them relying on the Soviet educational system, and others taking the western educational norms and standards as a model see (Ivanova, 2014) for general characteristics of the post-Soviet states' educational systems). As a result, unfortunately, nowadays the use of the Russian language tends to become more and more restricted in the former Soviet Republics, which prejudices the rights of millions of Russians living now in these states. Moreover, the number of educational institutions where Russian was the language of teaching, was shortened and, in some countries, even reduced to zero. Therefore, the role of the Russian language in the national educational systems of post-Soviet states seems to be of concern, and, first of all, it is connected with the educational institutions that operate in these countries and use Russian as a language of teaching.

3. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the investigation is to consider the prospects of the further development of educational links in the countries of the post-Soviet space in the context of strengthening the positions of the Russian language.

4. Research Methods

In order to achieve the desired goal, the methods of comparative pedagogical investigation have been used for determining the regularities and tendencies of the development of educational links in the countries of the post-Soviet space in the context of strengthening the positions of the Russian language.

5. Findings

At the present time when considering the problem of the status of the Russian language in the world, its role as a language of inter-ethnic communication and the disclosure of its essence in the countries of the post-Soviet space, there are different and sometimes opposing points of view (for instance, see (Dougherty, Kalyurand, 2015; Pavlenko, 2016; Zabrodsкая, Ekhalа, 2015). On the one hand, the issue evokes the problem of excessive russification of the learning process, of discrimination and suppression of a national identity and the like. On the other hand, it foregrounds a progressive character and positive impact of the Soviet educational system, in which the Russian language performs the role of an effective tool, employed to overcome the language barrier and ensure the consolidation of the Commonwealth member states.

The Russian language was formed in the result of a number of historical events and still retains its influence on all post-Soviet states today. It is regarded as the bearer of ideas, concepts, identity, myths, and numerous texts of the former Soviet Union and remains a powerful consolidation factor and a means for the formation of a single education space in the CIS (for instance, see (Marinosyan, Kurovskaya, 2016).

The perspective of the member states on the Russian language issue is the crucial component of the development of their national educational systems and creation of the CIS common education space.

Meanwhile, this purpose is possible to achieve only with “a strict coordination of the actions of all organisations, aimed at preserving, developing and spreading the Russian language worldwide” (Verbitskaya, 2014, p.15).

The first step to the creation of a single (common) education space was a Concept of the Formation of a Single Education Space of the CIS Countries signed by the leaders of the CIS member states in 1997 (Konceptsiya, 1997). That document established the necessary law foundation for the achievement of the following aims:

- to provide all citizens of the CIS member states that form a single (common) education space, with equal access to state educational institutions;
- to recognise syllabuses, documents on education, and scientific degrees;
- to coordinate actions of educational institutions and the CIS education administrative bodies.

Nowadays among the examples of successful cooperation in education one may cite the Network Universities of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS NU), with the aim of the Formation of the Network University of the Commonwealth of Independent States project being the development and implementation of a programme modelled on the Erasmus Mundus programme (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission, 2016) within the CIS common education space. In 2008, pursuing further partnership in the spheres of education and culture among the member states of the Commonwealth of the Independent States, the Peoples' Friendship University of

Russia (also known as RUDN University) and the Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation of the CIS countries (IFHC) initiated the project entitled the Formation of the Network University of the CIS (2008-2011) (FNU CIS). Primarily, the project aims to enhance the quality and attractiveness of higher education, as well as cooperation and partnerships of CIS tertiary schools; to create and deliver top-rank joint Master Degree programmes; to strengthen international collaboration in the preparation of specialists in the field; and to contribute to the exchange of post-graduate students and the organisation of joint scientific PhD researches (Oficial'nyy sayt, (2017). Another international cooperation project in education is the University of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that was established in 2008; in 2009, its membership amounted to 53 leading universities of the SCO member states (see further in (Oficial'nyy sayt, 2016). At last, apart from the CIS NU and the SCO mentioned above, one should also name the Slavonic Universities, which aim to promote learning mobility, strengthen cooperation of post-Soviet states in the training of high-qualified specialists, and facilitate the exchange of post-graduate students.

Regardless, what economic, management form and learning process organisation type these universities favour, they were founded to support the right of the residents of former Soviet Republics to choose the Russian language as their language of learning and preserve their language identity. Thus, the Slavonic Universities manage to use their potential to promote the use of the Russian language. By choosing Russian as the language of teaching, foreign educational institutions, in particular, the Slavonic Universities, contribute to the preservation of the language and cultural identity of the minority groups and let Russian speakers obtain the necessary level of education and social status in post-Soviet states. Furthermore, the use of Russian as a medium for teaching subject content appeals to representatives of various ethnic groups that are not native Russian speakers, too.

The CIS Slavonic Universities that can be considered as centres of education and culture ensure not only the development and enrichment of national culture and the formation of a single education space but the consolidation of the economic and scientific spheres as well. The Slavonic Universities develop effective strategies for their collaboration with governmental and non-governmental institutions of the Commonwealth and build multilateral partnerships with international organisations and civil society institutions.

For instance, Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University (hereinafter, RAU) maintains relationships and collaborates with such leading Russian and foreign academic institutions as MSU (Lomonosov Moscow State University), MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations), the University of Vienna, RUDN (the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia), the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Bauman MSTU (the Bauman Moscow State Technical University), MTUCI (Moscow Technical University of Communications and Informatics), the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, St. Petersburg's "Fund for the Support of Culture and Education", the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), and many others. The academic institutions provide the regular exchange of undergraduate and post-graduate students, develop joint programmes, hold conferences and seminars, and invite specialists to deliver lectures.

The RAU operates in compliance with Russian educational standards and delivers its syllabuses in Russian. The graduates of the university have an opportunity to work in Armenia and Russia, as they are awarded a diploma recognised in both countries (Hay-Řowsakan hamalsarani stegřowmë, 1997).

The RAU is both an educational and cultural centre of the Republic that promotes the Russian language and Russian culture. One of the RAU affiliates is the Institute of Russian Philology, within which was established the Centre for Continuing Education specialists in Russian philology. Hundreds of teachers from different regions of Russia and Armenia choose to finish a course in the Centre and are awarded certificates of the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute and Moscow Institute of Open Education.

The Institute of Russian philology (Řows banasirowt'yan institowt, 2000) organises and holds seminars in Russian language teaching throughout Armenia, develops scientific research and projects, including the programme “Social and Cultural Aspects of the Russian Language Usage as a Medium of International Communication in Armenia”. RAU also provides a possibility to undergo a post-graduate programme. When learning Russian culture and philology, students may benefit from the Cultural Centre, RAU theatre and the Art Hall.

6. Discussion

The authors would like to emphasise that the role of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space is ambiguous and unequal.

The only country that recognised Russian as one of its official languages is Belarus. It is one of the official languages in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and South Ossetia; it remains the language of international communication in Moldova, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Both in Georgia and in Armenia the role of the Russian language is officially undetermined, meaning that Russian should be regarded as a foreign language in these states.

In post-Soviet countries, one notes the drop in the number of young people speaking Russian. This tendency is related to two factors. The first one is the reduction (except in Belarus) in Russian classes in educational institutions. In many schools today, it is an extracurricular subject. According to the curricula of many CIS schools, the Russian language is allocated 20 hours less than foreign languages. The second factor is rooted in the demographic situation in the Commonwealth member states. For the last 20 years, the share of Russians has fallen from 30 to 17 million people, because of the emigration to other countries and a plummet in the birth rate in Russian communities. The factor of changing the self-identification of the Russian-speaking population plays an important role in connection with the need to adapt to the new sociocultural reality since in many countries it is required to know the language of the titular nation when entering a higher educational institution or when applying for a job.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, the points discussed above, one may state that the Slavonic Universities - specific socio-cultural phenomena - prove to boost the development of cooperation in education and culture,

which results in multilateral international collaboration, in particular, in science, economics, politics, and other spheres.

Furthermore, such educational institutions play a special role in promoting Russian philology and culture in the CIS member states. On the one hand, it allows Russian speakers, residing in these countries, to improve their social status; on the other, to preserve and spread the Russian language that makes the intercultural dialogue and existence of the common informational and cultural space of the Russian Commonwealth possible, as well as serves as a medium for intercultural communication and a traditional means for international consolidation.

Evidently, the actions of the CIS Slavonic Universities are important for the further development of the universities themselves, nevertheless, they are also a valuable model for the development of other educational institutions that participate in the formation of the common education space of the Commonwealth. Moreover, the present experience serves as the foundation for the opening of new Slavonic Universities in the Commonwealth and beyond and the introduction of new strategies for their improvement.

The Russian Federation would like to strengthen the role of the Russian language abroad. Thus, in pursuit of the purposes of spreading the Russian language abroad, in 2000 the government established the Fund of First Russian President Yeltsin. Together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Foundation for the Development of Russian Centres Abroad, it promotes the Russian language and Russian literature through the distribution of course books in Russian and Russian literature, Russian geographical and political maps, etc. In 2007 the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation was founded that aims to raise interest to the Russian language and support foreign learners of the language.

In order to draw more attention to the Russian language, the government approved the Federal Targeted Programme “The Russian Language 2006-2010” (Federal'naya celevaya programma "Russkiy yazyk (2006-2010 gody)", 2005). (the total amount of federal funding was 1402.359 m roubles, equivalent to 23.4 m Euro) (approved by Directive № 833 of December 29, 2005, issued by the Government of the Russian Federation), “which aims to ensure that the Russian language serves as the official language of the Russian Federation and a language of international communication, in order to promote the policy, national security, and status of the country, to consolidate the CIS member states, and to put the Russian Federation on the world’s political, economic, cultural, and educational stage. The strategic objectives of the Programme of the Russian Federation comprises the endorsement of the Russian language as the official language of the Russian Federation; the promotion of the Russian language as a medium for intercultural communication of different peoples residing in the Russian Federation; and the preservation of the Russian language as the national language of the Russians. The strategic objectives of the Programme abroad include the promotion of the Russian language as a means for the consolidation of the CIS; the distribution and teaching of the Russian language and Russian culture abroad; and the possibly complete satisfaction of the language and cultural needs of Russians residing abroad.

In 2011 the Programme was developed into the Federal Targeted Programme “The Russian Language 2011-2015” (Federal'naya celevaya programma "Russkiy yazyk" na 2011 - 2015 gody, 2010) (the total amount of federal funding was 2526.66 m roubles, equivalent to 42.17 m Euro), aimed at

increasing the number of teachers of Russian as a foreign language and course books in Russian and Russian literature, as well as involving more participants into cultural and educational events, etc.

At the beginning of June 2014, the government founded the Presidential Council on the Russian Language (Vladimir Putin signed Executive Order On the Presidential Council for the Russian Language, 2014), which, apart from other functions, was assigned to suggest priority directions and mechanisms of the development, preservation, and endorsement of the Russian language abroad, to strengthen its role in the world, to expand its use in other countries and in other spheres, and to support Russian-speaking communities abroad.

The measures enumerated above are, evidently, of great importance, as they help to preserve the Russian language in post-Soviet countries and, as a result, to maintain economic collaboration, to draw attention to Russian culture, and to make the Russian language attractive both to native speakers and foreigners, which, in the end, is related to the image and status of the Russian Federation.

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