The Instrumentalization of Language in Putin's Russia

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Abstract

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Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has taken a sharp turn toward conservative values and an identity that is based on traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, as defined by the state. A consistent element in the state discourse regarding this values and morality-based identity is the call to protect and promote the Russian language. This paper demonstrates the ways in which language and language policy have been instrumentalized under Putin to pursue three separate, yet interconnected, priorities: to create a new Russian identity, to export Russian soft power, and to support domestic and foreign policy goals. This study briefly addresses the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in these efforts and seeks to situate language policy within Putin's broader political strategy. As the Russian president continues in his attempts to consolidate power, language and language policy will continue to be important aspects of this strategy. Although attempts to purify and shape language are historically ultimately unsuccessful, there is reason to believe that the Russian state will continue to instrumentalize the Russian language and language policy to define a narrow version of the Russian identity—one that is used to justify continued repression of those who do not assimilate.

Introduction

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has taken a sharp turn toward conservative values and an identity that is based on traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, as defined by the state. Indeed, it seems that Putin sees himself as the only person who can guide the country into fully realizing its true identity, despite the fact that a significant number of Russian citizens often feel otherwise—as demonstrated by protests against his reelection in 2012 and against rigged elections in 2019. This conservative Russian identity, as constructed by Putin and the state, has been used as a justification for quashing dissent; one of the reasons given for the arrest of three members of Pussy Riot in 2012 was that their performance was not intended as a political protest, but rather as an insult to the Russian Orthodox Church. Even Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and the resulting ongoing conflict, has been justified by the idea that there is a need to protect a specific version of the Russian identity. In formalizing this national identity based on certain morals and values, often supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, the state defines Russian-ness and chooses who is allowed to be (or is forced to be) included in that definition.

A consistent element in the state discourse regarding this values and morality-based identity is the call to protect and promote the Russian language. There has been a long tradition in Russia and the Soviet Union of language policy as a tool for identity formation, nation-building, and social control. According to Gorham (2000), the language purity discourse played a role in the "symbolic legitimation of the Soviet party-state" and generated "a form of symbolic cultural cleansing that accompanied more direct methods of social extermination and control" (p. 135). During the early years of the Soviet Union, under Vladimir Lenin, the idea that each ethnic group had the right to use its own heritage language was a foundational principle; however, even

Lenin lamented the perceived degradation of the Russian language (Gorham, 2000; Grenoble, 2003). The intention behind the language policies of the time can be expressed in the motto "national in form, socialist in content." The "form" (language) could make the "content" (socialism) more palatable for the various groups the government was attempting to unify under Communism. However, these overtly inclusive language policies were frequently used to Russify native languages; the development of native languages was encouraged, but only in a specific Soviet way (Grenoble, 2003). The declared equality of languages was an important part of Joseph Stalin's policy of nativization (*korenizat͡sii͡a*), which sought to educate the indigenous peoples of the Soviet Union and bring them into the workforce; however, by 1934, nativization had effectively given way to policies promoting the Russian language and culture as the most effective means of building a Soviet society. Stalin made the study of Russian compulsory and began the campaign to transition the writing systems of the various languages to Cyrillic.

In the late 1950s, under Nikita Khrushchev, education in one's native language (or "mother tongue") became non-compulsory; this trend continued under Leonid Brezhnev as Russian language education became more widespread (Grenoble, 2003). In the late 1980s, language status became the focal point for the various nationalist independence movements; in October of 1990, after the various Soviet Republics had approved their own language laws, Russian was legally appointed the official language of the Soviet Union (Chevalier, 2006). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the status of the Russian language began to decline in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Approximately 20 million Russian speakers now found themselves living outside the borders of the Russian Federation (Bennett, 2011). These changes ultimately cemented the impetus of Russian language policy toward the regulation, protection, and

promotion of the Russian language, as the language of the state and as an essential component of Russian identity.

Language policy has frequently been accompanied by a discourse of anxiety about the state of the Russian language. As recently as 2019, Putin, in a meeting with the Council on Russian Language, claimed that there is a war on the Russian language, one that is being waged not only by Russophobes, but also by "active and aggressive nationalists" in other countries where this war is "official government policy" (*Meeting of Council on Russian Language*, 2019). The discourse about the state of the Russian language has been utilized to provoke fears about existential and actual threats to the security and power of the Russian state and the purity of the Russian culture. These fears are especially focused on loss of influence in the near abroad, in the form of the diminishing of Russian language education and native Russian speakers in these countries, and on the perceived threats coming from the West in the form of borrowed words and "foreign" ideologies. These conflicting messages betray the anxieties of the Russian state and its simultaneous insistence on its right, and in fact its moral imperative, to play a large role in the world.

In considering the language policies of the Russian Federation and the accompanying discourse about the Russian language, it is important to point out that Russia is far from a monolingual society. According to conventional estimates, there are 130-160 minority languages that exist on the territory of the Russian Federation. Around fifty of these are spoken by communities that are larger than 50,000 people. Most of these bigger groups speak the languages of the "titular nations" of constituent subjects of the Russian Federation or other languages that are co-official with Russian to some degree at the regional level (Oeter, 2012). However, Russian is the state language, meaning it is the language in which all federal

government business must be conducted, including business between the republics and the central government.

In this paper, I start with a review of the literature that has been written about how Putin's government has used language policy and discourse as a tool of identity formation. I expand on this idea by showing how language and language policy have been instrumentalized under Putin to pursue three separate, yet interconnected, priorities: not only to create a new Russian identity or "national idea," but also to export Russian soft power, and to support domestic and foreign policy goals. I believe the trends identified in the literature have continued and intensified as Putin seeks to consolidate power, with votes coming up this year to restructure the constitutional limits on presidential terms. I also briefly examine the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in this process. In order to situate this work within the broader literature on language policy and identity in modern Europe, I compare Russia's language policies under Putin to those of two other European countries and look at the way in which Russia has violated international norms using language as a justification. I will conclude with a discussion of the significance of this study and suggestions for further research on how language and language policy are instrumentalized.

Literature Review

Most scholars agree that the Russian government's treatment of language is largely focused on shaping identity. Gorham (2006) claims that analysis of language attitudes and production at the ideological and institutional levels "should shed light not only on the shape and direction of the contemporary Russian language culture, but also on the effort to forge a new, post-Soviet national identity (pp. 27-28). Ryazanova-Clarke (2006a) echoes this idea by contextualizing her analysis of the public linguistic debate and language policy in Russia within

the framework of "underlying ideologies and power structures, as they struggle to assert themselves and define a new version of Russian identity" (p. 32). Kovalev (2016) also argues that "the re-establishment and re-negotiation of linguistic norms needs to be seen in the context of Russia's identity crisis" (p. 337). Importantly, even though linguistic matters are the nominal subject of the discourse about the threats facing the Russian language, these matters are part of a larger effort to shape status, value, and identity and to define the "Russian national idea" (Argent, 2014, p. 84; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2006b, p. 40).

Since Putin came to power in 2000, he has recognized the utility of language policy and discourse. According to Gorham (2014), during revolutionary times, the capacity of language to "break down and transform reality" is of great importance; during times of restoration, however, the institutional function of language is to be "a marker of identity and therefore [a] stabilizing force" (p. 13). Gorham sees the period following the fall of the Soviet Union as a period of restoration, marked by increased resistance to change and renewed attempts to protect the Russian language as an essential marker of Russian identity. Purity of language is often directly correlated with purity of culture and identity; the backlash against the "contamination" of the Russian language was also directed toward the perceived "broader degeneration of the Russian national identity itself" (Gorham, 2014, p. 23). While Putin may not always be the primary force behind the current iteration of the purity discourse, he has certainly strategically applied it when it serves the government's interests.

Ryazanova-Clarke (2006a, 2006b) sees a similar pattern during the early 2000s under Putin. She points out that the linguistic culture was responding to the major sociopolitical changes taking place and the government was seeking to "intensify the symbolic connection between state power and language" (2006b, p. 38). As public interest in the "Russian national

idea" grew, so too did legal regulation of the Russian language. She points out that the Russian language was increasingly used in the national security discourse in efforts to construct an "other," framing the Russian language and the Cyrillic alphabet as "guardians of national security" (2006b, p. 45).

In his seminal work on nationalism, Anderson (2006) explains three ways in which language (specifically print language) is important in building nations. First, it creates unified fields of exchange and communication. Secondly, print gives a fixity to language which helps "to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (p. 44). Finally, it creates languages of power. All of these factors are reflected in Ryazanova-Clarke's (2006b) summary of the state's treatment of the Russian language: "At once a symbol of Russian statehood, a connector of lands and peoples, an emblem of a common heritage, and a means of achieving order and national security - the Russia language now embodies them all" (p. 55).

According to Kovalev (2016), the language purity discourse has been evolving in recent years "towards a discourse promoting traditional norms and a return to family values" (p. 341). Ryazanova-Clarke (2006a) points out similar trends in both the state and popular narratives: "the supremacy of concepts of centrality, fixed codes and values, the ideology of a strong state and return to tradition" (p. 62). Indeed, Gellner (1983) claims that "nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored" (pp. 55-56).

State Measures to Regulate, Promote and Protect the Russian Language

It is clear that language can be a powerful tool in nation-building efforts. There are multiple entities in the Russian government that are responsible for the regulation, promotion,

and protection of the Russian language—primarily the Council on Russian Language and the Interdepartmental Commission on the Russian Language which is under the Ministry of Education; additionally, there are several domestic and international programs that have been implemented, such as the "Russian Language" federal target program and the Russian World Foundation (*Fond Russkiĭ Mir*).

The 2005 Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation, the seminal language legislation passed in the Putin era, "focuses on the issue of language norms and sets out to define and regulate non-normative language and foreign lexicon," with one of the primary aims being to stem the influx of "inappropriate" borrowings or loanwords (Chevalier, 2006). Scholars see this as a response to perceived threats of invasion and violation, by the West in particular (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2006a). This law mandates that "when using Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation, it is forbidden to use words and expressions that do not comply with the norms of the modern Russian language, excluding foreign words which do not have commonly used equivalents" (as translated by Ryazanova-Clarke, 2006a, p. 44). This law was additionally intended to provide a legal definition of the "national" language and to delineate its function and usage (Chevalier, 2006). However, as scholars both inside and outside of Russia have pointed out, there have been many problems in interpreting and implementing the law. Among these are the fact that the law does not actually define what the phrase "Russian language as the state language" means, and in fact, "the sphere of Russian language usage as the state language of the Russian Federation and the Russian literary language…coincide only partially" (Rudnev & Sadova, 2017, p. 57). Further, the law called for the government to play a role in establishing language standards but did not clearly specify how it is to do so (Chevalier, 2006).

In 2006, in an attempt to solve this problem, the government called for the Ministry of Education and Science to develop a list of acceptable grammars, dictionaries, and reference books containing the norms of the modern Russian literary language in its use as the state language. In 2009, the ministry issued the order which, on the basis of recommendations from the Interdepartmental Commission on the Russian Language, gives a list of approved language tools published in 2008: a spelling dictionary, a dictionary of grammar, a dictionary of syllable stress, and a phraseological dictionary (Fradkov, 2006; Fursenko, 2009; Krongauz, 2016).

Under President Dmitry Medvedev, the 2010 federal law "On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development" banned dissemination of material containing obscene language under the category of "types of information that harm the health and/or the development of children" (*Federal'nyĭ zakon o zashchite deteĭ,* 2010; Kovalev, 2016). In 2013, Putin signed into law amendments to the Russian Federal Law and Russian Federation Code of Administrative Offenses that banned the use of profanity in mass media and introduced fines of up to 200,000 rubles for violations of the ban (Kovalev, 2016). The following year, the Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation was amended to ban the use of obscene language (*mat*) in film, theatre, and public performances of music or literature (Lunde, 2017). The entity responsible for monitoring the media in order to enforce these bans, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (*Roskomnadzor*), went so far as to develop, in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences' Russian Language Institute, a list of four words to be banned: *khuĭ*, *pizda*, *ebat'*, and *bl͡iad'* (Kovalev, 2016; Lunde, 2017). These laws have remained problematic and difficult to enforce; as *mat* is considered to be an important part of the Russian language, the Russian

culture, and Russian art, this law has been largely ignored by writers, artists, and cultural activists (Lunde, 2017).

In 2018, amendments to the Federal Law on Education were passed regarding the languages taught in schools around Russia. These amendments require that "teaching and learning of state languages of the republics has to be carried out on a voluntary basis and not to the detriment of the state language of the Russian Federation" (Zamyatin, 2018). This bill was quite controversial – many people in the various republics viewed it as an attempt to weaken non-Russian cultures (Lyubimov et al., 2018). It also created a new hurdle to education of the native languages in the form of requiring written requests from parents, while also increasing the amount of time that must be spent on Russian language education. However, some native Russian speakers did support the amendments. They did not believe that their children should be forced to learn a language which would not help them succeed in Russia and elsewhere; in fact, some activists even claimed that requiring students to learn the native languages of the regions in which they live is "a threat to the security and integrity of Russia" (Lyubimov et al., 2018).

In terms of other state measures in the sphere of language, the Russian World Foundation is perhaps the most significant. It was instituted by Putin in 2007 as part of the Year of the Russian Language and is largely responsible for coordinating Russia's foreign cultural policy (Gorham, 2014; Uffelmann, 2014). One of the primary goals of the foundation is to support study of the Russian language at home and abroad, and it offers grants to organizations which implement programs promoting the Russian language throughout the world (*About Russkiy Mir Foundation*). The Russian World Foundation will be discussed in further detail below.

Language and Language Policy in Support of State Priorities

Before analyzing how these measures, along with the Russian language itself, have been instrumentalized by the Russian state, it is important to understand the difference between the concepts of *russkiĭ* and *rossiĭskiĭ*, both of which are translated as "Russian." Simply put, the term *russkiĭ* refers to the Russian language, culture, and (ethnically Russian) people, whereas the term *rossiĭskiĭ* refers to the Russian government and people who are citizens of Russia. However, as with most matters related to identity, the difference between these two terms is not always so clear cut. Marlene Laruelle gives a more nuanced explanation:

> The term *russkii* is employed in a very blurry way to define both what is Russian by *culture* (and culture has always been more important than ethnicity: Russian culture is *russkaia*, not *rossiiskaia*, even if Gogol is of Ukrainian origin and Vasilii Grossman from a Jewish family) and in relation to the state in general. While *rossiiskii* is still used by those who identify with ethnic minorities to dissociate their ethnic from their civic identity, for most of the 80 per cent of those citizens who are both *russkie* and *rossiane*, *rossiiskii* has a purely official flavor: it is used in speaking about Russia in terms of citizenship, legal system and what pertains to the state as an administration, whereas *russkii* is increasingly associated with 'everything Russian', and therefore also as the Russian state understood in its historical *longue durée*. (2016, pp. 275-276)

The different connotations of these two terms becomes especially important when they are used in an official context. For example, some have understood Putin's use of the term *russkiĭ* in his speech justifying the annexation of Crimea as signaling a shift toward a nationalist agenda; others, like Laruelle, view this as reflective of a purely linguistic shift in mainstream usage (Laruelle, 2016).

Regardless of the specific terminology that is used, it is clear that the Russian state, under Putin, is trying to create its own "national idea," a specific version of the Russian national identity which is closely entwined with the Russian language. According to Manuela Kovalev, the language purity discourse has been evolving in recent years "towards a discourse promoting traditional norms and a return to family values" (2016, p. 341). As has been briefly discussed already, the state has put a significant emphasis on purity over the past fifteen years—not only purity of language, but of culture.

A compelling example of this trend is the 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. The section on culture addresses the threat to national security posed by the decline of the role of the Russian language in the world as well as the erosion of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. While there are many calls to unity and respect among the various national peoples and cultures of the Russian Federation, it is clear that all Russian citizens are expected to participate in a specific version of the "common Russian identity" that the state seeks to preserve and develop, one which embraces such traditional Russian spiritual and moral values as "the priority of the spiritual over the material" and "the norms of morals and morality" (*Strategiia natsional'noĭ bezopasnosti,* 2015). By framing perceived threats to the Russian language and Russian spiritual and moral values as threats to the country as a whole, this section of the document sets forth the parameters of the specific version of Russia the state wants to preserve.

While seeking to reinforce this Russian identity, the state is also looking to use the Russian language to exert influence beyond Russia's borders. At the above-referenced 2019 meeting of the Language Council, Putin referred to Russian as "a power to a certain extent, a soft power". He went on to explain that the "instrument" of the Russian language must be kept in

"good shape," so that as Russia's economy and influence grow, the language will be ready for the inevitable revival of demand for Russian language education in the near and far abroad (*Meeting of Council on Russian Language,* 2019).

The Russian World Foundation, a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science, coordinates Russia's foreign cultural policy and has been a large part of the effort to promote the Russian language as a soft power. As was mentioned above, it was instituted in 2007 as a part of the Year of the Russian Language (Gorham, 2014). The aims of the foundation are divided into three areas: the Russian language, Russian culture and heritage, and the Russian people. It seeks to support study of the Russian language at home and abroad; sponsor cultural programs around the world; and connect ethnic Russians, native Russian speakers, and people who have chosen to study Russian with the "homeland" (*About Russkiy Mir Foundation*). Gorham (2011) claims that "language and national identity lay at the foundation of the project, but clearly within the context of building Russia's image abroad and protecting and expanding its sphere of influence" (p. 31).

The Russian language has also been instrumentalized by the state in carrying out its more aggressive foreign policy goals. This has been especially prominent in Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, with the seizure of Crimea and ongoing occupation of parts of eastern Ukraine. Ryazanova-Clarke (2017) calls language a "crucial Russian weaponization mechanism" (p. 450). She explains that, before Ukraine underwent a pro-European revolution, the emphasis of the official Russian discourse had been on the similarities between the Ukrainian and Russian languages and the brotherhood between the two peoples. Beginning in November of 2013, when the Euromaidan protests began, the discourse coming from the Russian government began to shift. There was now an emphasis on the need to protect the linguistic

rights of Ukrainian Russian speakers, as well as the Russian language itself from the "aggressive" Ukrainian language (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017, p. 451). By taking on the role of linguistic defender, Russia sought to justify its aggression toward Ukraine.

Within Russia, the state has used language policy to support its more repressive domestic policy goals as well. The various above-mentioned laws against using obscene language have been applied to internet users, with significant consequences. In one case, after featuring a clip of a song by punk rock band Pussy Riot, the website of news agency Rosbalt.ru was temporarily shuttered and its publishing license revoked—despite the fact that the obscenities had been bleeped out. Such actions have been interpreted as "less to do with the protection of the Russian language than with attempts to tighten the State's grip on the internet" (Kovalev, 2016, p. 340). It is perhaps no coincidence that the majority of this legislation was passed in the years following Pussy Riot's obscenity-filled performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012. However that may be, control of the Russian internet has been an ongoing project for the Russian state; in what is perhaps the penultimate culmination of these efforts, Russia successfully tested its unplugged "sovereign Runet" at the end of 2019 (Wakefield, 2019).

The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church

In discussing the state's recent push toward a "return" to Russia's traditional moral and spiritual values, it is necessary to also consider the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Although scholars are not entirely in agreement on the extent to which the ROC can be considered a serious political player, it has certainly aided and abetted the state in its efforts to promote this traditional Russian identity. Especially under Patriarch Kirill, the ROC's policy has, sometimes unofficially, supported government policy—and government policy has increasingly favored the Church (Lamoreaux & Flake, 2018). Petro (2015) claims that this

symphonic relationship provides a “definable moral framework” for shaping Russian policy. Although the Russian government is officially secular and Russia is a multiconfessional country, secularism has become part of a common construction of Western liberal civilizations as the “other” and Russian traditional values have become more closely identified with Russian Orthodox values (Agadjanian, 2017; Blitt, 2011).

Petro (2015) sees this phenomenon play out in the conflict in Ukraine. He claims that Russia sees itself as defending core values, not just strategic interests, in Ukraine. Since the ROC has reasserted its traditional role in defining the moral vision and sense of honor, not just of the Russian Federation but of the *Russkiĭ mir* (Russian world) in its entirety, Western moral criticism of Russia’s actions in Ukraine holds little clout for Russians, according to Petro. In its supposed defense of values such as spiritual freedom and cultural loyalty, Russia “sees itself as occupying the moral high ground in this dispute” (Petro, 2015, paras. 21-23).

Both the ROC and the Russian state have embraced the above-mentioned idea of *Russkiĭ mir* (Russian world); for one it is a religious concept that refers to a spiritual identity, for the other it is a political and cultural concept. The ROC sees the Russian government as a tool in its efforts to reverse “the secularization of society throughout the former Soviet Union” (Petro, 2015). The state sees the ROC as a tool in its efforts to “strengthen the country's domestic stability, restore Russia's status as a world power, and increase her influence in neighboring states” (Petro, 2015). To this end, the ROC has been involved in the state-funded Russian World Foundation’s efforts: the Church sees an opportunity to promote its religious agenda abroad wherever Russian state and civic organizations promote Russian culture and language (Petro, 2015). Just as the Russian government, through the Russian World Foundation, considers the diaspora of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, as well as those who have chosen to study the

Russian language, to be included in the *Russkiĭ mir* and thus a part of its sphere of influence, so too does the ROC claim as its jurisdiction any part of the world in which there are Russians (*About Russkiy Mir Foundation*; Payne, 2010).

Although religion and language often go hand in hand in national identity formation, in the Russian context they have followed remarkably similar trajectories in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union:

> [T]here was an initial period of innovation and instability, as Soviet strictures were discarded and Western forms welcomed; this was followed by a period of constriction and consolidation, as Russian (and some Soviet) values and traditions were reasserted, culminating in legislation aimed at "managing" the new pluralism by protecting the privileged position of Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian language and Cyrillic script. (Bennett, 2011, p. 23)

As with the Russian language, the Church was perceived as facing threats from within and without. "Totalitarian sects" sprang up within Russia and "snatched believers from the Church" (Bennett, 2011, p. 36). Foreign missionaries flooded into Russia throughout the 1990s, threatening Russia's cultural identity as an Orthodox nation (Bennett, 2011; Payne, 2010).

Bennett also points out the territorial aspect of religion and language. The ROC's canonical territory—"the independent and mutually exclusive geographical region 'belonging' to a certain Orthodox Church"—has been threatened by the breakup of the Soviet Union (2011, p. 35). Similarly, the breakup left millions of Russian speakers outside the borders of the new Russian Federation. As the Church has fought to protect its influence in the parts of its canonical territory that now fall outside the borders of the Russian Federation, both the Church and the state have worked to protect the "diaspora" of Russian speakers (Bennett, 2011).

This anxiety over loss of influence in religious, linguistic and political spheres has been a motivating factor in the cooperation between the ROC and the Russian government in promoting the new Russian identity based on traditional morals and the Russian language. Putin has explicitly drawn a connection between "the spiritual renewal of society" with the "preservation of the role of the Russian language as a factor of the spiritual unity of the peoples of multinational Russia" (Blitt, 2011, p. 386; Stroop, 2018). Blitt (2011) sees a clear message in Putin's rhetoric: "Orthodoxy shall be promoted not only under the banner of an ostensibly more inclusive notion of spirituality or culture, but also as part of the government's broader effort to safeguard the Russian language" (p. 386). Anderson (2007) calls the relationship between the ROC and the Russian government an "asymmetric symphonia," one in which the Russian president is the dominant partner and the ROC's prominence in Russian society is primarily dependent on its support of the state's version of traditional values and identity (p. 198).

Russian Language Policy in the European Context

Is Russia unique in its instrumentalization of language and language policy within modern Europe? When comparing Russian language policy to notable policies of other European countries, it is evident that Russia is certainly not alone in its efforts to use language policy as a tool of identity formation and a way to promote domestic and foreign policy. In fact, members of the Council on Russian Language—the authors of the 2005 law on Russian as the State Language—traveled to France in 2001 for a joint seminar on language politics with the Committee on International Francophonie. The sections of the Russian law that set out to regulate the use of foreign words were modeled on the 1994 French language law On the use of French (Loi Toubon) (Chevalier, 2006). Despite Russia's numerous regional and minority

languages, recent developments in language policy seem geared toward the French idea of a monolingual nation-state.

France is well-known for the zealous manner in which it has sought to protect the status and purity of the French language and has a long history of language policy toward that end. Ordinance of Villers-Cotterets, the 16th century law proclaiming French the official language of the courts, is still in effect today (Edelstein, 2003). Various terminology commissions were formed throughout the 1970s in order to work with the Academie Francaise to help eliminate inappropriate foreign borrowings from the French language (Edelstein, 2003). The far-reaching Loi Toubon was passed in 1994 amid a reemergence of French protectionism in response to the decline of France's hegemonic role in Europe and the world. This law mandates the use of French by public and private citizens in six aspects of public discourse (consumer information, employment, education, demonstrations and other public gatherings, audiovisual media, and civil service); further, the French used must meet the government's standards of what the French language should be (Edelstein, 2003).

Although, as Garcia (2015) claims, the idea of France as a monolingual nation-state is more a political representation by the state than an empirical reality, this "self-understanding" has consistently shaped France's language policies (p. 221). Even as there has been a shift in education policies to create multilingual rather than monolingual citizens, in response to globalization and further European integration, the insistence on the "centrality of the French language" has remained (Garcia, 2015, p. 224).

In the effort to produce multilingual citizens, the French education system encourages study of foreign languages. In defining what counts as a foreign language, however, these policies reinforce the idea that languages are tied to sovereign nation-states; they are recognized

"on the grounds of their relating to entrenched cultural identities, as long as these are the identities of nation-states" (Garcia, 2015; Kraus, 2008, p. 69). The languages emphasized in these language policies show attempts to shape the type of multilingual citizen the French state wants to produce. Pupils can choose two foreign languages to learn, but as their first foreign language, they must choose a European language (with the exception of Chinese, Japanese, or Arabic); further, of the languages spoken on the European continent, only twelve Western European languages are considered "European" (Garcia, 2015).

The shift in the French education system toward foreign language education is in no small part influenced by France's diplomatic relations and foreign policy goals. By teaching foreign languages in France, it is hoped that the learning of French will be encouraged in other countries—an example of language as a soft power. Additionally, bilateral commitments with other European Union member states have influenced the selection of languages on which students can be tested to pass their exams (Garcia, 2015).

Perhaps most tellingly, regional languages and "immigrant languages" are not privileged in language education policy in the same way as European national languages. Even those "immigrant languages" such as Turkish and Arabic which have been integrated into mainstream foreign language teaching have been subjected to stereotypes and stigmas and thus there is a lower demand by parents to have their children learn these languages. Further, none of France's regional languages can be chosen to learn as a first foreign language. Only eight of them (Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Creole, Occitan, Tahitian and the Melanesian languages) can be taken as a second foreign language, but they continue to be strictly regulated in education (Garcia, 2015).

Spain has also instrumentalized language to promote a specific international "panhispanic" identity based on a regional variety of the Spanish language (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009). In this case, the Spanish government seeks to capitalize on the status of Spanish as a global language in order to build linguistic (and by implication, cultural) identification with Spain across Latin America and the United States. Some parallels can be drawn between the Russian World Foundation and Spain's Instituto Cervantes in their efforts to promote their respective national languages and cultures throughout the world. The Spanish government has also seized the economic opportunities afforded by the globalization of the Spanish language (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009).

The language policies of Spain are some of the most sweeping, in that they seek to regulate the Spanish language not only in Spain, but across Latin America and the United States as well. Paffey and Mar-Molinero (2009) recognize three facets of the Spanish government's language policy: internal policies, external policies, and "panhispanic language" policies. These three levels mirror the Russian government's efforts to promote and protect the Russian language internally, in the near abroad, and in the Russian World as a whole (which, as a reminder, is defined as anywhere there are ethnic Russians, native Russian speakers, or people who study Russian).

The 1978 Spanish Constitution recognizes Castilian as the official language of the state, and the internal language policy, supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, is to promote Castilian through its education policies. Although regional languages such as Catalan, Basque and Galician are legally "co-official" with Spanish, they have been widely marginalized for centuries (Depalma & Teasley, 2013). The Real Academia Española (RAE) also promotes the primacy of Castilian within Spain, and has recently expanded its aims from protecting the

purity of Spanish in Spain to maintaining a "unified, 'total' Spanish" outside of Spain (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009, p. 165). The Instituto Cervantes, the entity primarily responsible for the Spanish government's external language policy, seeks to promote the Spanish language and Spanish and Latin American culture; however, it imposes "one variety from Spain amidst the diversity of the language across the Spanish-speaking world" (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009, p. 164). Further, this internationalized "panhispanic" variety is actually "a national (historically, a regional) variety linked to an imperialist history and its imposition throughout the Americas" (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009, p. 167). Attempts to institutionalize this form of Spanish can be seen as a self-interested and ideologically-driven attempt to solidify Spain's primacy in the Spanish-speaking world and in the international linguistic marketplace as a whole (Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009).

France, Spain, and Russia have all instituted policies that seek to promote a strong identification between a specific variety of language and a specific version of culture. In most cases, these policies are meant to build solidarity between speakers of the language, wherever they are located, and the "homeland." Such efforts to build cultural identification are based in ideology rather than in empirical reality.

Conclusion

What can this study tell us about Putin's Russia? I have established that Russia is not alone in its efforts to instrumentalize language in support of identity formation, nation-building, and policy goals. The policies that deal with native and minority languages are almost certainly contributing to the decline of these languages, but that is arguably true of the language policies of other countries as well. However, language policy and discourse in Russia in the Putin era are unique in the ways they have been used to justify violence against a sovereign nation state. Such

actions seem to belong to the imperial past, not the present. Although there is a long, shared cultural history between Russians and Ukrainians that must be taken into account, Putin has nonetheless flouted international standards of what is acceptable behavior for a modern nation state, and used language as a justification for doing so.

Petro (2015) sees Russia's commitment to this conflict as reflecting its supposed moral mission. He claims that Russia sees itself as defending core values, not just strategic interests, in Ukraine. Since the Russian Orthodox Church has reasserted its traditional role in defining the moral vision and sense of honor, not just of the Russian Federation but of the so-called Russian World in its entirety, Western moral criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine holds little clout for Russians, according to Petro. In its supposed defense of values such as spiritual freedom and cultural loyalty, Russia "sees itself as occupying the moral high ground in this dispute" (Petro, 2015, paras. 21-23).

Regardless of whether Petro is correct in his assessment of how the state sees itself, this "moral high ground" messaging can be seen in many of the state's more repressive actions. Claiming to defend the Russian language and traditional values, the Russian government has shut down websites that run news stories unfavorable to the state and has arrested political protesters. By framing these actions in this way, the state seeks to change the narrative from political to moral and linguistic. Ultimately, Russia's language policies are a tool which the state uses to maintain the existing power structures by attempting to build linguistic, cultural, and moral affinity for the state (as representative of the true Russia) among the Russian people.

Language policy and the official discourse about the Russian language are important and effective elements of Putin's overarching nation-building strategy. However, they are rarely deployed in isolation. As has been discussed, the need to promote and protect the Russian

language is frequently touted in conjunction with the need to protect and promote traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. By attempting to so closely relate the Russian language to this very specific version of a traditional Russian identity, Putin creates a standard that results in the oppression of many Russians who do not meet the linguistic or "moral" criteria of "Russian-ness." The soft power of language policy and identity discourse has been deployed in combination with hard power not only in Ukraine, but also in various border disputes with Georgia. In these places, the Russian state has identified groups of people that it believes meet the "standard of Russian-ness" and thus deserve to be included within the borders of the Russian Federation.

In this paper, I have analyzed Russia's language policies within a primarily Western European context. This was intentional, in that France's policies are often brought up in discussions of the promotion and protection of language and Russia modelled its policies, at least in part, on French law. Further, Spain, France, and Russia were all imperial or colonial powers which have tried to maintain their language hegemony. However, in future research on this topic, it would be beneficial to analyze Russia's language policies within the context of other authoritarian governments, such as China. Such a study would further illuminate the ways in which language can be instrumentalized, and even, to borrow Ryazanova-Clarke's (2017) term, weaponized.

As Putin continues his attempts to consolidate power, language and language policy will continue to be important aspects of his strategy. Minority and regional language policies may well become a source of even more tension as the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the already strained relationship between the Putin and the regional governors. At the time of writing, a vote to approve changes to the Russian constitution is scheduled for the first of July

2020, despite the ongoing pandemic. Many see this as an attempt to get ahead of Putin's declining approval ratings, which hit a 20 year low in April of 2020 (Rodgers, 2020).

Should these changes be approved by Russian voters, they would allow Putin to stay in power for an additional twelve years past the time his term is set to expire in 2024. It is already difficult to separate modern Russian national identity from the man Vladimir Putin. If the constitution is amended and he is reelected, 36 of the Russian Federation's 45-year history will have been spent under Putin in some capacity. Although attempts to purify and shape language are historically ultimately unsuccessful, there is reason to believe that the Russian state will continue to instrumentalize the Russian language and language policy to define a narrow version of the Russian identity—one that is used to justify continued repression of those who do not assimilate.

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