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The Position of the Russian language in the Post-Soviet States

The present article describes the position of the Russian language in the Post-Soviet states in terms of the domains of Spolky's (2009) language management model. After taking a historical-structural approach to Critical Language Policy studies (Tollefson, 2006), the article hypothesizes that the language policy of the Post-Soviet states regarding the Russian language is formed by the complex of historical, political, and social factors. The study is based on language legislation documents (laws on languages, articles within constitutions), news sources relating to the language policy, expert reports on the contemporary linguistic situation, and population census results and estimates of Post-Soviet states.

Keywords: language maintenance, language policy, minority rights, Post-Soviet states, Russian language

1. Introduction

The Soviet Union (the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics, USSR) was established in 1922 as a socialist community of 15 multiethnic and multilingual states located in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the Transcaucasus region (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine), that also came to occupy the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) in 1940.

Initially, the Soviet Union's linguistic legislation nominally aimed at linguistic pluralism and proclaimed the *de jure* equality of all languages within the USSR, including Russian. The government developed and standardized indigenous languages, created alphabets based on Latin script for unwritten languages, and promoted literacy among ethnic groups living in the USSR (Pavlenko, 2008a; Xianzhong, 2014). The languages of the USSR were integrated into the educational system and other public domains (Hogan-Brun & Melnyk, 2012). Each citizen of the Soviet Republics gained the right to receive primary education in their mother tongue.

However, in the mid-1930s, a new approach to language policy was implemented. Due to the need to centralize political, administrative, and economic systems, a Russification process in status planning took place (Pavlenko, 2013). Stalin considered a unified language policy a powerful tool for enhancing the power of the Soviet government (Spolsky, 2004). While Russian was promoted as the dominant language, non-Russian ethnic groups faced suppression, in some

cases also deportation, and forced assimilation into the newly introduced Soviet identity.

As a result, Russian took on a dominant position in the USSR, displaced titular languages from public domains, and *de facto* functioned as an official language and lingua franca of the Soviet Union (Arutyunova, 2012). The Russification of corpus planning involved transliterating languages based on the Latin script into Cyrillic and standardizing languages in conformity with Russian grammar and spelling norms (Ataov, 1992; Hogan-Brun & Melnyk, 2012). Additionally, the Soviet language policy affected acquisition planning: Russian became a compulsory subject in schools with non-Russian languages of instruction. Furthermore, the educational reforms of 1959 eliminated the titular languages of the Soviet Republics from the mandatory curriculum. Thus, the USSR's linguistic legislation and the growing prestige of Russian as a language of social mobility facilitated a language shift through its widespread and rising competence throughout the Soviet Union (Pavlenko, 2008a).

The situation changed fundamentally in the 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Accumulated language tensions in the republics caused by the inconsistent and controversial Soviet language policy catalyzed reconsideration of the importance of the Russian language (Zamyatin, 2015). The newly independent states undertook de-Sovietization by distancing themselves from the Soviet past (Best, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006). The states regained the opportunity to strengthen the status of their titular languages by establishing monolingualism and introducing these languages into the administrative, educational, informational, and economic spheres, thereby displacing or reducing the use of Russian (Popova & de Bot, 2017).

In turn, the language shift in the Post-Soviet republics had repercussions for the sizable Russian-speaking diaspora of 25 million people who had migrated or had been forcefully relocated there during the Soviet era. As most of them did not have command of the titular languages of the Republics and were primarily monolingual, after the Soviet Union collapsed, they became a linguistic minority in the newly formed national states (Zaionchkovskaya, 2000). Formerly united by their common economic, political, and military systems and ideology, the independent republics took different approaches toward the Russian language and the Russian-speaking diaspora.

After taking a historical-structural approach to Critical Language Policy studies (Tollefson, 2006), the present research aims to prove the complexity of factors shaping the language policy of the Post-Soviet states regarding the Russian language and its speakers. With this purpose in mind, the study provides a descriptive analysis of the position of the Russian language in the former Soviet countries as analyzed by way of the domains of Spolsky's Language Management Model (2009).

2. Literature review

Previous research on the language policies of Post-Soviet states reveals the influence of internal and external factors on the position of the Russian language's placement within the studied region. Studies by Chernyavsky (2015) and Lavrenov & Ushurelu (2020) conclude that the status of the Russian language and its presence in the public domain within Eastern European countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) depends on the states' political orientation. As pro-Western Ukraine and Moldova aim to integrate into Europe and distance themselves from Russia, the policy that aims at eliminating the Russian language occurs in those countries. In contrast, the official pro-Russian stance of Belarus, an official major ally of Russia, is a crucial factor in the dominant position the Russian language still occupies within that country (Artymyshyn & Polovyi, 2022; Kharitonov, 2020; Pilipenko, 2020).

Mustajoki et al. (2019) and Pavlenko (2008a) conclude that the different positions taken toward the Russian language in two Post-Soviet states with Slavic titular languages, namely Ukraine and Belarus, can be explained historically: Belarus belonged to the Russian Empire for a longer period and, consequently, was subjected to Russification to a greater extent than Ukraine was.

Aside from history, several studies have revealed external determining factors in language policy formation. Arutyunova (2012), Snezhkova (2021), and Terzyan (2019) claim that the governments of Post-Soviet Armenia and Ukraine view the Russian language as a means of influence used by the Kremlin and, therefore, have removed it from the public domain, refusing to establish official bilingualism.

A similar reason for de-Russification, which also took place in the Baltic states, is revealed by Best (2013), Popova & de Bot (2017): the self-distancing from the Soviet past undertaken by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania has caused language restrictions toward Russian.

National consciousness and high proficiency levels in the titular languages of the Baltic and Transcaucasus states are additional factors that led to de-Russification in the Post-Soviet era (Avakyan, 2020; Gusejnli, 2020). Moreover, in contrast to the Central Asian countries, the Transcaucasian states have sufficiently developed their own titular languages to assume the role of communication in all public domains (Pavlenko, 2008a, 2013). In addition to the reasons mentioned above, Yu (2020) believes that the economic dependence of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on cooperation with Russia underlies their necessity to maintain the Russian language in the state.

Kazarian (2013) argues that the shrinking use of the Russian language in the Post-Soviet republics is a logical consequence of the mass emigration of Russians, which resulted in a dramatic decline in the share of Russian speakers. Zaionchkovskaya (2000) believes in the opposite causal relationship: she claims

that de-Russification processes and ethnic discrimination in the independent republics caused the emigration of Russians.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The present research follows the historical-structural approach to Critical Language Policy studies by Tollefson (2006), which views linguistic legislation as a complex result of social, historical, ideological, political, and economic factors including but not limited to demographic changes, nature of intergovernmental relations, conditions of states formation, and involvement of the state into a local or global conflict.

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As the present paper describes the current language policy and provides its historical development starting from the Soviet Era (1922-1991), the research follows the theory language policy of Spolsky (2004, 2009) which distinguishes between the three interrelated components: the actual language practice, language belief (ideology) regarding the language the community speaks, and language management including the efforts to modify practices and believes, and encompasses the following domains of language policy such as public space, school, media, workplace, and government.

4. Findings

4.1. Eastern Europe: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova

The position of the Russian language in Belarus is unique. Belarus is the only state in the former Soviet world (except for Russia) that awarded the Russian language status as a state language alongside Belarusian (Pilipenko, 2020). In 1989, ethnic Russians comprised 13% of the Belarusian population; at the same time, Russian was the mother tongue of a third of the total population and was fluently spoken as L2 by 80.0% of the titular nation. Census results of 2019 revealed another peculiarity of Belarus: although most of its population has a Belarusian identity (84.9%) and claim that Belarusian is their mother tongue (61.2%), the language they use at home is Russian for 70% of the population (census results of 2019). Thus, the titular language in Belarus acts as a "badge of ethnicity" (Crystal, 2000, as cited in Pavlenko, 2008b, p. 61) rather than as a means of communication.

Belarusian also plays a symbolic role in the public domain and appears in official documents, on stamps, road signs, banknotes, and toponymy (Kharitonov, 2020; Pilipenko, 2020). *De facto*, Russian is the dominant language: it is the

language of office and paperwork in most public institutions. Russian language maintenance in Belarus can be attributed to the country's pro-Russian political orientation, which promotes "the idea of historical, political, and economic unity with Russia" (Pavlenko, 2008b, p. 64). In the Belarussian scientific literature, Russian is viewed as a guarantee of Belarussian ethnicity, statehood preservation, and protection against exposure to Western values (Artymyshyn & Polovyi, 2022). Measures taken for the sake of Belarussian language maintenance are believed to affect the position of the Russian language, and this, in turn, aggravates relations with Belarus's main ally (Kharitonov, 2020). Moreover, in the political domain, Belarusian is considered the language of pro-Western opposition since most opposition slogans and posters are written in Belarusian.

Most mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, and electronic sources) feature Russian: 13 of the most popular 15 journals are in Russian. In addition, 3 out of 11 TV channels broadcast in Russian: seven use both state languages, and only one broadcasts in Belarusian exclusively (Pilipenko, 2020).

Russian and Belarusian are compulsory subjects in school and are the main languages of secondary education, where Russian predominates. In 2018/2019, 88% of students attended Russian middle schools, and only 11% studied in Belarusian. University programs are also offered mostly in Russian: in 2018/2019, 59.8% of university students received instruction in Russian, 39.3% were being educated in both languages, and only 0.1% studied solely in Belarusian (Azheronok & Denischik, 2020).

Ukraine takes a different approach to the Russian language and aims its language policy at de-Russification and de-Sovietization (Pavlenko, 2006). The Ukrainian language acts as an antipode to Russian (Pisano 2022). The first step toward Ukrainianization was in 1996 when the Constitution declared Ukrainian to be the sole state language (Snezhkova, 2021). Although Russian was the mother tongue for 33.2% of the entire population (1989), officially, it was considered a minority language and was granted a regional status. In the country's political units, where the share of Russian speakers exceeded 10% (the South-Eastern part of Ukraine), Russian was officially used in local state bodies, courts, and the educational sphere alongside Ukrainian (Pavlenko, 2008a). Officialization of Russian at the state level was viewed as a danger to the titular language's position (Pavlenko, 2011, as cited in Csernicskó & Kontra, 2022).

The revolution of 2014 was a turning point in Ukraine's language policy: the newly formed government intensified de-Russification and Ukrainization. Proficiency in Ukrainian became compulsory for authorities, deputies, judges, lawyers, notaries, medical workers, and teachers. The legal norm that had granted regional status to Russian was canceled despite the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2003 (Csernicsko & Kontra, 2022). As a result, Russian and other non-titular languages became foreign languages, although Russians made up 17% of the population.

The right to speak the native language became one of the official reasons for mass riots in the separatist regions with significant proportions of Russian speakers (the Donetsk region: 38%; the Luhansk region: 39%; the Autonomous Republic of Crimea: 58%) (About number and composition, 2001). As a result of the referendum held in Crimea in 2014, the peninsula *de facto* became a political unit within Russia. It declared Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar the state languages (art. 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea). The referendum was not recognized as legitimate by Ukraine and most member-states of the United Nations (Gunawan et al., 2020; Marxsen, 2014).

At the same time, Luhansk (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republics (DPR) proclaimed their independence from Ukraine and granted official status to the Russian language only (art. 10 of the Constitution of LND; art. 10 of the Constitution of DPR). In February 2022, LPR and DPR received diplomatic recognition from the Kremlin and were incorporated into the Russian Federation. Most countries considered this act a gross violation of international law and an invasion of the sovereign state by Russia (Pelliconi, 2023; Potocnak & Mares, 2022).

In the government-controlled territories of Ukraine, the use of the state language became widespread; it symbolized self-determination and autonomy from Russia (Pisano, 2022). Sanctions on Russian mass media were imposed as Russia was accused of one-sided news coverage and propaganda. In 2019, the Ukrainian government passed a law '[o]n ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language,' which broadened the sphere of Ukrainian language usage: it translated commercial, medical, and service industries into the state language. Furthermore, according to law, cultural events were to be held in Ukrainian or accompanied by translation (art. 23). Print media disseminated in non-state languages was either translated into Ukrainian or released in a bilingual edition. The law also affected the information sphere. A translation into Ukrainian must accompany TV programs and films broadcast in foreign languages (including Russian). The total duration of foreign-language TV and radio programs can be at most 10% of the daily broadcasting for national channels and 20% for regional channels.

Ukraine's primary instruction medium is the state language: 92% of students are instructed in Ukrainian. In minority schools, Ukrainian is a compulsory subject. The number of Russian schools dramatically decreased from 4.5 thousand (1989) to 55 (2021) (Melnyk, 2023).

Despite the condemnation of the Venice Commission, the Law on Education adopted in 2017 converted the language of instruction in minority schools into Ukrainian (Csernicskó, 2022). Exceptions were made only for the indigenous peoples of Ukraine (e.g., Crimean Tatars), who may receive complete schooling in their mother tongues. The other minority schools may conduct classes in their languages only in grades 1 – 4. 80% of classes beginning in 5th grade must have

Ukrainian as their language of instruction. Different approaches were applied toward EU and non-EU languages of instruction: schools with non-European languages of instruction (primarily Russian) had to switch 80% of their classes to the state language by September 2020. Only Russian language and literature lessons are allowed to be held in Russian. On the other hand, schools with EU languages as the means of instruction (e.g., Romanian, Hungarian) were allowed gradually to switch to Ukrainian, starting with 20% in 2020 and reaching 80% by 2023 (Csernicskó & Kontra, 2022).

Ukrainian is a compulsory entrance examination to higher educational institutions. Besides Ukrainian, EU languages and English can also be a means of instruction at the universities. The Russian language, however, is absent in higher education.

Oriented to the West, Moldova also aimed its language policy at de-Russification and strengthening the position of the titular language (Pavlenko, 2008b). Thus, despite significant shares of Ukrainians (14%) and Russians (13%) among the Moldavian population and the fact that Russian was the mother tongue of 23% of the population in 1989, Moldova adopted a language law that proclaimed Romanian based on the Latin script as the sole state language (Pavlenko, 2008a).

In 1990, two regions of Moldova (Gagauzia and Transnistria), populated with the Ukrainian and Russian diaspora, stood up against the imposed language law. They proclaimed autonomy within Moldova and established their regional languages: Russian was declared an official language alongside Gagauz in autonomous Gagauzia and Ukrainian in the self-declared state Transnistria (Abramova, 2020). At the same time, both regions retained the Moldavian language based on the Cyrillic alphabet as an official language (Riaboj & Grachev, 2021). As a result of the Transnistria separation, where Russians make up 29% of the population (2015), the share of Russians in Moldova decreased from 13% (1989) to 4.1% (2014) (Natsional'nyi sostav gosudarstv SNG (n/d); Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia, 2021).

The primary language of education in Post-Soviet Moldova is the state language. Minority language schools also function in the country. In 2011, 21% of schools offered education in Russian. The educational code of 2014, however, excluded Russian from the obligatory program in secondary school and made it an optional foreign language, along with English and French (Lavrenov & Ushurelu, 2020). At the same time, in the Gagauz Autonomy and the *de facto* state of Transnistria, Russian is a compulsory subject in schools with non-Russian languages of instruction (Pavlenko, 2008a).

The Russian language is gradually disappearing from higher education, which functions predominantly in the state language. Russian speakers in Moldova have access to Russian-medium programs on a fee basis since scholarships for studying at the universities are available only for courses with Romanian/Moldovan as the

language of instruction. The entrance exam in the titular language is compulsory for applicants, including those applying to Russian-medium programs (Chernyavsky, 2015).

The presence of minority languages (including Russian) in the information sphere is limited: the total volume of TV and radio programs in non-titular languages may not exceed 15% of airtime. In 2018, Moldova stopped re-broadcasting Russian news TV and radio programs following the passage of the Law on Protecting Informational Space from Foreign Propaganda (Saran, 2016). However, the law did not affect the local mass media run by the Russian diaspora: four Russian-language TV channels, four journals, and six national newspapers. In 2022, state monitoring of news coverage was introduced in response to the information war accompanying the conflict in Ukraine (Sisu et al., 2022).

4.2. The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

After proclaiming independence in the early 1990s, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania chose a political course of state rebuilding and distancing from Soviet influence. As a result, the significant size of the Russian-speaking population (34%, 30.3%, and 9.4% of the entire population of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, respectively), which had migrated there during the Soviet era, became an ethnic minority (Brhlikova, 2022; Pavlenko, 2008a).

Non-titular groups, including Russians, were encouraged to vote during the Independence Referendum in the 1990s; however, after the restoration of sovereignty, Estonia and Latvia granted citizenship only to those who had lived in those states before the Soviet occupation (Croft, 2016; Pavlenko, 2006). An additional requirement for being granted Latvian and Estonian citizenship became knowledge of the state language. Given that the level of the Estonian and Latvian languages spoken among the non-titulars was low, in the newly independent states, 25 percent of the Estonian and 30 percent of the Latvian population, primarily Russian speakers, became stateless (Maksimovtsova, 2022). Moreover, descendants of non-citizens born within the states' territory did not receive citizenship either (Popova & De Bot, 2017). In 2015, Estonia started providing citizenship automatically to all children born in the state regardless of their parents' citizenship. In Latvia, a similar law came into force in 2020, almost 30 years after the state had regained its independence (Erdilmen & Honohan, 2020). However, 10% of the Latvian and 6% of the Estonian population, mostly retired people over 65, remain stateless (Komori, 2022).

Stateless residents of Estonia and Latvia do not have the right to work as lawyers, judges, police officers, notaries, pharmacists, hold high-ranking positions, or own land (Zverev, 2022). Estonian residents without citizenship may only participate in local elections (Pavlenko, 2008b). They have access to the political sphere via the Centre Party, which builds a Russophone electorate (Csergő & Kallas, 2022). In Latvia, non-citizens are fully isolated from participating in political decisions, have neither active nor passive rights to vote

at any level, and may not establish their political party if at least half of the party members are stateless (Frolov, 2023). In contrast, Lithuania grants citizenship automatically to all children born within the country's territory and does not limit professional choice for non-titular groups. Every citizen also has active and passive suffrage. As ethnic Russians are well integrated into society and not limited in their political rights, the Russian diaspora organizes no political party (Best, 2013).

Although Russian speakers constitute 24.5% of the Latvian and 23.7% of the Estonian population (Coolican, 2021), Russian does not have official status and is defined as a foreign language (Law on Language of Estonia of 1995, chapter 1, art. 2; Law on State Language of Latvia of 1999, section 5). In Lithuania, which was exposed to immigration to a lesser extent, Russians make up 5% (2021) of the population and constitute the second minority group after Poles (Kuczynska-Zonik, 2017). The status of the Russian language is not defined. Only the titular languages are state languages of the states (Popova & de Bot, 2017).

Russian does not have regional status in the Baltic states either. However, its speakers constitute 97% of the population of the Ida–Virumaa region in Estonia, 85% of the second-largest Latvian city, Daugavpils, and 51% of the town of Visaginas in Lithuania. The authorities see the regional officialization of the Russian language as 'a threat to the construction of the national state' and consider Narva the 'next Crimea' (Trimbach & O'Lear, 2015).

Perceiving the Russian minority as an instrument of Kremlin propaganda, the Baltic states aim at forced assimilation of minorities by limiting the activity of those institutions that could maintain their identity, such as schools, universities, museums, libraries, and mass media (Frolov, 2022; Schulze, 2021). Thus, the Russian language is being gradually excluded from school education and replaced by titular languages.

The Estonian educational reform of 2008 established that only 40% of classes could be conducted in the languages of ethnic minorities; 60% of the courses had to be held in the state language. 13% of state schools function in Russian-Estonian languages. Nevertheless, the government aims to reach a monolingual education system held only in Estonian by 2024 (Kunitsõn et al., 2022). In Lithuania, ethnic minorities can receive a complete education in the language of the ethnic group they belong to, though not in history, geography, and civics, while the number of Russian schools is decreasing (Popova & de Bot, 2017).

In 2018, Latvia initiated a gradual transition of minority schools into the state language of education: 50% of classes in grades 1–6 and 80% in grades 7–9 were to be held in the official state language, and in the higher grades 80%–100% of subjects must be taught in Latvian. In 2020, Latvia converted all Russian and bilingual schools into schools with only the titular language of instruction. European Court on Human Rights confirmed that educational reform was not

discriminatory towards the Russian minority living in Latvia (Ogranicheniye prava na obucheniye na russkom yazyke, 2023).

Introducing monolingual schools is believed to unify society, eliminate the segregation in education, facilitate learning the state languages, and decrease the share of non-citizens, thereby providing equal access to career opportunities and higher education, which is available mainly in the state languages (Frolov, 2023; Kunitsõn et al., 2022). In 2022, Latvia eliminated education in Russian at state and private universities (Auers, 2023). Only the Slavonic and Russian Studies departments at state universities in Estonia and Lithuania include curricula given in Russian (Popova & de Bot, 2017).

The information sphere of the Baltic countries functions predominantly in the titular languages, and state legislation is gradually decreasing the share of media in minority languages. Russian media exists in print, namely newspapers and magazines run and sponsored by the Russian diaspora (Popova & de Bot, 2017). No state-funded TV channels broadcast in Russian in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania. The channels transmitting from Russia have been progressively excluded from airtime as Russian mass media is perceived as a means of warfare, propaganda, and a tool of destabilization (Persson, 2014; Schulze, 2021). Moreover, these limitations have been intensifying in reaction to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine: the countries imposed a 'digital curtain' on Russian state media due to its disinformation and one-sided coverage of the news. Having suspended Russian TV channel broadcasting has also led to a bolstered sense of justification for control over print media (Maksimovtsova, 2022; Sisu et al., 2022).

4.3. The Central Asian States: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

The last population census of the Soviet Union (1989) revealed that 9.5 million Russians lived in the Central Asian states (Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia, 2021). Most of them lived in Kazakhstan (6.1 million), Uzbekistan (1.6 million), and Kyrgyzstan (0.9 million). In Kazakhstan, the share of Russians was almost equal to the percentage of the titular nation (37.4 and 39.7, respectively).

However, the political and economic instability of the region after the states declared independence, civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997), coups in Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2010), and de-Russification processes led to mass emigration. As a result, the share of Russians living in Central Asian countries declined from 37.4 to 23.7% in Kazakhstan (2009), from 21.5 to 7.8% in Kyrgyzstan (2009), and from 7.6 to 0.5% in Tajikistan (2010) (Natsional'nyi sostav gosudarstv SNG, [n/d]; Popova & de Bot, 2020; Shulga, 2020).

In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Russian share of the population in 1989 was 8.3% and 9.5%, respectively (Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia, 2021). However, the latest census data is unavailable in these states: Uzbekistan has not held a population census since its proclamation of independence. Turkmenistan

conducted a population census in 2012, but the results were not published. Official estimates revealed that the proportion of Russians declined to 2.6% in Uzbekistan (2013) and 2% (2001) in Turkmenistan (Tsyriapkina, 2015). However, experts believe that the numbers are overreported.

In 1989–1990, all five independent states raised the status of the titular languages, defined them as the sole state languages, and aimed their language policy at expanding the sphere of titular language usage to all public domains. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan became the only state in the region to grant official status to the Russian language: Russian is used in the governmental, judicial, legal systems, and the public sphere alongside the other state language – Kyrgyz (Constitution of 2010, art. 10). In Kazakhstan, Russian is an officially used language along with Kazakh in 'state organizations and local governments' (Popova & de Bot, 2020). According to Pavlenko (2008a), official use of the Russian language in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be explained by insufficient development of the titular languages, which cannot cover all public domains.

Despite Russians making up only 0.5% (2010) of the population, in 2011, Tajikistan gave Russian the status of the language of international communication (Constitution of 2016, art. 2). In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, with the Russian population at 2%, the status of the Russian language remains undefined.

The Central Asian states introduced legislation making command over the national language a requirement for high-ranking positions. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan developed a language exam, 'Kaztest' and 'Kyrgyztest,' for state and civil servants and employees working in senior positions. The tests assess knowledge of the titular languages based on the CEFR scale and include listening, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as grammatical and lexical tasks (I.o. Prezidenta, 2020; Law on State Civil and Municipal Service of Kyrgyzstan of 2016, art. 14; Popova & de Bot, 2020). The state language exam is compulsory for candidates for deputy in Tajikistan. It consists of writing autobiographies, reading printed texts, and an oral interview with the central election commission and Tajik language scholars (V Tadzhikistane kandidaty v deputaty ot NDPT sdali test na znanie rodnogo iazyka, 2015; Zhang 2021). In Uzbekistan, the language examination system applies to civil servants (Naznachaiushchiesia na rukovodiashchie dolzhnosti, 2020). Only those who pass the language exam and get a certificate of command of the state language are allowed to remain in high-ranking positions. In Turkmenistan, not only is command of the titular language a requirement for state servants, but judicial, law enforcement, security, and financial sector employees must prove their ethnic Turkmen origin going back three generations (Turkmenistan 2022 Human Rights Report, n/d).

The policy of Turkmenization has also affected the educational sphere. There is only one school where the language of instruction is Russian (Jehan & Khan, 2022). Russian-medium classes in 30 Turkmen schools with 50 students each were functioning until 2020. Measures to prevent COVID-19 became an official

reason to distribute students from the overcrowded Russian classes to Turkmen and transform the educational system into a monolingual one (Iserell, 2021). Turkmenistan is also the only country in Central Asia where Russian is not studied as a compulsory school subject (Yu, 2020). The language of higher education in Turkmenistan was also converted into the titular language, and non-titular students' university admissions became more limited.

In the Central Asian states where Russian has an official status, its position remains strong in the educational sphere: it is the means of instruction in monolingual schools in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, constituting 10% and 17%, respectively. It is also used alongside the titular language in bilingual schools, making up 25% and 29% of schools in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, respectively (Bengard, 2018). Russian is also one of the languages of higher professional education: 34% of programs in Kazakhstan and 60% in Kyrgyzstan have Russian as the medium of instruction (Yu, 2020). Despite that, ethnic Russians face discrimination upon admission to the universities in Kazakhstan: privilege is given to applicants from the rural areas inhabited mainly by titulars and ethnic Kazakhs living abroad. Thus, only 6% of students in Kazakhstan are ethnic Russians (Popova & de Bot, 2020). Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan, politicians promise to fully transition to the state language within higher education so that it is accessible for titular nationals who do not speak Russian, thereby automatically depriving Russian speakers of access to higher education (Mambetaliev, 2023).

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the shares of Russian schools are 4.4% and 10.0%, respectively (Bekmatov, 2020; Saidov, 2023). Russian programs are available at all 63 universities in Uzbekistan (Saidpour, 2022). In Tajikistan, despite the population of Russians being only 0.5%, the Russian language is the language of instruction for 20% of university students and is the language of the Ph.D. thesis defense (Nagzibekova & Petrova, 2022).

State legislation has restricted the use of Russian in the information sphere. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the region where Russian is the primary language of mass media. 70% of print and internet mass media are in Russian. Russian TV and radio channels are also present in Kyrgyzstan's information sphere. In Kazakhstan, Russian remains in a dominant position only in the sphere of print mass media. The country's language policy aims to increase the total volume of TV and radio programs in Kazakh by 10% every year. Laws and norms are gradually excluding Russian and other languages from electronic media (Popova & de Bot, 2020).

Independent Tajikistan shortened the air time of radio programs broadcast in Russian from 100% (in 1989) to 25% (Yu, 2020). Only two TV channels and a two-hour daily radio program are broadcast in Russian.

The authoritarian regime in Turkmenistan has eliminated alternative information sources and imposed restrictions on the non-titular mass media. In 2002, the state banned all Russian TV channels and non-Turkmen print media

except for two journals in the Russian language (Iserell, 2021). The presence of the Russian language on the Internet is also limited in Turkmenistan. Access to Russian internet news sources, such as 'Sputnik' and 'Inosmi.ru,' is blocked. Satellite TV is the only source of access to Russian media.

Independent Uzbekistan limited the number of TV channels broadcast in Russian and introduced censorship of the Russian mass media. After Mirziyoyev came to power in Uzbekistan in 2016, censorship eased. As a result, new information sources in Russian and Russian-Uzbek appeared (Sverdlov, 2018). In 2020, the Russian printed mass media share was 30% of the total press volume (Yu, 2020).

4.5. Transcaucasus Region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

Emigration of Russians from the Transcaucasian region, which took place during the Soviet era and continued after the dissolution of the USSR, resulted in a significant decline in the share of Russians. A comparison of the latest census results with data from 1989 reveals that the percentage of Russians decreased from 6.3% to 0.7% in Georgia (2014), 5.6% to 1.3% in Azerbaijan (2009), and 1.6% to 0.39% in Armenia (2011) (General Population Census, 2016; Natsional'nyi sostav gosudarstv SNG [n/d]; Zaionchkovskaya, 2000).

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia aimed their language policy at expanding the sphere of the titular languages to all domains, reducing the scope of Russian language use.

The constitutions of independent Azerbaijan (art. 21), Armenia (art. 20), and Georgia (art. 2.3) declared their titular languages as the sole state languages. The status of Russian is not defined (Soltanova, 2023). However, *de facto*, Russian remains a lingua franca and a language of addressing authorities in local ethnic communities with low competence in the titular languages (e.g., Armenian and Azerbaijani in Georgia) (Pavlenko, 2013). In the partially recognized states South Ossetia and Abkhazia (d*e jure* regions of Georgia under the military patronage of Russia), where Russians make up 1.1% and 9.2% of the population, respectively (2015), Russian has been granted the status of a state language in South Ossetia and is the officially used language in Abkhazia (Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia. art. 6; Constitution of the Republic of South Ossetia. art. 4).

Russian is also a means of negotiation between Armenia and Azerbaijan relating to the military conflict in Nagorno–Karabakh. The region *de jure* belongs to Azerbaijan but is mainly inhabited by ethnic Armenians (99.7%) who resist the Azerbaijani regime. Russians constitute less than 1% of the total population. The self-proclaimed state, the Nagornyi Karabakh Republic, granted official status to Russian in February 2021 (Law on the Basis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Independent Statehood of 1992, Art. X).

The main languages of secondary education in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are titular. In Azerbaijan, more than 140 thousand pupils study at 16

Russian-medium schools and 340 classes within titular schools (Gusejnli, 2020). The Russian language is taught as a subject in 3 thousand schools with the titular language of instruction (Zinnurov, 2022). The state has not reduced the number of Russian-medium schools since the Soviet period (Pavlenko, 2008a). In the Nagorno–Karabakh Republic, one Russian school is functioning. Russian is also compulsory in state schools (Nersesyan, 2017).

In Georgia, the Russian sector is represented by 11 schools and 59 classes (Marinosyan & Kurovskaya, 2017). Russian is also an optional foreign language in non-Russian schools. It is also one of the languages of instruction in the *de facto* states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Akhmeteli, 2017; Kodalayeva & Kulikova, 2021; Tatabadze, 2018), which "resist the imposition of Georgian and favor native – and Russian-medium schooling" (Pavlenko 2013, p. 267). Resistance was implemented by converting the Georgian schools of the self-proclaimed states into schools with Russian language instruction.

Armenia converted Russian schools into titular ones. Russian became a foreign language in secondary education (Avakyan, 2020; Pavlenko, 2008b). The Russian sector is present in Armenia, with 38 Russian language classes and one school sponsored by the Russian embassy (Matevosyan, 2018). The titulars are not allowed to receive education in classes given in Russian. Only ethnic Russians and citizens of other Post-Soviet countries may be enrolled there. Russian is taught as a foreign language in Armenian schools; however, since 2001, the number of teaching hours has remarkably declined.

The main languages of higher education in the Transcaucasus region are titular. However, Russian language programs are available at four state universities in Georgia and 27 in Azerbaijan (Gusejnli, 2020). In Armenia, education in Russian is offered only within the Russian Studies department in branches of seven Russian universities (Matevosyan, 2018). Russian as a foreign language is a subject for first-year students of Armenian state universities, consisting of 34 academic hours per semester (Danielyan & Samuelyan, 2023).

In Armenia and Georgia, Russian mass media broadcasting faces the following difficulties: in 2001, Russian and other non-titular languages in Armenia's information space were limited to one hour per week for television and one hour per day for radio channels. These restrictions also affected Russian newscasts, which were excluded from airtime altogether. Only entertaining content was allowed to be re-transmitted. In August 2020, amendments to the law in Armenia excluded Russian media from analog TV broadcasting and obliged all non-Armenian programs to be translated into the state language or provide subtitles (Gazazyan, 2020; The Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting of 2000).

In 2008, following the military conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia stopped broadcasting three Russian TV news channels, accusing Russia of propaganda and one-sided coverage of political events (Popova, 2016).

Furthermore, in 2019, Russian films and animations were excluded from release in cinemas.

In Azerbaijan, the Law on Mass Media of 1999 (art. 6) does not restrict the use of non-titular languages. More than 50 Russian-language journals and seven informational agencies function in Azerbaijan (Gusejnli, 2020).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research describes the unique situation in which, within one century, a radical language shift took place twice: Russian became a dominant language throughout the Soviet Union, displacing titular languages from most public domains, and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it became a minority language without official status in most of the Post-Soviet states despite the presence of a considerable number of its speakers.

As language policy is a constantly changing field of investigation, the present study is based not only on the previous research but also on the sources providing the latest data: population censuses, estimates, language legislation acts, reports, and the latest news relating to the language policy of the countries under examination. Alternative sources are essential for studies investigating ongoing conflicts since they provide the latest updates.

Furthermore, as this study of language policy aims to describe the situation comprehensively, it underlines the importance of considering all political units regardless of their international legal status (recognized, non-recognized, partly recognized states, debatable territories, autonomies within the states). The given approach sheds light on how the status of the Russian language and its use in de facto states (LPR, DPR, Crimea, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Nagorno–Karabakh Republic) differs from language laws enacted by the states they *de facto* break away from.

Following the historical-structural approach to Critical Language Policy studies by Tollefson (2006), the present language policy research reveals common characteristics affecting the language policy of the de facto Post-Soviet states: the position under the Russian military patronage, resistance to the language imposed by the countries they are seceding from (e.g. Abkhazia and South Ossetia consider Russian as an antipode to the imposed language policy by Georgia; similarly, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic opts for Russian instead of language of Azerbaijan which they de jure belong to).

Conversely, the countries in a state of active or frozen armed conflict with Russia (e.g., Ukraine, Georgia) consider the Russian language the means of Kremlin propaganda and shrink the sphere of its usage in the public domain.

The results also reveal the following interconnection between the demographic factor and the decision-making process regarding the Russian language: although all the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) aim to strengthen the titular languages, a thorough elimination of Russian from the educational and informational domains occurs only in Estonia and Latvia, where a quarter of the

population consists of Russians. The governments of the two states also declined to make Russian an official language at the regional level in areas with a high density of Russians. In contrast, Lithuania was not exposed to the migration of Russians as much as the other two Baltic states were (Russians make up 5.8% of the population). The Lithuanian law neither restricts Russian language use nor limits the civil rights of Russian speakers. Thus, the present example indicates how the size of the Russian-speaking minority can be a factor affecting the language policy of the states.

The study contributes to minority rights studies and an understanding of the linguistic reasons for the emergence of non-recognized states; however, it requires greater attention.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

As previously stated, language policy is a multidisciplinary research field requiring a comprehensive approach and attention to numerous issues. Yet, the theory of language policy investigation needs a universal framework that would apply to all LP studies (Ricento, 2006). Thus, studying the Post-Soviet states with the model of Spolsky (2009) covered the main public domains. However, it might omit some aspects of the linguistic situation that are not parts of the model and consequently bias the results.

The limitation of the present paper lies in the census results. The population data is comparatively old: the years in which a census took place range from 2001 (Ukraine, Turkmenistan) to 2021 (Lithuania). Uzbekistan has not held a census in its independent history, and the data we do have comes from state estimates, which we cannot consider as reliable as population census results. Another statistical challenge is the presence of non-recognized countries in the Post-Soviet space. The numbers in the official census of *de jure* states also include populations from non-recognized states. However, it is crucial to describe each state separately in language policy studies, regardless of its legal status. There is also the possibility of politically formed bias in the population census results and subjectivity in certain mass media sources.

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