

## **Evaluation of Mariia Popova's Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

Faculty of Humanities  
Multilingualism Doctoral School  
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**Title:** The Maintenance of the Russian Language in the Post-Soviet States: The Activities of Russia

**Supervisor:** Prof. Dr. István Csernicskó; Prof. Dr. Kees de Bot

**Assessor:** Dr. Sándor Czeglédi, English and American Studies Institute, University of Pannonia, Veszprém

Mariia Popova's dissertation explores an exceptionally timely and politically charged topic—the maintenance of the Russian language in post-Soviet states, examining Russia's activities in promoting and sustaining its language through cultural diplomacy and soft power. This topic is of growing importance, particularly in the current geopolitical landscape where language is often tied to identity, nationalism, and political allegiance. The fact that Russia has been using language as a tool of influence across its neighboring countries, especially in the context of the ongoing Ukraine conflict and annexation of Crimea, renders the subject matter even more acute. The choice of topic is well-justified by the dissertation's introduction, which situates the research within the broader debates on nationalism, language rights, and post-Soviet state identity formation.

The novelty of the research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining elements of applied linguistics, political science, and international relations. By applying linguistic theories like Spolsky's Language Management Model alongside constructivist approaches from international relations, the dissertation moves beyond the traditional boundaries of language policy studies. Moreover, the inclusion of non-recognized, de facto states in the analysis adds an often overlooked dimension to the piece.

The dissertation is meticulously structured, following a logical progression that facilitates understanding and readability. The chapters are clearly delineated, moving from the introduction through theoretical frameworks, historical context, empirical data analysis, and culminating in a well-rounded—although somewhat brief—discussion and conclusion. The structure is also balanced in its division between historical analysis and contemporary evaluation. The first part of the dissertation focuses on historical language policies under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, providing essential background for understanding the contemporary dynamics. The second half deals with Russia's current efforts to maintain the Russian language in the post-Soviet space, particularly through its institutions, e.g. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The literature review is comprehensive and well-researched, drawing from a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics, political science, and international relations.

The research design is rigorous and multifaceted, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. A significant strength of the research design lies in the variety of data sources

used, including census results, legal documents (language laws and constitutions), media reports, and international organization charters. This diversity of sources enhances the validity of the research and allows for a comprehensive analysis of language policies across different post-Soviet countries. By comparing multiple states, the research provides a comparative dimension, which is essential for understanding the broader regional dynamics.

One area for potential improvement in the research design would be to expand the empirical data collection by incorporating more interviews with policymakers, educators, or members of Russian-language organizations in the region. This would provide first-hand insights into how these policies are perceived on the ground and whether they are effective in practice.

The conclusions drawn from the research are well-founded and logically flow from the evidence presented throughout the dissertation. The author successfully argues that the Russian language remains a central tool in Russia's soft power strategy across post-Soviet states. Popova's conclusions also highlight the tensions between efforts to de-Sovietize language policies and the persistence of Russian linguistic and cultural influence.

One area where the conclusions could be further elaborated is the potential impact of digital globalization on the future of the Russian language in these states. As more countries embrace digital diplomacy and soft power through online media, it would be interesting to explore whether Russia's language promotion strategies are adapting to these new realities.

On a side-note: I understand and accept that the expansion of the thesis to include David Cassels Johnson's multi-layered LP definition in the analysis in order to expose covert or implicit policies; to address the policy creation, interpretation and appropriation phases; and to identify (more thoroughly) the underlying language ideologies in relevant policy texts and discourses (2013, p. 9—see the preliminary evaluation below), would have been impractical—and even impossible—during the short time that the candidate had at her disposal between the mock examination and the actual defense.

The shortcomings concerning the documentation of the theoretical framework have been eliminated, and the dissertation has been thoroughly proofread since the submission of the previous version. The remaining few spelling mistakes (mostly missing spaces) and grammatical errors are not significant in a 127-page document:

### **Grammar and spelling:**

**p. v:** “maintainance”

**p. 4:** “It might be concluded that the Russification policy was aimed **not as much** at spreading the dominant language over the multinational empire **than** at limiting the influence of the local elites by decreasing the status of their mother tongues.”=... **not so much... as...**

**p. 12:** “Soviet Uniondriven”

**p. 16:** “(in 1989)became”

**p. 19:** “Brubaker(1993)”

**p. 34:** “Russan”

**p. 51:** “2)Bilateral”

**p. 79:** “under the quota. for each state”

**p. 80:** “Хрустальная чернильница(Eng. Crystal Inkwell)”

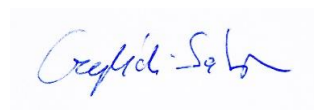
Strictly speaking, “**Russkij**” should be “Russkiy” as per the standard English transliteration (throughout the document).

Overall, the dissertation meets the requirements for a PhD thesis, thus I recommend it for public discussion and defense without reservations.

**Question to the candidate (for the PhD defense):**

The current list of the federal ministries and agencies of the Russian Federation contains 21 ministries and 18 federal services and agencies. (See <http://government.ru/en/ministries/>.) In addition to the entities discussed in the dissertation, which of these may also be involved in language maintenance or language spread policies—and how?

How transparent are the activities of these ministries and agencies as far as the availability of their policy documents and analyses are concerned?



Veszprém, September 29, 2024

Dr. Sándor Czeglédi  
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## **The Preliminary Evaluation of the Dissertation (from July 2024):**

Mariia Popova's dissertation has aimed to combine political and linguistic theoretical frameworks to examine the nature and effects of post-Soviet language policies designed to maintain and—if possible—to spread the Russian language in the successor states, quasi-states and other entities formerly belonging to the Soviet Union.

The task is definitely momentous as the geographical scope of inquiry stretches from Eastern Europe and the Baltic States through the Transcaucasian region to Central Asia, and, as a result, the analysis is almost bound to remain somewhat superficial on occasion, despite the fact that the author has done a decent job in compiling, comparing and contrasting various language management decisions affecting the position of Russian and those of the titular languages.

The historical and terminological overview in Chapter I is correct, it helps to orientate the reader and clarify some finer points of distinction and interpretation, including the controversial aspects of the “R2P” (“right-to-protect”) doctrine by the kin-state (in this case: Russia).

The theoretical framework, however, is somewhat ill-defined. It is supposed to have been largely based on Bernard Spolsky's tripartite language policy model (2009), which includes the actual language practices of a community or polity, language beliefs (“ideology”), and language management attempts to approximate practices to (shifting) ideological expectations (or vice versa). While Spolsky's works provide the backbone of the theoretical background to the dissertation, all of these books (and/or essays, articles) are missing from the reference list, which is inexplicable and would be absolutely unacceptable in the final version of the dissertation. This is also true for Wendt (1992)—in the context of the other pillar of the theoretical framework, Constructivism—which source cannot be located among the references, either.

By and large, the dissertation explores those soft power policies of Russia which are related to language management (more specifically: to external language maintenance and language spread). While the author succeeds in taking stock of the relevant practices and explicit/overt decisions and developments, the ideological embeddedness of the examined policy instruments and tendencies remains to a degree underexplored, although the author sometimes makes references to underlying ideas and beliefs (e.g. in the context of Russian imperialism and some of the ensuing backlash phenomena, e.g. “de-Pushkinization”).

The literature review is relegated to a brief subchapter (1.5) but it is remarkably detailed (despite its brevity), and, in a broad sense, parts of the other subchapters could also be regarded as thematically belonging here as well.

Chapter II describes the position of the Russian language in the post-Soviet States, while Chapter III explores Russian governmental and quasi-governmental efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Russian Orthodox Church in maintaining and promoting the Russian language, while Chapter IV highlights some of the perceptions of and reactions to Russian kin-state language policies.

Overall, the structure of the dissertation is logical but in the second half of the piece the chapters become progressively shorter (which tendency affects the conclusions as well). The findings and their interpretation are convincing.

The sources used by the author are relevant, numerous and mostly up-to-date. They are identified correctly—despite the glaring omission of the works by Spolsky, as mentioned above. The language of the dissertation, however, needs thorough proofreading before the final defense as the number of mistakes and errors in the current version are unacceptably high. A recurring and persistent problem is incorrect article use but there are also spelling mistakes which could have been eliminated in a matter of minutes:

### Spelling/grammar/style:

Perhaps the (sub)title would sound more natural in the plural (with some additional modifications), e.g. “**The Relevant Activities of Russia**”

p. ii: “...the consequences of the Soviet Union collapse...”= the consequences of the Soviet Union’s collapse/the collapse **of the Soviet Union**

p. ii: “The theoretical framework of the study is Constructivism approach of international relations”= “The theoretical framework of the study is **based on the** Constructivism (**Constructivist(?)**) approach **of/to** international relations”

p. 5: “CHAPTER III. MAINTAINANCE...”=CHAPTER III. MAINTENANCE...

p. 5: “CHAPTER IV. PERCEPTION OF THE ACTIVITY OF RUSSIA AIMED AT MAINTAINANCE OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE POST-SOVIET STATES: ACTIVITY OF RUSSIA”=CHAPTER IV. PERCEPTION OF THE ACTIVITY **ACTIVITIES** OF RUSSIA AIMED AT **THE** MAINTENANCE OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE POST-SOVIET STATES: **THE ACTIVITIES** OF RUSSIA. (The “activity of Russia” phrase appears to be rather repetitive.)

p. 8: “Language policy of Russia toward ethnic groups...”=**The** language policy of Russia toward ethnic groups...

p. 8: “In 1720-s”=In **the** 1720s

p. 8: “...conditioned by more developed social, legal, cultural, and economic system of the newly incorporated area”= conditioned by **the** more developed social, legal, cultural, and economic system of the newly incorporated areas

p. 8: “shaped by ~~the~~ Romanticism”

p. 8: “However, Romanticism became the reason ~~of for~~ not only the Russification of the empire, but also **the** growth of national consciousness resulted in ethnic riots and movements in the European regions.

p. 8: “Exception was made for Finland, which remained the **symbol of(?)** political stability”

p. 8: “In 1867, a requirement(**/requirements**) to master Russian for officials was established.”

p. 8: “attempts to introduce compulsory Russian”

p. 9: “**a/the** policy of intensive Russification”

p. 9: “opening public schools with the Russian language of instruction”= opening public schools **with Russian as the language of instruction**

p. 9: “The majority was constituted predominantly by Orthodox Ukrainians and Belarussians which were considered speakers of dialects of Russian”=The majority **consisted** predominantly **of** Orthodox Ukrainians and Belarussians(,) **who** were considered speakers of dialects of Russian

p. 9: “Due to **the** low level of national consciousness”

p. 9: “**The A** different approach was applied in Georgia.”

p. 9: “In 1860-s”=In **the** 1860s

p. 9: “Russian substituted the titular language in Georgian schools living it as an optional subject.”= “Russian **replaced** the titular language in Georgian schools, **leaving(?)** it as an optional subject.”

p. 9: “It might be concluded that **the** Russification policy”

p. 10: “**The** multilingual character of the state”

p. 10: “66,8%”=66.8% (decimal points are needed elsewhere as well, not commas)

p. 14: “1 rubble note”=1-**r(o)uble** note

p. 22: “practices and believes”= practices and **beliefs**

p. 23: “However, unlike ~~to~~ realism and liberalism”

- p. 24: “Despite sovereign states remain influential, its primacy in international relations is challenged”= Despite **the fact that** sovereign states remain influential, **their** primacy in international relations is challenged
- p. 24: “dialog”=dialogue
- p. 33: “Despite the former barely focuses on religious component,”= Despite **the fact that** the former barely focuses on **the** religious component,
- p. 33: “Haynes (2008) and Mandaville (2018), who study how religious actors affect the course” (missing comma)
- p. 42: “academical research”= academic research
- p. 42: “aimed at support and protect its linguistic, cultural, and lungustic diaspora”= aimed at supporting and protecting its (**linguistic,**) cultural and linguistic diaspora
- p. 42: “compartiotis”=compatriots
- p. 42: “Brubeker”=Brubaker
- p. 43: “all the above-mentioned states were not members of the EU and the Schengen zone”=**none of .... were**
- p. 43: “Hungary remained simplified visa application procedure”=...retained(?)
- p. 47: “another group of author”= another group of authors
- p. 48: “As in the president speech, the action of Russia to accept the Crimea into the state was explained with the need to protect fundamental rights compatriots living in the peninsula from the linguistic repressions and disorder, the Russian diaspora residing in the other post-Soviet states have become a subject of political and academic attention especially in the countries with its significant size.”= As in the president’s speech, the action of Russia to accept the Crimea into the state was explained with the need to protect **the** fundamental rights of **their** compatriots living in the peninsula **to be free** from the linguistic repressions and disorder, **the Russian diaspora residing in the other post-Soviet states have become a subject of political and academic attention especially in the countries with its significant size.** (Missing linking word—but probably an entirely new sentence would be the solution.)
- p. 60: “Russian is one of the official(s) and working languages of international organizations”
- p. 79: “After the Soviet Union dissolution”=After the dissolution of the Soviet Union
- p. 82: “separately from ones Moldova.”= separately from ones **in/from** Moldova.
- p. 84: “The target auditory of the Foundation”=The target **audience** of the Foundation
- p. 86: “a 588 paged book”= a **588-page** book
- p. 97: “Several analyzes”=Several analyses
- p. 100: “the activities of the Russkij Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo address the issue of **include(?)** providing grants and scholarships for studying in Russian universities. **Frequently missing full stops/periods** after the year of publication in the Reference list.

### Question to the candidate (for the mock examination):

If we take into consideration David Cassels Johnson’s multi-layered LP definition (2013, p. 9), according to which LPs include: 1. official regulations; 2. unofficial, covert, de facto, and implicit mechanisms; 3. processes (policy creation, interpretation, appropriation, and instantiation); 4. policy texts and discourses (influenced by the ideologies and discourses unique to that context), how could the analysis be deepened to (at least partially) address points 3 and 4?

Reference:

Johnson, D. C. (2013). *Language policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Czeplő-Soln".

Veszprém, July 29, 2024

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