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**‘The Language of Intranational
Communication’: Re-visiting the Role of
Russian in the Context of the Russian
Federation’s Constitutional Amendments
of 2020**

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Introduction

On 3rd July 2020, the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (ЦИК) declared that an overwhelming majority (77.92%) of the Russian electorate had voted to accept a set of constitutional amendments proposed by the federal government.¹ Among these amendments was an adjustment to Article 68, which concerns the role and status of the Russian language in the Russian Federation (RF). Prior to the referendum on the constitutional amendments, Article 68 simply declared Russian's status as the official state language of the RF. The amendment made in 2020, however, added clarification regarding the specific role to be played by the Russian language, with the text added in 2020 indicated below in bold:

“Государственным языком Российской Федерации на всей ее территории является русский язык **как язык государствообразующего народа, входящего в многонациональный союз равноправных народов Российской Федерации.**”²

As such, the amended Article 68 makes the state-building role of the Russian language in uniting the RF's various nationality groups explicit in the constitution. However, this idea of the Russian language being used as a tool to strengthen intranational relations in the RF is not without precedent. A key aim of both Soviet and contemporary Russian language policy can be defined as promoting Russian as the ‘язык межнационального общения’, or ‘the language of intranational communication’. This phrase refers to Russian's role as a *lingua franca* used to facilitate communication across the RF's various nationality groups.

¹ Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, ‘O resul'tatax obsherossiiskoi golosovaniia po voprosu odobreniia izmenenii v Konstitutsiiu Rossiiskoi Federatsii’. Available online: <http://www.cikrf.ru/activity/docs/postanovleniya/46746/> [last accessed 13.04.2021]

² Russian Federation, ‘Novyi tekst Konstitutsii RF s popravkami s 2020’, 2020. Available online: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/> [last accessed 07.05.2021]

Indeed, the RF displays a high degree of both linguistic and ethnic diversity, with the last federation-wide census conducted in 2010 showing the country was home to 193 different nationality groups.³ The data also showed that 171 different languages were spoken in the RF in 2010 (including foreign languages and sign languages), and that a further 20,584 people spoke other minority languages not listed.⁴ Clearly, this high degree of linguistic diversity would suggest that there is a practical need for a *lingua franca* in the RF today to facilitate intranational communication. As the language of the RF's largest ethnic group – ethnic Russians, or *russkie*, who constitute 77.71% of the RF's population⁵ – the Russian language would appear best placed to fulfil this need for a *lingua franca*. In fact, the Russian language is spoken almost universally in the RF today, with the 2010 census reporting that 136,019,395 out of 137,227,107 people spoke Russian, suggesting over 99% of the RF's population have some level of proficiency in Russian.⁶

However, practicality and ease of intranational communication are perhaps not the only reasons for the emergence of Russian as the RF's *lingua franca* and only official state language at the federal level. Numerous linguists have drawn attention to the link existing between language and ideas of the nation. For example, Joseph describes language as “the potent force [...] in the creation of a unified national identity”.⁷ May

³ Federal State Statistics Service, 'Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia', 2010. Available online: https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf [last accessed 26.03.2021]

⁴ Federal State Statistics Service, 'Vladienie iazykami naseleniem Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 2010. Available online: https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-05.pdf [last accessed 13.04.2021]

⁵ Federal State Statistics Service, 'Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia'

⁶ Federal State Statistics Service, 'Naselenie po natsional'nosti i vladeniiu russkim iazykom', 2010. Available online: https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-03.pdf [last accessed 13.04.2021]

⁷ John E. Joseph, *Language and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 147

goes further, describing nation states as “a realm from which minority languages and cultures are effectively banished”.⁸ Finally, Haugen contends that “the national ideal demands that there be a single linguistic code”.⁹ These ideas surrounding the need for a single national language arguably conflict with the linguistic diversity displayed in the RF. Nonetheless, they may go some way towards explaining the federal government’s continued focus on promoting Russian as ‘the language of intranational communication’, since a shared language could help foster a unified sense of nation across the RF’s diverse peoples. As Ryazanova-Clarke puts it, “the Russian language can provide a force for unifying Russia’s multilingual lands”.¹⁰

The aim of this dissertation is to contextualise why the constitutional amendments concerning the role of Russian language were deemed necessary, as well as building an understanding of what they show about the role of the Russian language in the RF today. To that end, this dissertation will be divided into three sections. Firstly, in order to understand the historical role played by the Russian language, it will discuss the changing priorities of language policies in the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1990s. Secondly, it will consider the current linguistic situation in the RF by examining contemporary legislation and language policy decisions taken at the federal level. Thirdly, a case study of language policy in the Republic of Tatarstan will illustrate the status of languages other than Russian. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to provide an understanding of how the constitutional amendments made in 2020 relate to other trends in Soviet and contemporary Russian language policy.

⁸ Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 7

⁹ Einar Haugen, ‘Dialect, Language, Nation’, *American Anthropologist*, 68/4 (1966), pp. 922-935 (p. 928)

¹⁰ Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, “The State Turning to Language”: Power and Identity in Russian Language Policy Today’, *Russian Language Journal*, 56 (2006), pp. 37-55 (p. 41)

Overview of language policy in the Soviet Union

Language policies enacted by central leadership varied throughout the Soviet Union's existence. In the 1920s, measures relating to *korenizatsiia* (translated by Martin as 'indigenization') involved establishing "the language of the titular nationality [...] as the official state language"¹¹ in each of the Soviet republics to make Soviet power "seem indigenous rather than an external Russian imperial imposition".¹² Consequently, space was made for multilingualism at the official level, since it was deemed that ensuring linguistic diversity would help the newly-installed Soviet regime to "avoid the perception of empire".¹³

Equally important in the Soviet Union's early days was a focus on promoting literacy, with "an aggressive national campaign to end illiteracy"¹⁴ taking place after the 1897 Russian census had revealed that "only 39% of adults were literate".¹⁵ Interestingly, the early Soviet approach to promoting literacy illustrates the pluralist, multilingual approach of language policy at the time. For instance, the 1919 decree 'О ликвидации безграмотности среди населения РСФСР' stated:

¹¹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 10

¹² Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 12

¹³ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 19

¹⁴ William B. Husband, 'The New Economic Policy (NEP) and the Revolutionary Experiment 1921-1929', in Gregory L. Freeze (ed.), *Russia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 307-340 (p. 334)

¹⁵ I.V. Glushchenko, 'The Soviet Educational Project: The Eradication of Adult Illiteracy in the 1920s-1930s', *Russian Social Science Review*, 57/5 (2016), pp. 378-414 (p. 381)

“Все население Республики в возрасте от 8 до 50 лет, не умеющее читать или писать, обязано обучаться грамоте на родном или русском языке, по желанию”.¹⁶

The fact that a choice was given between developing literacy in either Russian or one's native language demonstrates that in the early days of the Soviet Union, there was no preference for Russian being taught over other national languages. Instead, the focus was squarely on promoting literacy, regardless of whether Russian or the native language was chosen.

By contrast, the Stalinist period saw an increased focus on promoting Russian nationalism throughout the Soviet Union, which was accompanied by a period of linguistic Russification from the 1930s onwards.¹⁷ Policy makers introduced legislation aimed at making Russian the “de facto *lingua franca* of the Soviet state”,¹⁸ including the 1938 decree ‘Об обязательном изучении русского языка в школах национальных республик и областей’, which required Russian to be taught universally in national schools.¹⁹ Furthermore, the 1930s saw the “rehabilitation of the *russkii narod* by Stalin, the rewriting of national histories, the succession of purges in the republics, the official status given to the Russian language [...] and a series of

¹⁶ Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, ‘O likvidatsii bezgramatnosti sredi naseleniia RSFSR’, 1919. Available online: <http://projects.rusarchives.ru/statehood/08-41-dekret-bezgramotnost-1918.shtml> [last accessed 04.05.2021]

¹⁷ Jacob Ornstein, ‘Soviet Language Policy: Theory and Practice’, *The Slavic and East-European Journal*, 3/1 (1959), pp. 1-24 (p. 2)

¹⁸ Joan F. Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language: An Overview of Language Planning in the Russian Federation’, *Russian Language Journal*, 56 (2006), pp. 25-36 (p. 26)

¹⁹ Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, ‘Ob obiazatel'nom izuchenii russkogo iazyka v shkolakh natsional'nykh respublik i oblastei’, 1938. Available online: <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=ESU&n=23269#05222645893499793> [last accessed 07.05.2021]

language and alphabet reforms”.²⁰ All of this demonstrates a clear change in policy direction away from recognising and supporting national minorities and their language rights, and towards assimilation based on the Russian language.

Following this, Khrushchev “recognized the need to decentralize and shift power and responsibility to the republic level”,²¹ suggesting an approach akin to the *korenizatsiia* measures observed in the 1920s. However, the education law enacted in 1958 giving parents the right to choose whether their children would be educated in Russian or their native language “is said to have resulted in de facto Russification”,²² since parents typically associated a strong command of the Russian language with upward social mobility. With Brezhnev later declaring Russian to be “the language of inter-nationality communication in the building of communism”,²³ the numbers of indigenous languages other than Russian offered in national schools fell from 47 in the 1960s to just 17 by 1982, with numbers of people bilingual in Russian and another indigenous language increasing as a consequence.²⁴ These increased levels of bilingualism could represent the first stage of a language shift away from minority languages and towards Russian.

The perestroika reforms of the 1980s, by contrast, “empowered nationalities [...] to demand more autonomy, official predominance of the indigenous language [...] and ultimately total independence.”²⁵ As the principles of glasnost and perestroika took

²⁰ Jeremy Smith, ‘Was There a Soviet Nationality Policy?’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71/6 (2019), pp. 972-993 (p. 977)

²¹ Gregory L. Freeze, ‘From Stalinism to Stagnation 1953-1985’, in Gregory L. Freeze (ed.), *Russia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 406-450 (p. 412)

²² Gerda Mansour, *Multilingualism and Nation Building*, (Clevedon England: Multilingual Matters, 1993), p. 113

²³ Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language’, p. 26

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gregory L. Freeze, ‘A Modern ‘Time of Troubles’: From Reform to Disintegration, 1985-1999’, in Gregory L. Freeze (ed.), *Russia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 451-488 (p. 461-462)

root in Soviet society, issues of national identity and language rights re-emerged as political issues. Indeed, several studies have highlighted the importance of national languages in driving forward the national independence movements of the 1980s and 1990s, describing national language rights as “a rallying point for ethnolinguistic groups seeking to reclaim their identity”²⁶ and as “one of the main mobilising factors in the nationalist movements”.²⁷

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the Soviet Union’s language policy became increasingly focused “on the status of minority languages, guaranteeing language rights and granting titular republic languages legal status.”²⁸ For instance, the 1991 ‘Декларация прав и свобод человека’ (one of the last laws passed before the dissolution of the Soviet Union) protected the language rights of minority nationalities, with Article 4 declaring:

“Каждому человеку обеспечивается право на пользование родным языком, обучение на родном языке, сохранение и развитие национальной культуры.”²⁹

Laws of this nature underline the pressure on Soviet leaders to respond to the concerns raised by minority nationalities in the 1980s and early 1990s, which notably included “the fear of continuing language shift”³⁰ away from minority languages and towards Russian.

²⁶ Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language’, p. 29

²⁷ David Cashaback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation: A Case Study of Language Policy in Tatarstan’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 60/2 (2008), pp. 249-275 (p. 249)

²⁸ Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language’, p. 32

²⁹ Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, ‘Декларация прав и свобод человека’, 1991. Available online: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/901836567> [last accessed 14.02.2021]

³⁰ Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1

Nonetheless, by the 1990s, linguists deemed that “competence in Russian has enormously expanded and its dominant role as a *lingua franca* is generally not resisted.”³¹ Overall, this would suggest that the language policies implemented from the Stalinist period onwards, which focused on promoting Russian as ‘the language of intranational communication’, had a significant impact on language usage within the Soviet Union in terms of promoting increased levels of competency in Russian across the various nationality groups.

Contemporary language policy in the Russian Federation

With the various republics seceding from the Soviet Union and gaining their independence in the years from 1988 to 1991, the demographic makeup of the newly formed RF differed significantly to that of the Soviet ‘empire’, displaying a higher degree of both ethnic and linguistic homogeneity. While the last Soviet census conducted in 1989 found that *russkie* made up a little over half of the total Soviet population (50.7%),³² the first census conducted in the RF in 2002 found that *russkie* accounted for 79.8% of the population.³³ As such, changes taking place in the 1990s resulted in “a redefinition of the Russian nation [which] required that the Russian language serve as one of the nation’s and the state’s major symbols of power”.³⁴ This section will examine a number of recent changes to the RF’s language policy, which may be characterised as attempts to promote Russian as ‘the language of intranational communication’ in the RF today.

³¹ Mansour, *Multilingualism and Nation Building*, p. 115

³² Central Statistical Directorate of the USSR, ‘Naselenie SSSR’, 1989. Available online: <https://www.prlib.ru/item/350966> [last accessed 06.05.2021]

³³ Federal State Statistics Service, ‘Vserossiiskaia perepis’ naseleniia 2002 goda’. Available online: <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=78> [last accessed 06.05.2021]

³⁴ Ryazanova-Clarke, ‘The State Turning to Language’, p. 39

In the 1990s, immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF's approach to language policy was largely focused on ensuring minority language rights. This came at least partly in response to the strength of the "Tatar and Chechen nationalist movements, which voiced separatist demands in the 1990s".³⁵ For instance, the RF's constitution of 1993 granted the titular republics, including Tatarstan and Chechnya, the right to "establish their own state languages"³⁶ alongside Russian. This was enshrined in Article 68.2, which declared:

"Республики вправе устанавливать свои государственные языки."³⁷

Chevalier also draws attention to the provisions contained in the RF's constitution of 1993 with regard to "guaranteeing language rights and supporting the freedom of language choice in education, in communication and in the workplace".³⁸ This suggests an approach largely consistent with perestroika-era policies in terms of protecting and promoting minority language rights.

However, more recent developments illustrate how the priorities of the RF's language policy have changed in recent years, with the focus shifting away from protecting minority languages and towards promoting the dominant role of Russian. One particularly prominent law examined in existing literature is the 2005 law 'О государственном языке Российской Федерации', which focuses on the role of the Russian language in uniting the RF's various nationality groups and facilitating

³⁵ Jadwiga Rogoża, 'Russian Nationalism: Between Imperialism and Xenophobia', *European View*, 3/1 (2014), pp. 79-86 (p. 82)

³⁶ Cashaback, 'Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation', p. 256

³⁷ Russian Federation, *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, 2020. Article 68.2. Available online: <http://konstitucija.ru/1993/1/#03> [last accessed 03.04.2021]

³⁸ Chevalier, 'Russian as the National Language', p. 28

intranational communication. For instance, Article 1.4 defines the role of the Russian language as follows:

“Государственный язык Российской Федерации является языком, способствующим взаимопониманию, укреплению межнациональных связей народов Российской Федерации в едином многонациональном государстве.”³⁹

Given this focus on using the Russian language to unite the RF’s various nationality groups and create a unified, multinational state, the 2005 law ‘О государственном языке Российской Федерации’ could be seen as a precursor to the 2020 constitutional amendments, which evoke similar ideas about language, nation and statehood.

In response to the law ‘О государственном языке Российской Федерации’, linguists judged that the “Russian administration felt it most necessary to intensify the symbolic connection between state power and language”.⁴⁰ This would suggest that the Russian language has become a tool used to construct Russian statehood and a sense of intranational unity in the RF. While the 2005 law alludes to the RF’s ethnic diversity, it is clear that its focus is on promoting the Russian language as a means of strengthening intranational relations, with no regard given to the role played by minority national languages. Indeed, Article 5 of the law cements the right of all RF citizens to be educated in Russian, prompting Chevalier to describe the 2005 law as an attempt “to re-establish Russian’s status as the supranational language of the Russian Federation”.⁴¹ As such, the law could be interpreted as a sign that the Russian

³⁹ Russian Federation, ‘О государственном языке Российской Федерации’, 2005, Article 1.4

⁴⁰ Ryazanova-Clarke, ‘The State Turning to Language’, p. 38

⁴¹ Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language’, p. 32

authorities intend to use language as “a construction to shape national identity and serve the state”.⁴²

Following this, the 2012 law ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’ contained a focus on the language of instruction in the RF’s schools, with Article 14.1 guaranteeing the right to a Russian-language education in all state schools:

“В Российской Федерации гарантируется получение образования на государственном языке Российской Федерации.”⁴³

While the law makes provision for the teaching of other languages, including the state languages of the titular republics, there is once again a clear focus on promoting Russian, with Article 14.3 requiring that the learning of other languages must not be to the detriment of Russian:

“Преподавание и изучение государственных языков республик Российской Федерации не должны осуществляться в ущерб преподаванию и изучению государственного языка Российской Федерации.”⁴⁴

This demonstrates a concerted effort by the federal authorities to establish Russian as “the default language of instruction”⁴⁵ throughout the RF and grant it precedence over other state languages spoken in the republics.

Moreover, the measures contained within the 2012 law ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’ appear to be consistent with the overall direction of the RF’s

⁴² Ryazanova-Clarke, ‘The State Turning to Language’, p. 40

⁴³ Russian Federation, ‘Ob obrazovanii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, 2012, Article 14.1

⁴⁴ Russian Federation, ‘Ob obrazovanii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, 2012, Article 14.3

⁴⁵ Paola Bocale, ‘Trends and issues in language policy and language education in Crimea’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 58/1 (2016), pp. 3-22 (p. 15)

education policy in recent years when it comes to the languages offered in schools. For instance, a 2018 report by the Council of Europe into the treatment of national minorities in the RF suggests that the measures contained in this law are reflected in current education provision, stating that:

“Education of and in minority languages has decreased considerably [...] A uniform approach and an emphasis on the Russian language continue to characterise education reforms.”⁴⁶

It is perhaps unsurprising that the federal government’s attempts at ensuring the widespread use of Russian have focused on education reforms in recent years. Joseph highlights the importance of education in national language policy, stating that “it is through education that language and national identity are created, performed and above all reproduced.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Bocale contends that “language education in schools is central to the implementation of hegemonic language ideologies that favour assimilation and monolingualism.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the 2012 law ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’ and its accompanying efforts towards promoting the teaching of Russian over minority languages suggests that the federal government intends to impose a certain level of both linguistic and cultural hegemony in the RF.

Subsequently, in 2014, the Russian government published a federal programme concerning the Russian language for the period 2016-2020. The central aim of the programme, similarly to Soviet aims examined previously, appears to be consolidating

⁴⁶ Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ‘Fourth Opinion on the Russian Federation’, 2018. Available online: <https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-the-russian-federation-english-langu/1680908982> [last accessed 28.01.2021]

⁴⁷ Joseph, *Language and Politics*, p. 49

⁴⁸ Bocale, ‘Trends and issues in language policy and language education in Crimea’, p. 10

Russian's role as 'the language of intranational communication'. For instance, an explicit priority of the programme is:

“Реализацию функции русского языка как государственного языка и как языка межнационального общения”.⁴⁹

The repeated use of the phrase 'язык межнационального общения' throughout this programme makes clear the federal government's intention to promote the use of Russian across all of the RF's nationality groups. Additionally, the 2014 programme describes strengthening the position of the Russian language as a strategic priority for the RF:

“Укрепление позиции русского языка является стратегическим приоритетом Российской Федерации.”⁵⁰

This further highlights the political importance of promoting the Russian language, making it unsurprising that the Russian authorities are ready to take additional measures, including constitutional amendments, to establish the state-building role of the Russian language at the official level.

Similarly, this emphasis on promoting Russian as 'the language of intranational communication' is evident in speeches made by the RF's political leaders. For instance, in a 2017 address, Vladimir Putin stressed the importance of learning Russian, declaring that:

“Русский язык для нас – язык государственный, язык межнационального общения [...] Его знать должен каждый”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Russian Federation, 'Kontsepsiia federal'noi tselevoi programmy "Russkii iazyk" na 2016 – 2020 gody'. Available online: <https://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/13/fcp2016.pdf> [last accessed 11.03.2021]

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Vladimir Putin, 'Zasedanie Soveta po mezhnatsional'nym otnosheniiam', 2017. Available online: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55109> [last accessed 06.05.2021]

Here, Russian is referred to yet again as the ‘язык межнационального общения’, alongside the suggestion that everyone should speak it, pointing to its importance in developing a sense of unity at the state level. The speech also includes a focus on language policy in education, with Putin contending that:

“Заставляет человека учить язык, который для него родным не является, так же недопустимо, как и снижать уровень и время преподавания русского.”⁵²

Once more, it is clear that while there is legal space for learning minority national languages in the RF, the focus is squarely on the Russian language – any study of other languages must not be to the detriment of the standard of Russian taught in schools.

Case study: The linguistic situation in the Republic of Tatarstan

As previously discussed, current language policy in the RF has focused on the status of the Russian language, with minority languages given a subordinate position at the federal level, notably in schools. However, to build a fuller understanding of how language usage has been affected by these measures, it is worth considering the linguistic situation at the republic level. Article 65 of the Russian constitution declares that 22 republics are subjects of the RF.⁵³ These republics are granted considerable powers, including the right to establish their own state language(s).

The Republic of Tatarstan is one of the republics in which the titular nationality group (Tatars) constitutes the majority of the population. The last census conducted in 2010

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Russian Federation, *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, 2020, Article 65

found that ethnic Tatars accounted for 53.2% of Tatarstan's population; *russkie* were the second largest ethnic group making up 39.7% of the republic's population.⁵⁴ Given this demographic makeup, it makes sense that both Russian and Tatar are recognised as equal, official state languages in Tatarstan, with Article 8 of the republic's constitution declaring:

“Государственными языками в Республике Татарстан являются равноправные татарский и русский языки.”⁵⁵

However, it would seem that the legal equality of Russian and Tatar granted by Tatarstan's constitution is not reflected in real-world usage. Indeed, Cashaback contends that “strong contradictions exist between the status and the functions of the Tatar language.”⁵⁶ As the native language of 50.4% of the population, Tatar is the most widely spoken native language in Tatarstan, ahead of Russian, which is the native language of 44.2%.⁵⁷ In terms of overall speakers, however, Russian is spoken almost universally by 97.6% of Tatarstan's population, way ahead of Tatar, which is spoken by 52.1%. Therefore, the data suggest that Russian continues to act as a *lingua franca* in the diverse, multilingual Republic of Tatarstan.

Moreover, examining the data by nationality group reveals how language proficiency differs between ethnic Tatars and *russkie* in Tatarstan. Figure 1 below shows that while 95.8% of Tatars speak Russian, a mere 3.6% of *russkie* living in the republic speak the Tatar language. As such, bilingualism in Russian and Tatar seems to be the

⁵⁴ Tatarstanstat, ‘Vserossiiskaia perepis’ naseleniia 2010’. Available online: <https://tatstat.gks.ru/folder/39222> [last accessed 01.05.2021]

⁵⁵ Republic of Tatarstan, *Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan*, 2012. Available online: https://minjust.tatarstan.ru/konstitutsiya.htm?pub_id=1084014.htm [last accessed 01.05.2021]

⁵⁶ Cashaback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation’, p. 262

⁵⁷ Tatarstanstat, ‘Vserossiiskaia perepis’ naseleniia 2010’

norm for ethnic Tatars in the republic, while levels of Russian-Tatar bilingualism are staggeringly low among *russkie*. This reflects the primacy of the Russian language throughout the RF, even in titular republics like Tatarstan where native Russian speakers are not in the majority.

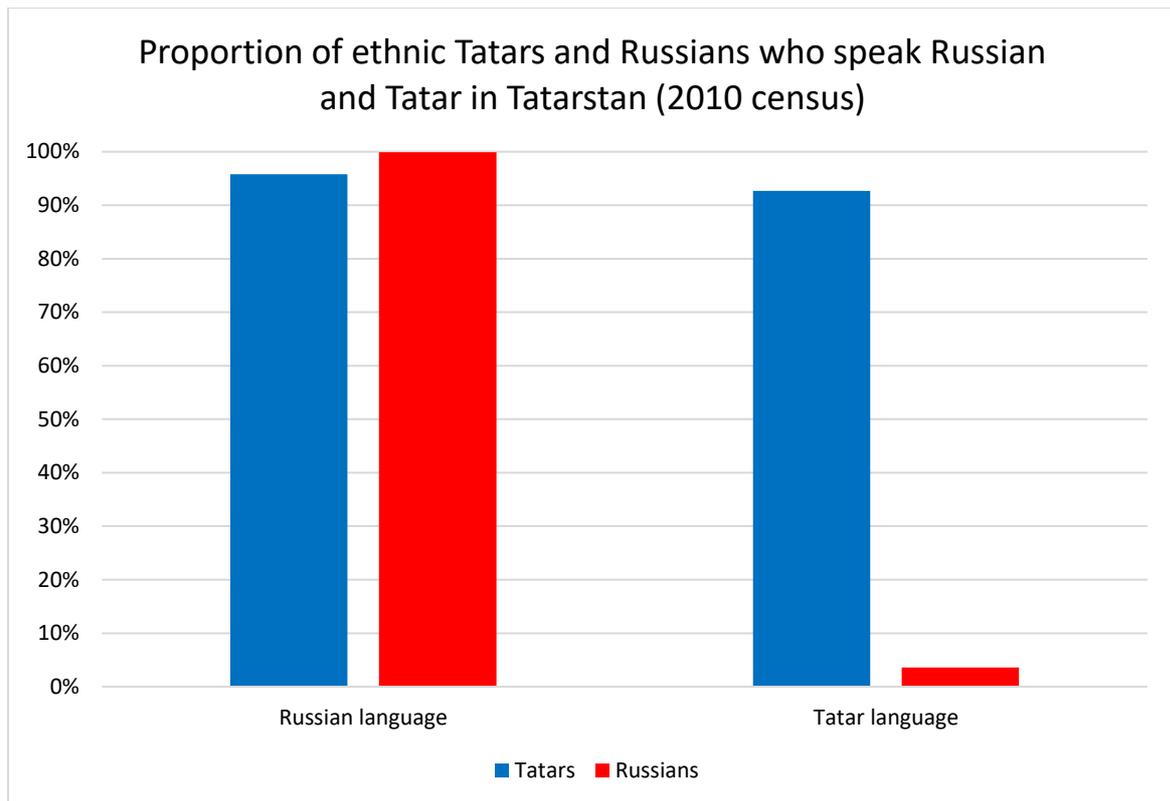


Figure 1

Data from Tatarstanstat, 'Vserossiiskaia perepis' naseleniia 2010'. Available online: <https://tatstat.gks.ru/folder/39222> (last accessed 01.05.2021).

To understand why this is the case, the development of Tatarstan's linguistic situation can be mapped alongside developments in language policy in the Soviet Union and the RF. As previously discussed, the perestroika era saw the growth of national independence movements, with national languages serving as valuable "symbols of

independence”.⁵⁸ Tatarstan’s relationship with the Tatar language proved no exception to this. Indeed, in the early 1990s, “Tatar nationalists saw official language status for Tatar as the cornerstone of an ambitious cultural revival programme.”⁵⁹ This was achieved in Article 3 of Tatarstan’s ‘Декларация о государственном суверенитете’ of 1990, which declared the equality of the Tatar and Russian languages in the republic:

“В Татарской ССР гарантируется равноправное функционирование татарского и русского языков”.⁶⁰

Since then, the government of Tatarstan has worked consistently to put the Tatar and Russian languages on an equal footing through language policies enacted at the republic level. For example, Article 6 of Tatarstan’s 1993 law ‘Об образовании’ included a focus on the language of instruction used in schools, declaring that:

“Татарский и русский языки в общеобразовательных учреждениях и учреждениях начального и среднего профессионального образования изучаются в равных объемах”.⁶¹

This requirement for Tatar and Russian to be studied in equal amounts saw an increase in the numbers of Tatar children enrolled at Tatar language pre-schools from 23.5% in 1992 to 70% in 1999.⁶² This suggests that efforts at promoting Tatar language learning were received positively by Tatar parents, who increasingly opted for Tatar language education for their children.

⁵⁸ Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, *The Russian Language Outside the Nation: Speakers and Identities*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 5

⁵⁹ Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation*, p. 93

⁶⁰ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘Декларация о государственном суверенитете Татарской Советской Социалистической Республики’, 1990, Article 3

⁶¹ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘Об образовании’, 1993, Article 6.2

⁶² Cashback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation’, p. 260

Recent laws further demonstrate Tatarstan's focus on promoting the status and usage of the Tatar language. For instance, the 2013 law 'Об использовании татарского языка как государственного языка Республики Татарстан' makes clear the Tatar government's intention to protect and promote the status of the Tatar language and the rights of its citizens to use the Tatar language:

“Настоящий Закон направлен на обеспечение использования татарского языка как государственного языка на всей территории Республики Татарстан, обеспечение права граждан на пользование татарским языком как государственным языком, защиту и развитие татарской языковой культуры, сохранение преемственности исторических традиций письменности татарского народа”.⁶³

This clearly shows the link in the minds of Tatarstan's policy makers between promoting the rights of their citizens to use the Tatar language and protecting Tatar national culture.

Furthermore, the Republic of Tatarstan devises language programmes on a regular basis, which unambiguously lay out current language policy priorities. For instance, the most recent programme published in 2020 for the period 2023-2030 contained several measures aimed at promoting both the status and usage of the Tatar language, with goals including:

⁶³ Republic of Tatarstan, 'Ob ispol'zovanii tatarskogo iazyka kak gosudarstvennogo iazyka Respubliki Tatarstan', 2013. Available online: http://old.gossov.tatarstan.ru/dokument/pasport_zak/2013/1_zrt [last accessed 09.04.2021]

- “Поддержка паритетного функционирования русского и татарского языков как государственных языков Республики Татарстан”;
- “Развитие целостной системы изучения татарского и русского языков”⁶⁴

This clearly demonstrates that the equal functioning of the Tatar and Russian languages remains a priority for Tatarstan’s leaders today. The programme also sets ambitious targets to increase the visibility of the Tatar language in the republic. For example, it reports that in 2019, 75% of street signs were bilingual; it aims for this figure to increase to 94% by 2030.⁶⁵ This shows that Tatarstan’s government is taking active measures to promote the presence of the Tatar language in the republic.

Nonetheless, over recent years, federal language policy has had a clear impact on the linguistic situation in Tatarstan, prompting criticism from Tatar officials. Interviews conducted by Cashaback revealed that Tatar officials feel that Moscow offers a “lack of support for minority languages in general.”⁶⁶ Indeed, Tatarstan’s aforementioned language programme outlines some of the challenges encountered in fulfilling the programme’s aims. Interestingly, criticism centres around measures put in place by the RF’s federal government, with the programme drawing attention to:

⁶⁴ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘Gosudarstvennaia programma “Sokhranenie, izuchenie i razvitie gosudarstvennykh iazykov Respubliki Tatarstan i drugikh iazykov v Respublike Tatarstan na 2023-2030 gody”’, 2020, p. 2. Available online: <https://kitaphane.tatarstan.ru/file/kitaphane/File/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BC%D0%B0%20%D1%8F%D0%B7%D1%8B%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%A0%D0%A2%20.pdf> [last accessed 10.03.2021]

⁶⁵ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘Gosudarstvennaia programma “Sokhranenie, izuchenie i razvitie gosudarstvennykh iazykov Respubliki Tatarstan i drugikh iazykov v Respublike Tatarstan na 2023-2030 gody”’, 2020, p. 50

⁶⁶ Cashaback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation’, p. 257

- “Отсутствие целевых федеральных программ по сохранению языков народов Российской Федерации”;
- “Изменения федерального законодательства об образовании в части изучения родных языков”.⁶⁷

This would suggest a certain level of discontent from Tatarstan’s policy makers towards the federal language policies examined previously, such as the 2012 law ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’, which made clear the primacy of Russian over other national languages like Tatar in the RF’s schools.

Furthermore, in 2017, it was reported that changes made to the federal curriculum had placed a weekly limit of two hours on the time that could be spent studying state languages other than Russian in schools:⁶⁸

“Возможность изучения государственных языков республик добровольно, на основе письменного согласия родителей учащихся в пределах до 2 часов неделю.”⁶⁹

This clearly shows the approach of the RF’s federal authorities to be at odds with the priorities of Tatarstan’s government. While the Tatar authorities would like to see a situation of equality between the Russian and Tatar languages, this seems largely unachievable given restrictions placed on studying languages other than Russian under current federal legislation.

⁶⁷ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘Gosudarstvennaia programma “Sokhranenie, izuchenie i razvitiie gosudarstvennykh iazykov Respubliki Tatarstan i drugikh iazykov v Respublike Tatarstan na 2023-2030 gody”’, p. 10-11

⁶⁸ Kirill Antonov and Sof’ia Samokhina. ‘Tatarstan stoit na svoem iazyke’, *Kommersant’* [website], <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3600958> [last accessed 10.03.2021]

⁶⁹ BBC Russian Service, ‘Bez iazyka: Kazan’ otkazalas’ ot obiazatel’nykh urokov tatarskogo’, BBC News [website], <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42186885> [last accessed 04.03.2021]

A final example that illustrates the tension between language policy aims at the federal and republic levels is the script used to write the Tatar language. Since the Stalinist era, “the preferred route was to make the non-Russian languages more similar to Russian”,⁷⁰ which was achieved with the imposition of the Cyrillic script throughout the Soviet Union in 1938 and increased borrowings from Russian into other languages.⁷¹ However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and increased nationalist sentiment in the titular republics, delegates at the 1996 All-World Tatar Congress “voted unanimously in favour of script reform”,⁷² demonstrating a desire to break from the Cyrillic script associated with a policy of linguistic Russification. Indeed, in 1999, Tatarstan passed the law ‘О восстановлении татарского алфавита на основе латинской графики’, setting out a new Tatar alphabet based on the Latin script.⁷³

However, this policy of alphabet reform became an “object of increasing opposition within the rest of Russia”.⁷⁴ The federal response to Tatarstan’s proposals makes clear that the Cyrillic script is still linked to wider language policy goals, with a change to federal law in 2002 requiring that all state languages of the republics be written using a Cyrillic alphabet:

“В Российской Федерации алфавиты государственного языка Российской Федерации и государственных языков республик строятся на графической основе кириллицы.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Juliette Cadiot, ‘Russia Learns to Write: Slavistics, Politics, and the Struggle to Redefine Empire in the Early 20th Century’, *Kritika*, 9/1 (2008), pp. 135-167, p. 166

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Cashaback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation’, p. 264

⁷³ Republic of Tatarstan, ‘O vosstanovlenii tatarskogo alfavita na osnove latinskoi grafiki’, 1999. Available online: http://1997-2011.tatarstan.ru/index.html@node_id=1005.html [last accessed 26.03.2021]

⁷⁴ Cashaback, ‘Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation’ p. 265

⁷⁵ Russian Federation, ‘O iazykakh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, 2002, Article 3.6. Available online: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102012883> [last accessed 11.05.2021]

This change in law demonstrates the federal government's commitment to combat any perceived move away from Russification at the linguistic level. Although Tatar officials claimed the move was due to the phonology of the Tatar language, arguing that a "Latin-based alphabet more faithfully renders the sounds of Tatar,"⁷⁶ the federal government seemed to take quite a different standpoint, prompting Ryazanova-Clarke to conclude that "the issue of the alphabet is a matter of Russia's territorial unity."⁷⁷

Conclusion

To conclude, we have seen that the amendments made to the RF's constitution in 2020 are largely consistent with both historical and more recent trends in Russian language policy. From a historical perspective, both the intention and wording of the amended Article 68 are evocative of earlier Soviet policies, under which "Russian became known as *jazyk meznacionalnogo obsčeniya* [...] or even more pompously as *istočnik razvitija i obgasčeniya jazykov narodov SSSR*".⁷⁸ An examination of language policies from the Stalinist period onwards has demonstrated that the Soviet authorities' focus was squarely on promoting Russian, even if this had a detrimental impact on the usage of other languages. Nonetheless, the era of perestroika and, ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that the 1980s and 1990s saw renewed interest among the emerging nationalist movements in promoting their national languages as "symbols of independence".⁷⁹ This was reflected in the language policies pursued in the RF's early years, such as the 1991 law 'О языках народов Российской

⁷⁶ Cashaback, 'Assessing Asymmetrical Federal Design in the Russian Federation', p. 265

⁷⁷ Ryazanova-Clarke, 'The State Turning to Language', p. 45

⁷⁸ Carmichael, 'Coming to Terms with the Past', p. 270

⁷⁹ Ryazanova-Clarke, *The Russian Language Outside the Nation*, p. 5

Федерации’, which “provided a legal basis, at least in theory, for multilingualism within the Russian Federation”.⁸⁰

However, an examination of legislation from the 21st century has revealed a notable change in policy direction. More recently, the federal government of the RF has shown renewed interest in promoting Russian as the ‘language of intranational communication’, with attention focused on strengthening Russian’s role as the *lingua franca* of the RF rather than promoting linguistic diversity.

While Russia’s constitution continues to allow the titular republics to establish their own state languages, with Article 68.2 stating: “Республики вправе устанавливать свои государственные языки”,⁸¹ there does appear to be some discrepancy between legislation and reality. The case study of language policy in Tatarstan has demonstrated that while republics may aim to take full advantage of their right to linguistic self-determination, the approach of federal government has, in practice, not been fully supportive of minority language rights. This was particularly well-illustrated by the two-hour limit placed on learning state languages other than Russian in changes made to the federal curriculum in 2017.⁸² It seems, therefore, that efforts to actively promote languages other than Russian today come from the titular republics’ governments rather than the federal government. However, a future study may benefit from examining developments in language policy across a greater number of the titular republics to ascertain whether Tatarstan’s experience is unique or universal across the RF.

⁸⁰ Chevalier, ‘Russian as the National Language’, p. 27

⁸¹ Russian Federation, Constitution, Article 68.2

⁸² BBC Russian Service, ‘Bez iazyka’ [website]

Ultimately, the amendments made to the constitution in 2020 are significant in that they cement the link between the Russian language, the state, and national identity. Once again, this is not without precedent. In a 2018 presidential order, Vladimir Putin declared:

“Современное российское общество объединяет единый культурный (цивилизационный) код, который основан на сохранении и развитии русской культуры и языка”.⁸³

Conflating the ideas of *rossiiskoi* (referring to the RF state) and *russkii* (referring to the Russian nation) in this manner points to an underlying aim of contemporary Russian language policy: promoting Russian as ‘the language of intranational communication’ to create a unifying sense of national identity for the RF as a whole.

⁸³ Vladimir Putin, ‘O vnesenii izmenenii v Strategiiu gosudarstvennoi natsional’noi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2025 goda’, 2018. Available online: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43843> [last accessed 11.03.2021]

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