

THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE PLANNING:  
LESSONS FOR AND FROM THE SOVIET UNION

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Prepared for delivery at the Eighth National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, St. Louis, Missouri, 6-9 October, 1976.

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### 1. The Field of Language Planning

Language, like politics, is an object of ambivalence, whether viewed normatively or descriptively. One side of language is its widely recognized autonomy. Normatively, we think of it as a living organism, something that should not be interfered with, meddled with, violated, or abused. Descriptively, we closely associate it with other phenomena, such as nationality, but most as the determiner rather than the follower. The autonomy of language has been reaffirmed by two recent currents of linguistic scholarship which are otherwise hostile to each other. The school of linguistic relativity, represented most forcefully by Whorf, holds that languages of different families bring about fundamentally different world-views in their speakers, while not being subject to much influence by nonlinguistic conditions.[1] Structural and generative-grammar linguistics, who predominate in the study of language today in the United States and many other countries, while denying this power of language to shape thought or culture, still agree that language is fairly immune to influences by them, and even resistant to deliberate manipulation by public authorities.[2]

Yet language is also an instrument for achieving human purposes. As such, languages have always been created, revived, destroyed, changed, adapted, and manipulated. Throughout history, most people have been standardistically and hierarchically oriented toward language: they have wanted to be told (or to tell others) what forms are correct, incorrect, or taboo, and which languages are better than which other languages. People have rebelled at the idea that one might equally well say either this or that. There has been a general tendency to standardize pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and other aspects of prescriptive grammar. The notion of language as instrument is nowhere better exemplified than in the age-old drive to invent languages for special purposes. According to the most complete bibliography to date, from the second century to 1973 a total of 912 artificial languages for international communication were devised and published; no one knows how many others never reached the printing press.[3]

Political intervention in the process of linguistic change has been traced back as far as the fifth century B.C., [4] but the importance of deliberate language planning has undoubtedly risen in recent years. The need for such planning can be explained by the expansion of mass education, the mobilization and integration of diverse ethnic groups in industrial economies, the expansion of political participation to all adults, the extension of norms of equality and non-discrimination to ever more kinds of social categories, and the ongoing revolution in communications technology that will soon give everyone a technical opportunity to communicate cheaply with everyone else in the world, leaving language, together with politics, as the main obstacle. [5] At the same time, the possibility of language planning has grown with our improving understanding of language and language behavior. We now know much more about language varieties, linguistic stratification, language learning, language attitudes, language universals, and the organization of successful language policy than we did only a decade ago. We also know more about the methods for filling in the gaps in our knowledge: advances in sociolinguistic questionnaire design and innovative experimental methods like the matched

guise technique have made intelligent language planning considerably more feasible and monitorable.

Language planning has several kinds, objects, and stages. The main kinds have been called "language status planning" and "language corpus planning."<sup>[6]</sup> Language status planning deals with the statuses, roles, and functions of languages in society. Choices among several languages made by speakers or writers may be affected by this kind of planning. It includes policies selecting an official or working language or a language of instruction, policies toward speakers of a minority language or dialect, and policies establishing linguistic prerequisites for admission to schools, professions, or the franchise. Language corpus planning deals not with choices among several languages, but with the corpus, i.e. the content and structure, of one or more languages themselves. Corpus planning affects the vocabularies, sound systems, word structures, sentence structures, writing systems, and stylistic repertoires of languages. It is aimed not at which language a person uses, but at how he uses the one he uses. Most comprehensive language policies involve both kinds of planning. In India, for example, announced government policy is not only to make Hindi gradually replace English as the domestic lingua franca, but also to use Sanskrit as the principal source of lexical enrichment for Hindi, rather than importing new vocabulary from English, Russian, other Indian languages, etc.

Three different types of languages may be the objects of language planning. The type that has received the most attention is natural languages. This term refers to languages spoken by human beings and perpetuated by being acquired as native languages by children, but it is also (and here will be) extended to include languages without many or any native speakers that have come into existence in a spontaneous fashion. This term, then, includes what Stewart has called standard, classical, vernacular, dialect, creole, and pidgin languages.<sup>[7]</sup> The second type is artificial languages; these are invented either a priori or a posteriori (i.e. not based or based on any natural languages, respectively) by an individual or a committee, but can subsequently be, and sometimes are, used as media of communication in the same ways that natural languages are. The third type is what Cherry calls "sign systems."<sup>[8]</sup> These, like artificial languages, are devised by individuals or committees, but they are unlike either of the two other types because sign systems are limited to particular semantic domains and are, within those domains, unambiguous. Typically, sign systems are also used only in written form.<sup>[9]</sup>

Language planning also has more than one stage. As Haugen says, "In any movement for change one may distinguish initiation from implementation..."<sup>[10]</sup> In the field of language planning, it would be appropriate to strengthen this statement by changing "may" to "must." Some language changes can be accomplished by formal decisions, such as the establishment of an official language or orthography. Others are changes in human behavior, such as language learning or speech habits.

## 2. The Goals of Language Planning

What makes people want to engage in language planning? The practitioners and proponents of this activity aim at various benefits. One is unity: bringing a linguistically diverse collectivity into communicational or emotional, and often hence into political and economic, togetherness. We see the force

of this purpose especially in new or revolutionized states whose leaders perceive a need to build a nation to correspond with political boundaries.

The converse goal is distinctiveness: a linguistic difference between one collectivity and another. National and ethnic leaders often use language planning to reduce their citizens' loyalties to another place (e.g. Moldavia vis-à-vis Rumania, Wales vis-à-vis the United Kingdom, Québec vis-à-vis Canada), another group (e.g. Urdu vs. Hindi, Croatian vs. Serbian, Sephardi vs. Ashkenazi), or another time (e.g. the Republic of Turkey vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, the USSR vis-à-vis the Russian Empire, Oceania vis-à-vis Britain). This common type of linguistic differentiation attests to the perception that a nation requires not just a common language, but also a distinct one. Yet language planners also seek at times to create distinctions within their countries on linguistic bases, such as elite-mass distinctions.

A third goal of language planning is communicational power. A language can be empowered to serve in a wider domain than before, by the development of its technical vocabulary. It can be reformed to make it more precise, i.e. less ambiguous. And it can be enriched with expressions that convey much meaning without much effort. Thus the introduction of the phrase "Achilles' heel" from Russian into Azerbaijani is described as enrichment by one scholar, presumably because it allows the easy expression of a complex concept;[11] whereas George Orwell in 1945 attacked this same phrase in English as a "lump of verbal refuse [belonging in] the dustbin..."[12] on the ground that it had lost its (once great) power to communicate information.

Related to communicational power as a language-planning goal is efficiency, the ratio of benefits to costs in learning or using a language. It is more efficient for the commonest words to be the shortest, for example. Chinese writing efficiency has been increased by the simplification of characters. The efficiency with which a language can be learned depends on its regularity. Thus spelling reform or the elimination of irregular verbs might increase the efficiency of a language.[13] Efficiency can also be changed by increasing or decreasing the amount of redundancy in a language, since there is a trade-off between the increased cost of communicating and the increased reliability of the communicated message that both come with heightened redundancy.

Beauty and other aesthetic qualities (elegance, symmetry, etc.) are also goals in language planning. Aesthetic standards are often related to the typical distinctive qualities of the language in question, so that the pursuit of beauty results in emphasizing what is unique in the language, but there may be universally valued aesthetic qualities as well, such as brevity, rhythmicness, and variety,[14] whose pursuit would tend to make languages more similar instead.

Naturally, each of these goals, if achieved, can lead to other effects. These by-products of language planning are often in fact among its chief motivations. Linguistic unity and distinctiveness can strengthen a country. Elite-mass linguistic stratification can protect an elite against competition from upwardly mobile citizens. The development of an indigenous language in technical vocabulary can make mass education possible for the first time. Reforms in the writing system of a language can have effects on the level of literacy. Thus language planning is undertaken for various purposes, only some of which are linguistic.

### 3. The Limits of Language Planning

Remembering the hypothesis that language is autonomous, we must ask how far language planning can go in achieving these kinds of goals. To answer this question fully, we need more knowledge than we have, but at least some kinds of limits can be described. Much language behavior is exceedingly difficult to influence--so difficult that even those who push for or push through an in-principle decision may find themselves failing to conform to it at the same time as they are trying to bring the whole society into compliance. Thus we find some Turkish opponents of puristic vocabulary using that vocabulary in their attacks on it,[15] some advocates of genderless third-person singular pronouns in English continuing to use "he" and "she," and some persons asserting that Esperanto is easy to learn who have not managed to learn it. It is not that language is difficult to change, since it changes all the time, but rather that slowing, speeding, or changing the changes in language is not necessarily easy, even when there is a consensus on goals.

One limit is imposed by the rate at which people can learn. Language planning always involves learning and unlearning. Status planning means that people must learn entirely different languages, and corpus planning means that they must learn different words or forms within a language that they already know. Assimilating such changes takes time and imposes an opportunity cost, since linguistic learning takes place at the expense of other kinds of learning. One observer has argued that the attempt to teach both substance and language at the same time results, in practice, in the learning of the language without the learning of the substance.[16] If the public authorities attempt to push language learning faster than the natural limit, existing information in the minds of the targets may be unnecessarily destroyed, with harmful consequences for them.[17] The speed of language learning has been surprisingly resistant to improvement, although much applied research has gone into the attempt. In fact, the conclusions of such research continue to point to natural immersion rather than any particular teaching methodology as the most effective language teacher.

Language planning is probably limited not only in the speed of the changes it can accomplish, but also in the nature of these changes. Linguists have been collecting information on "language universals," i.e. characteristics that all or nearly all languages share. They have argued that the existence of such universals is a prima facie case for innate orientations in the human mind predisposing us to accept only certain linguistic forms. Universals have been discovered in semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology, i.e. in all basic aspects of language. If this assumption is correct, then language corpus planning is effectively constrained to obey these universal characteristics of language. A planner wanting to infuse his language with technical terms consisting of ternary compounds, for example, would be expected to find his proposals resisted, since compounding at each level is almost always binary in the languages of the world.[18] In language reform activity, the tendency to apply analogies probably keeps proposed changes within the bounds established by language universals. But an examination of all the proposed artificial international languages would certainly reveal many that violate these norms.

Linguistic changes may also be limited by the systemic nature of each language. Even if a proposed change in a language does not contravene a linguistic universal, it may violate such a fundamental rule of the particular language as to be, for practical purposes, impossible. Attempts to infuse one

language with elements from another may be foiled if they differ in major systemic ways, such as if one is tonal and the other atonal, one isolating (a separate word for each unit of meaning) and the other polysynthetic (combining many units of meaning into a word), or one left-embedding and the other right-embedding (referring to the direction of syntactic modification).

In addition to absolute limits on language planning, conditional constraints are imposed by its costs. One kind of cost is borne in fulfilling the prerequisites for the implementation of a given language policy. For example, there is some reason to believe that language behavior will not change unless facilitative attitudes are developed.[19] Changing mass attitudes is costly and sometimes impossible. Costs are also incurred in making and administering language policy. Feasibility studies are often expensive; so little is known about how to simulate society-wide language change that major attitudinal, behavioral, and institutional surveys are required in addition to linguistic analyses. Administration involves massive activities to codify, promulgate, teach, and monitor the observance of language rules, whether of corpus or status.

Still another kind of cost is the unwanted effects of language planning. There may be conflicts among the several goals of a program of language policy. For example, linguistic protection of the elite from the masses is incompatible with national linguistic homogeneity. Aesthetic variety conflicts with efficient uniformity.[20] National distinctiveness requires added efforts to find substitutes for foreign terms that contribute to communicative power.

Some kind of unwanted contact or isolation is another price of most language planning. Policies that connect a country to the world by adopting a foreign language for official purposes tend to isolate the educated minority of the country from the rest of its population and connect the elite with foreign influences. Conversely, policies that link elites and masses tend to parochialize the elites. A policy of orthographic preservation maintains ties with the literature of the past but isolates the written from the contemporary spoken tongue; a policy of adapting the written language does the opposite.

Discrimination is also a likely by-product of language planning. Those doing the planning often make decisions that advantage themselves as political leaders or the members of the ethnic groups they come from. If their planning is populistically motivated, it will still give preference to some groups over others, in general. One dialect will be selected over others as the base of a standard language; one language will be selected as the official one. Attempts to represent everyone equally in substantive language policy are not likely to succeed, because languages cannot be divided and recombined as some resources can. Although it might seem that one way out of this dilemma is to have no policy at all, that option too is probably foreclosed. In multilingual situations, differentiation as to language is unavoidable." [21]

A final price paid for language planning is often conflict. People disagree vehemently not only about how language planning ought to proceed, but also about whether language planning of any kind is legitimate. The willingness to compromise on language is not widespread; persons totally opposed to any kind of linguistic engineering are often ranged against radical perfectionists who will settle for nothing less than the ideal (for them) language. As Rustow says,

On matters of economic policy and social expenditures you can always split the difference. . . . But there is no middle position between Flemish and French as official languages, or between Calvinism, Catholicism, and secularism as principles of education. The best you can get here is a . . . log-rolling deal whereby some government offices speak French and some Flemish . . . . Such a solution may partly depoliticize the question. Yet it also entrenches the differences instead of removing them, and accordingly it may convert political conflict into a form of trench warfare.[22]

The conflict between groups like these, and between ethnic and socioeconomic groups differentially affected by specific language policies, will be reduced to the extent that language planning is professionalized and hence removed from the political arena. The existence of language planning as a scholarly field with experts may help to reduce such conflict, but so far these experts have been isolated from the linguistic mainstream.

To these may be added an additional reason for expecting language politics to be acrimonious. In language politics, interest groups are also communication groups, if one makes the plausible assumption that interests are determined largely by the existing language repertoires of the people involved. Those on one side of a language issue are able to communicate only, or better, with each other; they are relatively isolated from those on the other side. Since coalitions rarely form across communication barriers,[23] this pattern reinforces the language conflict. This is compounded by the fact that mass media communicators have a particular interest in the outcome of language issues, since any change in the linguistic status quo can affect their careers and business interests immensely. So those on one side of a language conflict not only are more exposed to communications from their own side, but also are particularly likely to receive anti-compromise messages in this communication network.

The difficulty of resolving language conflicts will be especially great where language groups function as separate constituencies. It may be more efficient to carve out linguistically homogeneous constituencies for politics in general, but on language policy such a political map will lead to the escalation of polemics and the emergence of a stalemate. Naur makes this point with respect both to artificial languages and to sign systems, each of which has its own committee with, he argues, a vested interest in keeping its system different from all others rather than borrowing the best from others and promoting rapprochement.[24]

It is tempting to view voluntarism as a conflict-reducing policy, but also misleading. If language policy provides for many options, it avoids coercion. Citizens may choose freely, for example, which language to speak or which term to use for a particular concept. By leaving options open, policymakers can hope that impersonal tendencies will lead to uniformity, for which no one can blame them. Whenever agreement is unreachable, leaving the choice optional is an easy way out. On the other hand, options may be euphemisms for what Rustow calls "trench warfare" if different options are selected by mutually isolated language groups. Selecting a particular option can become a code for adherence to a particular side of the cleavage, just as is the case in other policy arenas ("Ms.", "Black", "right to work", "pig", etc.).[25] Because language learning proceeds slowly, people can be expected to take advantage of options, if they exist, to keep doing whatever they are used to, and desired changes may be postponed ad infinitum. Meanwhile, divergent language behaviors may strengthen divergent attitudes. Furthermore, it seems that optionality per se is resented in language; many people would actually rather be told

to use a less preferred form than to have a choice between that and their more preferred form.[26] In this respect people seem to classify language choices in the same category as traffic rule choices: they may prefer one to another, but above all they prefer uniform application.

Likewise, it might seem possible to overcome the limits on language planning by making changes one at a time. But some changes cannot be introduced piecemeal. It has been possible to simplify the characters in Chinese gradually, but the Arabic alphabet of Turkish could not have been changed step by step to a Roman one. And if changes are decided on one at a time, logrolling will be hindered, since each change will benefit some and hurt others. The simultaneous adoption of massive but politically balanced changes is sometimes the only feasible strategy.[27]

#### 4. Lessons for and from the Soviet Union

Clearly, language planning has its limits. How these limits affect a particular country depends on its language situation and on the extent to which its leaders wish, and its citizens are willing, to do difficult things with language. Let us not try to discover here the "real" intentions of the Soviet leadership with regard to language. The argument about whether there is a single Soviet language policy, whether it is consistent, and what other policies it is a function of, can be pursued elsewhere. There are language-planning aims that we know to be relevant to the Soviet situation and to be harbored or espoused by at least some leaders and groups. Are these aims easy, difficult, or impossible to achieve?

In the realm of language corpus planning, one of the most commonly posed questions, the world over, is where new words should be gotten from. As technology and civilization evolve, new concepts need names. These can be acquired in several ways. Already existing words in the language can be semantically extended to cover new meanings; existing morphemes (lexical elements) can be combined in new ways; new morphemes can be created from scratch; and words can be borrowed from other languages.

One answer to this question is what might be called the authenticist approach. It insists on developing the vocabulary of a language in such a way as to preserve the homogeneity and the distinctive characteristics of the language. Borrowing from other languages is rejected altogether in the purest form of this approach. In the form usually practiced, however, the borrowing of conceptual schemes is accepted, as long as each concept is represented in the language by words native to the language itself. The result is usually loan translations. According to some linguists it is unimportant whether words are borrowed from other languages or created from morphemes already present in the language.[28] But from other points of view it is very important. The authenticist approach results in a vocabulary that is probably easier to master for native speakers and may well contribute to their self-esteem by increasing the perceived richness and independence of their language. At the same time, satisfaction with the regime and better inter-group relations may arise from the feelings of group equality and worth that authenticist language



development cultivates. On the other hand, this approach can be expected to harden the learning of whatever language would have been the main source for borrowed words, as well as whatever other languages would have borrowed from the same source. Consequently it would make communication more difficult across language-group boundaries and, if the languages in question are those of a single country, would thereby decrease civic unity. So there are grounds for both supporting and opposing authenticism.

In the Soviet Union, authenticism has considerable support, at least if applied with moderation. According to N.A. Andreev, "There is no basis for introducing a parallel term from another language" if one already exists precisely expressing the required meaning, because "In cultural development it is impermissible to ignore the richness of a native language." [29] The leading Soviet Turkologist has written, "It is the basic lexical stock of the language itself, with its core of roots, that serves as the vastest and richest source for the enrichment of the vocabulary of a particular language. The possibilities for word formation in each language are inexhaustible." [30] For this reason he believes it is an "inadequacy" to make "less than full use" of a language's own means for word formation. [31] This view is particularly common among those concerned with the further development of languages having their own literary traditions. According to the head of Azerbaijani terminological activities, for example, terms should be borrowed only when they cannot be created satisfactorily, and then only if they can be naturalized. [32] Some linguists even refuse to call "Azerbaijani" a word borrowed by the language from Russian, [33] and there have been calls for mass vigilance against threats to the purity of the language. [34]

In almost every case such authenticist sentiments are qualified or even contradicted by the same authors elsewhere in their works, but there is clearly a desire among some elements of Soviet society to protect languages other than Russian from Russian words, just as some Russian writers are concerned about the denaturing effect of foreign loans in Russian. [35] To what extent is this a practicable desire? Are there any limits to the ability of language planners to develop a vocabulary on the basis, as Soviet jargon has it, of the "internal resources" of the language in question?

As far as the available evidence permits a conclusion, it must be that in the Soviet situation an official policy of authenticist language development could be largely successful. From a purely linguistic point of view, there is no reason why there should be any limit to the number of new concepts that could be expressed using the creative possibilities inherent in any given language. The relative success of the Turkish authorities in authenticizing the development of Turkish, without control of the print media, suggests that the Soviet government could manage to achieve the same purpose if it wanted. Editorial control over publications and the determination of the curriculum of language and science classes in the schools are enough powers to assure the desired term-using behaviors in most persons, especially since the bulk of the intellectual elite of each nationality would probably be partial to an officially inspired policy of moderate authenticism. Obstacles would arise mostly in the behavior of specialists communicating with each

other, and then only when adopting terms that they had not been taught in school. The authenticist counterparts to these terms would replace them among the next generation, however, if they entered the school curriculum. A policy of extreme authenticism, characterized by the replacement of already accepted Russian loan words with words of native origin, would encounter resistance from the habits of all speakers and resentment by an important segment of the intelligentsia, while being actively supported by others, including many writers, if the experiences of other countries are any guide. The result would be a kind of political diglossia, in which some would authenticize their speech and writing while others continued to use already ingrained Russian loans. The school curriculum would, however, ensure that subsequent generations spoke thoroughly authenticized varieties of their language.

Even this policy, although called "extreme" above, is in fact relatively mild, because it is limited to "form" rather than "content". As long as the semantic ranges of terms are manipulated to make sure that all Soviet languages are perfectly intertranslatable--something that is in no way the case among truly independent languages--we must recognize how limited a policy of linguistic authenticism would be. Yet it is paradoxically possible that there is an inverse relationship between the two kinds of policy, that dealing with form and that dealing with meaning. To the extent that Russian words are borrowed to express new concepts, the connotations of native words remain unchanged and therefore unique. They can constitute a refuge and a resource for those who wish to think non-intertranslatable thoughts. Hence the most effective kind of cultural unification policy, short of getting people to switch languages entirely, might well be one which gives Soviet meanings to national words rather than importing Russian words.

The anti-authenticist, or Russianist, approach to lexical development also has considerable support. Soviet writers on language policy often describe any influence of Russian on other Soviet languages as "enrichment". Each such influence is seen as a contribution to the linguistic and cultural rapprochement of the Soviet nationalities. In addition, advocates of intensive borrowing from Russian argue that this only reflects the existing knowledge of, and preference for, Russian-origin words by the masses who speak other Soviet languages. This preference is seen as a progressive phenomenon.

Russianism can be applied in different degrees. A moderate version prefers the borrowing of a Russian word whenever the only way to get a native one would be to make it up. A more thorough version supports the selection of the Russian term rather than the native one in cases where both have been in use in a given language.[36] Finally, some language policymakers look with favor on the replacement of an old native term by a new Russian one, even when the old term goes "back into the depths of the centuries." [37] Some proponents of Russianist language development approve of the modification of borrowed words to conform to the grammatical structure, including the phonology, of the borrowing language. Others, however, insist that they be pronounced, if possible, and in any case written, just as they are in Russian.

A consistent policy of Russianist language development could have considerable success in the Soviet context, partly for the same reasons that an authenticist policy could succeed. The control over media and schools could be put to work in either direction.[38] In addition, the adoption of borrowed words together with borrowed concepts is typically easier than the process of agreeing on what native word to apply to each meaning. The fact that specialists often bring Russian words into their own communications anyway would facilitate a Russianist policy. Increasing exposure to Russian has led to spontaneous Russianization of their vocabularies by masses of citizens as well. To the extent that a Russianist policy does not try to hasten this adoption process, it should be able to count on much behavioral support. The replacement of widely used words by Russian loans, however, as a policy would entail conflicts between official norms and popular speech habits. It would also invite sabotage from teachers, writers, radio announcers, singers, etc., whose language use is already recalcitrant enough to evoke harsh criticisms from language policymakers. Still, there is no purely linguistic reason for expecting the Russianization of vocabulary to have any particular limit. A language can replace almost all of its vocabulary, including all of its lexical morphemes, without losing its grammatical structure and its separate linguistic identity.

A successful Russianist policy would still involve costs. One trade-off is the converse of that mentioned above with regard to authenticism. Formal Russianization runs the risk of decreasing substantive Sovietization by making speakers of non-Russian languages read, hear, and use words whose meanings they do not know well.[39] Another trade-off is between the number of Russian borrowings and the Russianness of Russian borrowings. If each borrowed word must be written and spoken just as it is in Russian, then some words will not be successfully transferred into the language. Their assimilation to native-like forms can increase their acceptability.[40]

Closer approximations than the above generalizations are possible when the peculiarities of each language are taken into account. Authenticism is more likely to succeed in languages of non-Slavic and especially non-Indo-European families than in those closely related to Russian. It is also more likely to succeed in languages spoken by larger numbers of people, enjoying the status of Republic languages, and having old written traditions.

Let us turn to language status policy and consider two more proposals. One would be to make everyone in the USSR bilingual except Russians living in the RSFSR. The most unambiguous language policy in the Soviet Union today is to get every Soviet citizen to know Russian. The additional step of getting Russians outside their own Republic to learn the language of the Republic in which they live is implied by the fact that these languages are taught in school to Russians living there, and by the claim that such linguistic knowledge would help improve attitudes and relations between Russians and members of other nationality groups.[41] Could such a widespread bilingualism develop, even with complete government support? The Soviet census reveals that Russian bilingualism among non-Russians is already substantial: about half the non-Russian population claims to have a fluent knowledge of Russian.

One Soviet scholar has asserted on the basis of survey data that the census actually understates the number of people who know Russian, but an equally plausible reinterpretation of his own published data could argue just the opposite.[42] In either case, one can safely assume that the utility of a knowledge of Russian will under all foreseeable conditions within a continued Soviet political order remain much higher than the utility of a knowledge of any other Soviet language. Thus the serious question is whether any policy could succeed in making almost all Russians outside their own Republic bilingual.

There are hardly any cases of widespread reciprocal bilingualism in the world. Spanish-Guarani bilingualism in Paraguay and English-Afrikaans bilingualism among the white population of South Africa are both high, but neither is the result of a deliberate government policy imposed in a situation where such bilingualism was previously absent. A recent attempt to turn asymmetrical bilingualism into reciprocal bilingualism has been made in Canada, preceded by millions of dollars worth of feasibility studies. There, in spite of the fact that the main effort has been confined to Federal civil servants, who have been given encouragement, help, and incentives to learn the other official language, recent studies indicate that the program of bilingualization has been a massive failure and that almost the only really bilingual officials remain those whose native language is French.[43] A comparison of the Soviet and the Canadian censuses shows that Russians claim to know non-Russian languages considerably less than English Canadians claim to know French, if we control for the ethnic composition of the places they live in. For example, a Russian surrounded by 98% non-Russians has about a 5 to 10% likelihood of knowing their language, while an English Canadian living in an area that is 98% French-Canadian has about a 70 to 80% likelihood of knowing French.[44] On this basis it would seem less likely that a policy of reciprocal bilingualism could work in the USSR than in Canada. The fact that no major language in the USSR besides Russian has international status, and that many are linguistically very distant from Russian, adds to the expected difference. The main force operating in the other direction is the greater capacity for rewarding, sanctioning, and controlling possessed by the Soviet authorities.

A second possible language status policy is the complete Russianization of the Soviet people. Most contemporary analyses of the linguistic situation done by scholars within the USSR do not say anything about the long-run future. This omission can be attributed to the belief that the total unilingualization of the country, arising from the disappearance of all Soviet languages except Russian, is a real possibility, combined with the knowledge that this possibility is intolerable to a large and important body of Soviet citizens. Analyses of the past have pointed out that the smallest languages, in terms of the numbers of their speakers, have been losing ground and cannot be profitably promoted as full-scale languages with wide-ranging social roles.[45] The fact that Belorussians and Ukrainians outside their own Republics are assimilated into the Russian group emerges from statistics on both language behavior and language policy. The voluntary decision of a non-Russian to consider Russian his or her native language, or to send his or her children to schools in which Russian is the medium of instruction, is generally praised rather than attacked by Soviet

writers. The implication of these orientations is clear: some influential Soviets attach no value to the survival per se of a minority language and look forward to the day when none of them will survive. Many intellectuals in the non-Russian nationalities, however, are actively working to ensure their languages' survival--and enhancement. This potentially serious conflict keeps long-range planning off the agenda.

If the withering away of all languages but Russian became the official policy, however, would it succeed? One answer is that this will happen even if no such policy is announced. Perhaps, in accordance with Leninist doctrine, it will happen even faster if it is allowed, rather than forced, to happen. If all non-Russians were to learn Russian as a second language, the instrumental utility, or at least the essentiality, of their native languages would decline. They might then be expected to cultivate their Russian at the expense of their other languages. This change would be assisted by the electronic and print media, which would respond to the fact that everybody can be reached in Russian by offering more and better material in Russian. This would further increase the utility of Russian, inducing more parents to send their children to Russian-medium schools, after which they would be likely to raise their children with Russian as the home language, especially if they married across native-language lines. Hence, in view of the growing knowledge of Russian as a second language, what is there to stop it from peacefully exterminating all the other Soviet languages?

Two main forces would act to retard the switch to Russian. One is the existence of fairly homogeneous non-Russian rural communities; until the rural population is reduced to a small fraction of its present size, this residential segregation can be expected to persist, preserving enclaves of minority languages that will not be changeable without coercion. The second force against Russianization is the attitudes of the non-Russian elites. This force should grow, rather than shrink, as industrial development and urbanization proceed. The perceived importance of its language among the elite of a subordinate group tends to be low when initial contact with a more advantaged language group is made and creates a desire to learn the latter language. Once those who wish to learn it have done so and some permanent assimilation to that language has begun, it begins to be perceived as a threat to the survival of the native language. It is difficult to predict how far a movement of native-language consciousness would go in a particular Soviet group, but the movement would probably become strong as soon as virtually all of the group's population had a moderate command of Russian and a substantial trend toward the selection of Russian-medium education by parents had set in. The fact that birth-rate differentials among nationality groups would be minimal by the time this happened in the major non-Slavic nationalities would heighten the perception that the group is in danger of being assimilated. The likelihood of a strong resistance developing would be greater in groups with the greatest cultural differences from the Russians, e.g. the nationalities of Central Asia.

From a political point of view, the most acceptable compromise seems to be stable, asymmetric bilingualism. This guarantees to each

group what it cares most about: to the Russians the ability to communicate without having to learn another Soviet language, and to the non-Russians the continued vitality of their national languages. And once competence in Russian has been universalized, the tide in language corpus planning may once again turn toward authenticity, as was fashionable in the 1920's and 1930's, for the cultivation of distinctive languages will no longer seem a threat to the aspirations for Russian.

Notes

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