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The Geolinguistics of State Foreign Language Education Policy Regarding Rarely Taught Languages of the Global South

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Abstract. This paper is based on a talk given by the author at the round table discussion on Current Trends in the Development of Language Policy in CIS, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean (MGIMO University, Moscow, October 12, 2023). Geolinguistics in the context of Russian government foreign language policy planning was discussed in terms of languages of the Global South not yet taught in the Russian Federation. Based on the principle that political multi-polarity implies linguistic multi-polarity, many languages of regional importance were identified. Although great-power status for Russia is assumed to apply at present, demographics suggest that this will change in the future. Nevertheless, with proper foreign language education planning, Russia's soft-power status can be preserved indefinitely. Different approaches with regard to language policy can exist. One approach is that of promoting homogeneity in language use. Another is encouraging transparency in the transfer of information through multilingualism. Yet another one is that of promoting linguistic multi-polarity, where national, international, and local languages are valued equally. Government language education policies, whether idealistic or Machiavellian, must have concrete, usually politically determined, objectives. On the basis of political and economic considerations, Kurdish, Nepali, Burmese, Sinhala, Tamil, Cambodian, and also Tagalog were recommended. A case was also made for the pidgin and creole language studies being taken seriously. Various African languages of national importance were mentioned, as well as Sundanese a language spoken in Indonesia and Cebuano, a language spoken in the Philippines, on the grounds that they are included on Google and/or Yandex Translate. Finally, emoji was introduced as a worldwide pidgin that is rapidly developing into a language for written communication, especially among people who use sign languages. Language education policies can have political objectives which are positive, negative, or neutral. Though there are too many languages of potential importance to teach all, Russian advocacy of multi-polarity must presuppose a commitment to multilingualism and to transparency as to its methods and objectives.

Keywords: geolinguistics, sociolinguistics, language policy, language education, rare languages, Global South

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Геоллингвистика государственной политики в сфере иноязычного образования в отношении редко изучаемых языков глобального Юга

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Аннотация. В основе данной статьи лежит доклад, прочитанный автором на круглом столе «Современные тенденции развития языковой политики в странах ближнего зарубежья, Азии, Африки и Карибского бассейна» (Москва, МГИМО МИД России, 12 октября 2023 г.). Геоллингвистика в контексте планирования государственной иноязычной политики России обсуждалась с точки зрения языков глобального Юга, которые ещё не преподаются в Российской Федерации. Исходя из принципа, что политическая многополярность подразумевает языковую многополярность, было выделено множество языков регионального значения. Хотя в настоящее время предполагается, что Россия имеет статус великой державы, демографические показатели говорят о том, что в будущем эта ситуация изменится. Тем не менее, при правильном планировании иноязычного образования статус «мягкой силы» России может сохраняться на неограниченный срок. Существуют различные подходы к языковой политике. Один из них заключается в поощрении однородности в использовании языков. Другой предполагает поощрение прозрачности при передаче информации с помощью многоязычия. Ещё один подход заключается в поощрении языковой многополярности, когда национальные, международные и местные языки ценятся одинаково. Государственная политика в области языкового образования, будь она идеалистическая или макиавеллистическая, должна преследовать конкретные, как правило, политически обусловленные цели. Исходя из политических и экономических соображений, были рекомендованы курдский, непальский, бирманский, сингальский, тамильский, камбоджийский, а также тагальский языки. Кроме того, было указано на необходимость серьёзного отношения к изучению пиджинов и креольских языков. Были упомянуты различные африканские языки национального значения, а также сунданский язык, на котором говорят в Индонезии, и себуано, язык, на котором говорят на Филиппинах, на том основании, что они включены в сервисы *Google Translate* и/или *Яндекс Переводчик*. Наконец, эмодзи были представлены как всемирный пиджин, который быстро превращается в язык письменного общения, особенно среди людей, использующих жестовые языки. Политика в области языкового образования может преследовать положительные, отрицательные или нейтральные политические цели. Хотя потенциально важных языков слишком много, чтобы преподавать их все, продвижение Россией идеи многополярности должно предполагать приверженность многоязычию и прозрачности её методов и целей.

Ключевые слова: геоллингвистика, социоллингвистика, языковая политики, языковое образование, редкие языки, глобальный Юг

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This paper had its origin as a talk given by the author at the round table discussion on Current Trends in the Development of Language Policy in CIS, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean held at MGIMO University in Moscow on October 12, 2023. The reasons for writing this article are 1) to promote geolinguistics, as it was originally formulated, as a means for determining policy recommendations with regard to foreign language education and use, and 2) to illustrate how this might work with regard to the choosing of new foreign languages to be taught in the Russian Federation. The goals this paper is aiming to achieve are 1) providing an overview of regionally important languages in the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa; 2) bringing attention to the importance of pidgin languages and creoles; 3) introducing the concept of emoji as an emerging language; and 4) providing an explanation of how foreign language education policy can intersect with and strongly affect political and economic policy vis-a-vis other nations.

A geolinguistic perspective on language policy

Firstly, a word about geolinguistics. Briefly stated, to the extent that accurate census data would be available, geolinguistics was originally conceived of as the study of language use in the context of government policy planning [5, p. 33]. Dictionary makers, however, chose to emphasize definitions that tended to shift focus to dialectology map-making [3, p. 47]. Thus, two traditions of geolinguistics developed. In America, the original emphasis was on it being a potential tool for helping to formulate policy solutions to politically perceived language problems, and this continued to be emphasized [5].

The American approach to geolinguistics is also the case in Nepal as the state is required to deal with many language-related issues. This is because Nepal is a country where the national language is not the native language of a majority of the population¹.

In Japan, where language standardization is advanced and, building on a state-funded basis of dialectology studies about mostly quickly disappearing dialects, the focus has continued to be on map-making activities in furtherance of the study of linguistic history [2, p. 568]. Here, geolinguistics is used to describe linguistic events rather than to prescribe what actions the state should take concerning them [ibid.].

In the case of the Russian Federation, however, it would seem that using geolinguistics to look at language prescriptively rather than descriptively might generally represent a more useful application of this field of intellectual endeavor. It was with this assumption in mind that this paper was first envisioned as a talk at the said round table held at MGIMO². The reason for seeing a geolinguistics approach as natural was due to the author's direct experience as a former president of geolinguistics organizations in both Japan and the United States and as the person who initiated the founding of the now nationally recognized Geolinguistics Society of Nepal.

The assumption made was that, if a language of the Global South was not taught at MGIMO, then the chances were great that it was not elsewhere taught in the Russian Federation. There were, in fact, a considerable number of languages identified which would seem to be of potential importance with regard to Russia's foreign policy and international trade. As such, they are worthy of being considered when developing policies aimed at consolidating Russian soft-power status during this era of political and economic multi-polarity.

¹ Regmi, D.R. Languages of Nepal in 2021 census: An overview, academia.edu/108556723/LANGUAGES_OF_NEPAL_IN_2021_CENSUS_AN_OVERVIEW (accessed 24 August 2024).

² RAMI: Transformatsiia iazykovogo obrazovaniia: trendy, traektorii, perspektivy [Russian International Studies Association: Transformation of language education: trends, trajectories and perspectives], mgimo.ru/about/news/announce/xv-risa-lang-edu/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

Language policy as soft power

Russia can be identified two times previously in Eurasian history as having functioned as a great power and one time when it functioned as a superpower. Its first era of great-power status was during the 10th and 11th centuries when the Russian state of the feudal era reached its peak of power during the relatively long reigns of Saint Vladimir the Great and his son Yaroslav the Wise. These two rulers, Vladimir and Yaroslav, used their control of inland waterway trade as the basis for transforming into a great Eurasian power the speakers of the many languages used by the numerous different Slavic and non-Slavic tribes which they ruled over [4, p. 53].

A second era of multi-polarity with Russia as a great Eurasian power happened under the rule of the Romanovs, beginning with the reign of Peter the Great [20, p. 1]. Then, after the post-World War I collapse of the Russian Empire and Russia's re-emergence as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it achieved superpower status as a result of World War II. And, now again, Russia has emerged as a great Eurasian economic power in the company of China, India, and Iran, competing against a rapidly declining North American United States and cooperating with a steadily rising South American Brazil [7, p. 16]. In spite of, or, one might argue, because of the censorship now so common in the Collective West, the Russian Federation is also rapidly approaching a superpower status in terms of its soft power, in its ability to capture attention and influence how people think about the world in political, military, and cultural terms and how they react to it³.

Nevertheless, demographics and commonsense would strongly suggest that the current rise in Russia's share of the world's GDP will clearly decline over time, even though Russian citizens, as individuals, might very well get richer. However, finding confirmation of this in English language texts is close to impossible, due to the fact that any Google search will show that the confirmation bias of the Collective West demands that English-language writers of Russian affairs portray the future of the Russian Federation in gloomy terms, never positively.

In terms of total Price Purchasing Power GDP, however, it seems clear that, in the coming decades, China will continue to rank number one, and then India⁴. It also seems clear that Russia will have to devote considerable diplomatic energy to keeping deep-seated rivalries between these two countries from developing in a dangerous direction. Nevertheless, commonsense would also suggest that neither of these countries will be able to maintain their relative shares of the world's GDP permanently. America's era of superpower status will, in any case, become more and more of a distant memory as the century progresses.

Soft power, though, is something quite different from military power. The Russian Federation now has the rare opportunity of becoming a superpower in terms of its soft-power status. Moreover, this preeminence could, with proper management, develop and last well into the next century. But, proper management means proper funding across a broad range of cultural and educational endeavors. How long the Russian Federation's emerging soft-power superpower status will last is something which is impossible to predict. Without proper planning combined with proper funding, it might even suffer a stillbirth. Careful application of the principles of practical geolinguistics could allow it to last indefinitely.

Nevertheless, by analogy with French soft-power projection successes, it is clear that the future success or failure of the Russian Federation in creating, maintaining, and extending its soft-power status will be directly connected with the success of its language education policies, the language policies which promote not only the study of foreign languages, but also the study of Russian and the many other languages of the numerous ethnic groups that make up this country [17, p. 1]. With this in mind and before taking a quick look at rarely taught languages that might be of use in maintaining and in building further the soft-power image of the Russian Federation, let us now consider the different principles which nations choose and upon which they base their language policies, whether for national languages, minority languages, or languages to be taught as foreign languages.

³ The world in 2050, [pwc.com/gx/en/research-insights/economy/the-world-in-2050.html](https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/research-insights/economy/the-world-in-2050.html) (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁴ Ibid.

Approaches to language policy

One principle many nations use is the principle of **promoting homogeneity in language use**. This is usually based on the underlying assumption that, if everyone speaks in the same manner, population control will be easier and that, with improved population control, it will be easier to destroy inconvenient memories of local history and traditions and, thereby, to better control matters that might disturb social harmony. Due to this belief, language homogeneity has been popular in many different eras over many parts of the globe. In France, every French government since that of Louis XIII in the mid-17th century⁵ has adhered to this principle. In the United States, it began in the British colonial period and continues even today as a popularly supported policy in many American states⁶. In Japan, it was adopted from the third quarter of the 19th century and has been accepted with continued unconscious pride until the present time in the belief that linguistic homogeneity provides proof of Japan's national ideology of racial and cultural uniqueness [14, p. 311]. The author's personal experience over the last 50 years would suggest that most Japanese, in fact, came to accept the idea that uniqueness and diversity are two incompatible objectives, though theoretically, this need not be the case.

Another principle that can be seen promoted by design in the language policies of the European Union and possibly as a side-effect of political structure in the Russian Federation is that of **encouraging transparency in the transfer of information through multilingualism** [18, p. 173]. It can be argued that this has been the case throughout Russian history. For instance, there are many recorded instances of Catherine the Great's Romanov descendants being fluent and well-read in not only Russian and German, but also in English and French⁷. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a more or less similar tradition of multilingual foreign language education was followed on a customary basis and the transparency of information transfer across languages was seen as desirable [11, p. 269]. And, as concerns Russia, local languages and customs, especially in areas of the empire with a history of literacy, tended to be respected, no matter what the period of Russian history it might be [8, p. 412]. Moreover, it would seem that these were attitudes that had nothing to do with constitutional structures or imperial personalities, but which permeated and still permeate what this paper perhaps arbitrarily designates as the Russian imperial system, an approach to governance that seems to have been generally held in common by all rulers of Russia, whether the Rurikids, the Romanovs, the commissars of the Soviet Union, or the bureaucrats of the present day Russian Federation.

Both concerning language and other spheres of governance, we can see the unfortunate results of differences in approach when comparing the homogenizing approach in imperial governance characteristic of the United States with the transparency of information exchange approach historically characteristic of Russia. Considering the influence of the CIA and related agencies on Japanese and American foreign policy, all one needs to do is to look at the current range of foreign policies being advocated by these countries to become immediately aware of the glaringly inadequate analytical skills of most members of this extended intelligence community in the United States. But these individuals are supposedly the cream of the crop. Comparing the average educated Japanese and American with the average educated Russian, educated Russians, whether in a position of government authority or not, tend to be better informed about the world at large than the citizens of these two other just mentioned nations.

Another possible principle that could be used in the formulation of language policy, whether foreign or local, is in the process of being formulated now, but it is one which commonsense would indicate can function well only when co-existing with the principle of transparency in the transfer of information. Precisely because it is in the process of formulation, no country comes to mind which has so far thought to apply this new principle of language education policy with regard to their national language, minority

⁵ Les missions, academie-francaise.fr/linstitution/les-missions (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁶ What is the official language of the United States?, lingoda.com/en/content/what-is-the-official-language-of-the-united-states/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁷ What languages did the Romanovs speak?, rbth.com/history/329404-romanovs-language-spoke (accessed 23 August 2024).

language, or foreign language policies. This principle is what, by analogy to a phrase popularized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, could be called “**the multi-polarity approach to language education policy**”. That is, what is to be actively promoted is the friendly and mutually respectful competition of languages. At the very minimum, trilingual competence at a high level in at least one national, one local, and one foreign language each should be seen as something to respect and as something for government language policy to encourage.

Though national languages will continue to have preeminence, because of rapid developments in machine translation, the age of unthinking national language dominance will become increasingly untenable. Linguistic competition can no longer be permanently suppressed, so it would seem to be a better approach to embrace it. The aim should be a mutually respectful competitive promotion of languages as a means of encouraging transparency in the transfer of information. The goal should be mutual enrichment in terms of cultural production, whether in terms of literature or in terms of debating skill and diplomacy. The cultural spill-over would include exciting developments in journalism, cinema, drama, and song. It goes without saying that the political soft-power advantage acquired in this manner would be incalculable.

Promising languages of the Global South

Nevertheless, government language education policy is not only a development of principles that are accepted by a society as axiomatic. Linguistic or, otherwise, government language education policies must have concrete, politically determined objectives that are popularly seen as desirable. Otherwise, long term funding cannot be expected. Objectives can be idealistic and objectives can be Machiavellian. Objectives can be both at the same time without changing basic principles. This will be discussed later with concrete examples.

But now, having introduced the topic and the author’s personal bias at play in writing this paper, it would now be appropriate to introduce a select number of languages that, for various reasons, might be considered as candidates for formal instruction in the Russian Federation. This is not a complete list; a complete list could easily include perhaps as many as a thousand or more languages which, at the present time, would be too many to be considered seriously by any government ministry charged with formulating language policy or any educational institution charged with its implementation.

Starting with Asia, Kurdish is a language which needs to be considered because it is a language used by millions of people in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, and also because, in particular with regard to Turkey, it is a focal point for conflict [12, p. 1]. There seem to be many reasons why, at the very least, well-trained, fluent, Kurdish-competent employees of both the ministries of defense and of foreign affairs could be of great utility in helping these ministries avoid making unnecessary future policy mistakes.

Moving more to the east in **South Asia**, Nepali, Burmese, Sinhala, and Tamil make attractive candidates for further investment, being languages having national status and each possessing numerous speakers. Considering the volatile nature of politics in this part of the world, investment in these languages could bring very good returns in enabling the Russian Federation to maintain balance in a still politically, culturally, and socially imbalanced part of the world. Additionally, a case could be made for adding Cambodian, and also Tagalog, the language of the ordinary people of the Philippines, to the foreign language curriculum at MGIMO. This would seem to have importance in countering American-led attempts at containing China and limiting Russian influence. The American government has, furthermore, long been active in trying to destabilize the current regimes in the region and to force them to take sides in support of America [19].

This brings us to Papua New Guinea in **Melanesia** and will take us in a perhaps surprising manner to the Caribbean and to Africa. There are serious geolinguistic reasons for suggesting that a creole and pidgin language university consortium should be established. There are many such languages, some of which are very important for intercommunication between people of the various countries these languages exist in, no matter what continent we look at in the Global South. In Papua New Guinea, Tok Pisin is

a recognized national language understood by almost everyone in that nation⁸. The neighboring island nation of the Solomon Islands has Bislama, a different creole, acting as a national language⁹. Going to **the Caribbean**, Papiamentu, Guyanese Creole, Sranan Tongo, and Haitian Creole occupy positions of importance. In the case of Haitian Creole, it is considered as being of such importance that it is included in the curriculum of the School of Language Studies of the Department of State of the United States¹⁰. Moving on to **Africa**, other creoles of importance are those of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad. In particular, the number of speakers of Nigerian Pidgin is huge. In 2020 it was estimated as having 4.7 million first language native speakers and 116 million second language speakers¹¹. Moreover, the United Kingdom considers it important enough for the BBC to have developed a website using a West African Pidgin English variety that is fully intelligible to Nigerian Pidgin speakers and which is much appreciated by them, but which is not considered by them to be the Pidgin that they, themselves, use in daily life [6, p. 78].

Considering the admission of Ethiopia to BRICS and the many linguistically based ethnic conflicts inside that country and on its borders, it would seem wise to at least consider whether or not to invest in Tigrinya, the language of the Tigray region and also the most important language of the neighboring country of Eritrea¹². A similar situation would apply to Somali¹³. Oromo, on the other hand, is a native language of Ethiopia spoken by more people than Amharic, the national language¹⁴. Also, Dinka deserves consideration because of its importance as the most important of the native languages of South Sudan, another historically unstable neighboring country of Ethiopia¹⁵.

Among the native languages of **West Africa**, there are several that deserve further investigation because of increasing involvement of the Russian Federation and China in the Sahel. Wolof, Hausa, Twellemmet, Fula, Yoruba, and Igbo come to mind and are each languages that can be considered important. Wolof is an indigenous language spoken by a significant number of people in Senegal¹⁶. Fula holds a similar position in Guinea¹⁷. For the same reason, Mossi in Burkina Faso¹⁸ and Bambara in Mali¹⁹ deserve consideration. As for Hausa, it is the language of a majority of the population of Niger, plus it is one of Nigeria's most used native languages²⁰. Two others of importance are Yoruba and Igbo, the first languages of a large portion of Nigeria's citizens²¹. In addition to the role of Hausa in Niger, another important native language is Tawellemmet, a Berber language used by the Tuaregs²², who are a large ethnic group whose insurgency has been used by Western powers to destabilize the governments of Niger and Mali²³. It would seem to be in the interest of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Russian intelligence services to have a certain number of trained individuals capable of direct communication with this Tuareg people, so as to more efficiently counter tricky political issues.

Another large African country with a massive population is the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The three most important native languages are Kituba, Lingala, and Tashiluba²⁴, each with more native speakers than many European languages which are currently taught at MGIMO. Kirundi of Burundi

⁸ Seigel, J. Tok Pisin, hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/tokpisin.html (accessed 26 August 2024).

⁹ Meyerhoff, M. Survey chapter: Bislama, apics-online.info/surveys/23 (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁰ Foreign language training, state.gov/foreign-language-training/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹¹ Faracias, N. Structure dataset 17: Nigerian Pidgin, apics-online.info/contributions/17 (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹² Tigrinya speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/tigrinya.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹³ Somalia: Language situation and dialects, landinfo.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Somalia_language-situation-and-dialects.pdf (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁴ Language map of Ethiopia, translatorswithoutborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Ethiopia-Language-Map-Static-EN-1.pdf (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁵ Dinka, languagesgulper.com/eng/Dinka.html (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁶ Wolof speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/wolof.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁷ Fula, languagesgulper.com/eng/Fula.html (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁸ 10 main languages of Burkina Faso, tilti.co.uk/burkina-faso-languages/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹⁹ Bambara speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/bambara.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁰ The Hausa language, iaaw.hu-berlin.de/en/africa/linguistik-und-sprachen/african-languages/hausa (accessed 23 August 2024).

²¹ Language data for Nigeria, clearglobal.org/language-data-for-nigeria/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

²² Languages of Niger, forum.unilang.org/viewtopic.php?f=132&t=59418 (accessed 23 August 2024).

²³ Olawunmi, K. The movement for the liberation of Azawad, tdhj.org/blog/post/liberation-terror-azawad/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

and Kinyarwanda of Rwanda are of great importance in these nations [13, p. 11] but these nations may or may not be of particular importance to the Russian Federation. As for languages of importance in the **southern regions of Africa**, besides Swahili, which is already part of the curriculum of MGIMO, Fang of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea²⁵, Bemba of Zambia²⁶, Shona and Ndebele of Zimbabwe [15, p. 2849], Setswana of Botswana [1, p. 116], Oshiwambo of Namibia²⁷, Siswati of Eswatini [10], Sesotho of Lesotho²⁸, Zulu and Xhosa of South Africa²⁹, Malagasy of Madagascar³⁰, and the Swahili-based Comorian language of the Comoros Islands³¹ may all be considered as languages of national importance for the nations they are each most strongly represented in.

Among the African languages considered important enough to be included on Google Translate, we have the Amharic language of Ethiopia, the Twi and Ewe languages of Ghana, the Chichewa language of Malawi, Swahili of Kenya and Tanzania, Krio (a creole of Sierra Leone), Kinyarwanda of Rwanda, Oromo of Ethiopia and Kenya, Sepedi, Tsonga, Xhosa, and Zulu which are four of the national languages of South Africa, Sesotho of Lesotho, Shona of Zimbabwe, and Somali of Ethiopia and Somalia. Among the Asian languages supported by Google Translate can be found Sundanese, a minority language with 40 million speakers in Indonesia, and Cebuano, a minority language spoken by 22 million people in the Philippines. If a language is included on Google Translate, it can be taken as representing a part of the world the United States government is interested in, either for political reasons or for the purpose of some form or other of economic exploitation³². For this reason, these languages, whether eventually taught or not, should, nevertheless, undergo careful scrutiny.

Emoji

Finally, there is one last language variety, emoji, that has already become a worldwide pidgin and applies as much to the smartphone users of the Global South as elsewhere. Having watched from the beginning the development of translation software, from his personal experience, the author would suggest that within 20 years it will reach creole status as the basis for giving a common written literary expression to the many sign languages throughout the world, including those of the Global South, none of which have yet developed a written literature. Moreover, emoji is already supported on Yandex Translate and is in the process of developing at an accelerating pace³³. Currently, because grammatical usage and lexical values have not yet solidified across cultures, the quality of Yandex emoji translations is poor, rather like translation software was for Japanese to English and vice versa at the turn of the century [9, p. 22]. But, at current rates of development, it will match the quality of present day translation software translating between Russian and English and vice versa, which is excellent. Precisely because emoji is a pure eye language, it has the potential for developing into a language that could conceivably be read and understood visually by users of not only sign languages but also of spoken language users as a means of general intercommunication.

In theory, otherwise monolingual speakers of widely differing languages could be rapidly trained to use it for purposes of instant communication. In this age we are living in, what is conceivable is no longer in the realm of science fiction, but is something that can be considered as highly likely. The main

²⁴ The four national languages of DRC, translatorswithoutborders.org/four-national-languages-drc (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁵ Fang speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/fang.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁶ Bemba (Chibemba), omniglot.com/writing/bemba.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁷ Oshiwambo, ethnologue.com/language/kua/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁸ Sesotho speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/sesotho.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

²⁹ Distribution of languages spoken by individuals inside and outside of households in South Africa 2018, statista.com/statistics/1114302/distribution-of-languages-spoken-inside-and-outside-of-households-in-south-africa/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

³⁰ Malagasy speaking countries, worlddata.info/languages/malagasy.php (accessed 23 August 2024).

³¹ Comorian, britannica.com/topic/Comorian-language (accessed 23 August 2024).

³² Ahmed, N. Google: A DARPA enterprise run by the Central Intelligence Agency, themillenniumreport.com/2017/09/google-a-darpa-enterprise-run-by-the-central-intelligence-agency/ (accessed 23 August 2024).

³³ Yandex Translate, translate.yandex.com (accessed 23 August 2024).

problem, and it is a big one, concerns public perceptions. Emoji now tend to be perceived of as too cute to be taken seriously. But, if this continues to be true, then Chinese characters could be developed as a literary development of sign language. At least, Chinese characters are not generally considered to be cute, a matter which takes us full circle to a consideration of the function of objectives in formulating language education policy.

Possible language education policy objectives

Language education policies can have objectives which are positive, negative, or neutral. For example, the principle of linguistic multi-polarity could be used to throw a rival government off balance. And, in the world in which we live, this is sometimes a strong recommendation for policy implementation. What follows, thus, is an example which, although not directly connected with the topic the round table on language policy is supposed to address, has the advantage of being easily understandable and illustrating the point well.

For instance, the United States could be made to become intensely worried, if the Russian Federation were to combine its cultural power with that of China to create active internet-based programs for promoting the rapidly disappearing indigenous languages of North America and particularly those of the Arctic Ocean, the native languages of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and northern Scandinavia. The strategic and economic value of the Arctic Ocean is becoming ever greater and Russia's natural advantages in the region are a matter of increasing concern for the United States and NATO. To further throw people off balance, the net could be further extended to include Hawaiian, Navaho, Cherokee, Pennsylvania Dutch, Louisiana French, Quebec French, Haitian Creole, Spanglish, Gulla, Nahuatl, Yucatan Mayan, and Belizean Creole.

If the aim were to make Japan nervous, sponsoring language and cultural programs in Ainu and in the various languages of the Ryukyu Islands could achieve the same effect, as could the sponsoring of dialect language programs. Such programs, whether aimed at Japan or North America, would be meaningless in economic terms, but could be both culturally productive as well as politically irritating at the same time.

Conclusion

The conclusion is merely a statement of commonsense. There are too many languages of potential importance to teach all. However, in the case of the Russian Federation, its advocacy of multi-polarity in international relations means that the more foreign languages that can be taught, the greater the impact its foreign policy initiatives will eventually have. In a world where multi-polarity becomes the norm, multilingualism becomes an essential educational strategy and polyglottery a common outcome [16, p. 1]. Moreover, properly carried out, creating and maintaining long term superpower status in terms of soft power will be assured, because a multi-polar language education policy makes opacity in the transfer of information difficult and promotes transparency.

And, in the world of today, democracy is not what is needed. It is transparency that is needed, the knowledge of who makes what decisions for what reasons, when and where. If people have transparency and if the freedom to the unimpeded transfer of knowledge to one another is guaranteed, then all governments where such policies are in effect, whether pure democracies or absolute autocracies, will tend to converge to a common level of positive public service. If the transfer of knowledge remains opaque, it will be rather much like things are at present in many NATO countries where censorship is common, where the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, and where the exploitation of the great majority becomes ever more unbearable³⁴.

³⁴ Durden, T. NATO's new mission: Peace through censorship, zerohedge.com/geopolitical/natos-new-mission-peace-through-censorship (accessed 23 August 2024).

In such a world, democracy is meaningless. Hitler was a democratically elected leader. So was Mussolini. Mr. Zelensky, also. In Russian history, Vladimir the Great, Yaroslav the Wise, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Alexander II were all unelected autocrats, who each, in their own way, promoted transparency in the transfer of information. If it is a choice between democracy or transparency, it is transparency as to methods and objectives that should be chosen, especially in the context of formulating foreign language education policy.

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