

# Russia and India: Comparative Analysis of Language Policies

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**Abstract**— This paper presents a comparative analysis of linguistic policies of the Russian Federation and India, admittedly the most influential regional economies of Europe and Asia respectively. The importance of an appropriate linguistic policy can hardly be overestimated as it influences the cultural values and morale of the nations providing for social and economic development of the states. Both countries are constantly taking steps to promote and secure their national languages and have already achieved significant results. Despite the evident differences in approaches, a number of similarities can still be observed.

**Index Terms**—Language policy, Legal regulation, Linguistic security, Official languages, State language

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of linguistic security covers a complex and multilayered structure, a hierarchy of goals and tasks and a number of interrelated directions. At the same time, the focus of linguistic security policy is preserving a country's geopolitical code as well as society's genetic code. This, in its turn, provides for a certain state of socio-cultural and moral relations, which contributes to a safe existence, equal development and interaction of the state and national languages and cultures, efficient realization of human rights and freedoms. The culture of coexistence and dialogue between different ethnic groups, religions and languages that has developed over many centuries in a number of countries may definitely be considered a unique civilizational potential. However, the historical experience of co-development must find new effective forms of implementation.

As humanity seems to be the only species that has mastered cognitive language communication, it may be reasonable to assume that human beings are primed to communicate. It is difficult to overestimate the role of language which is much more than just a consequence of one's extraordinary cognitive powers. It has been proved that a language may shape general perception of time, space or even objects of a nation.

Furthermore, securing the status of the state language is a key element of the legal regulation of language relations in any country, since this covers not only the regulatory framework for the functioning of languages within a state, but also the constitutional rights of their speakers. This process is admittedly most complex and contradictory in multinational, multiethnic and multiconfessional countries, to which both the Russian Federation and India may be referred to.

## II. LANGUAGE POLICY ISSUES

Before the 2nd half of the 20th century, both in the former USSR and in international organizations, particularly, in the UN, there was a destructive model of language policy that left no prospects for the existence of minority languages. Both Russia and India were undergoing certain periods of social and economic recovery after the Second World War and gaining independence respectively.

In the Russian Federation, the 1993 Constitution established the status of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation while simultaneously granting the constituent entities, namely, republics the right to establish their own state languages, which implies their use in the activities of public authorities and local governments, as well as in governmental bodies of the republics along with the state language of the Russian Federation [1]. Since Russian is the state language, the use of a republic's own language is expected along with Russian.

This is to be inferred logically, since the Russian Constitution does not regulate the interaction of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation with the state languages of the constituent entities within the Federation. The absence of constitutional regulatory norms allows for different approaches to these matters at the theoretical and practical levels, which has given rise to debate. The issue of recognizing the Russian language as a republic's state language is becoming increasingly relevant. Unexplained and unresolved issues at the constitutional and legal level are reflected in the Russian language legislation, despite the vast regulatory framework. As a result, one can increasingly observe the appearance of negative trends, the Russian language being opposed to regional state languages. Thus, the legal regulation of linguistic relations aimed at integrating the peoples of Russia into a common

political, social, economic and cultural space may in practice lead to disintegration, which poses a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.

Over the years, India has been pursuing a liberal language policy assuming that all cultures and languages are equally respected and have equal opportunities for further development. Indian constitution does not state the existence of a common national language. Under the constitutional acts the government guarantees that all regions, languages, and cultures are accepted and respected. This policy is aimed at consolidating the country while also reducing the possibility of social conflicts arising from diverse social interests.

### III. ADOPTION OF KEY LEGAL ACTS

In 1963, the Indian government laid a foundation for India's language policy by introducing the Official Language Act. The Kothari Commission pursued the language policy suggesting Hindi as a national language hence promoting the process of melding India's various cultures and dialects. However, this policy led to non-Hindi speaking states' protests. Another reason was the failure of the three-language formula which underwent a transformation of goals that ultimately resulted in the designation of Hindi and English as quasi-official languages [2].

In 1968 the Education Ministry of India adopted the National Policy Resolution which assumed a three-language policy according to which three languages were to be taught in all public schools across India. English was to be taught as a compulsory language, Hindi was compulsory for students both in Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking states while the third compulsory language was the local regional one.

This formula was transformed and adjusted to the needs, traditions and local languages of the states. Hindi and English became the most widespread languages on the territory of India.

However, the ultimate goal of the three-language formula was to increase multilingualism across the country. Multilingualism, being a scientific evidence, is aimed not only at broadening people's horizons but also promoting creativity and social tolerance.

Still, the three-language formula failed for a variety of reasons. It ultimately led to a creation of a two-language formula - the dominance of Hindi and English in Hindi-speaking states, and the dominance of the local language and mostly English (or rarely Hindi) in non-Hindi-speaking states [3]. Under the current language policy, politicians may take examinations in any of the mentioned languages, and newly appointed members of state assemblies can take the oath in any of the mentioned languages. Each state has a predetermined set of official languages, and state governments ensure that the languages of a certain state are recognized by using them in 4 official documents. Furthermore, no language in India has the status of national language under the Indian constitution [4].

The adoption of specialized language laws in 1989-1990 in all USSR republics triggered the so-called "velvet language

revolution" and brought about the conflictogenic development of the USSR disintegration process. The primary task of the documents was to guarantee national and cultural autonomy to specific language speakers. However, underestimation of the meaning of language as the fundamental national identity basis led to the hopeless delay in adopting The USSR Peoples' Languages Act (24 April 1990). Moreover, it made a fundamental from the point of view of linguistic security mistake - it consisted in declaring the Russian language not the "state" language, but the "official" one, which resulted in the loss of the state-forming role of the Russian language on the USSR territory.

On October 25, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation adopted a proactive legal document, The Russian Federation Peoples' Languages Act. It spelled out the fundamental principles of linguistic life for the peoples of Russia. For the first time in the Russian state history, the Russian language was declared the state language throughout its entire territory [5]. The key function of the Russian language was the restoration of its state-forming role. From the point of view of linguistic security, the significance of this law consists in the fact that, unlike The USSR Peoples' Languages Act which was created by the example of laws already adopted in the USSR national republics, The Russian Federation Peoples' Languages Act itself became the model for creating language laws in the Russian Federation subjects. Up to date, the majority of national republics which are constituent entities of the Russian Federation have adopted their own language laws.

### IV. COEXISTENCE OF LANGUAGES

Thus, the end of the 20th century witnessed a fundamentally new linguistic situation in Russia, a kind of new sociolinguistic paradigm - state bilingualism - characterized by the coexistence of the Russian language as the state language throughout the Russian Federation and the state languages of the titular peoples of the Russian Federation constituent entities. The status of Russian as the state language was finally secured by Article 68 of the Russian Federation Constitution:

- 1) Russian was recognized as the state language of the Russian Federation throughout its territory;
- 2) republics have the right to establish their own state languages, which are used in public administration bodies, local authorities and governmental institutions of the republics along with the state language of the Russian Federation;
- 3) The Russian Federation guarantees to all its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development [1].

Many of the Russian Federation constituent entities have their own state languages (titular peoples' languages): Abaza, Adyghe, Altai, Bashkir, Buryat, Ingush, etc. In addition, an official status has been established for the languages of the autonomous districts and the autonomous area: Vepsian, Kazakh, Karelian, Nenets, Chukchi, Finnish, etc.

According to the statistics cited in the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2025, 193 peoples living in Russia use approximately 277 languages and dialects [6].

No less amazing is the statistics on India provided by the 2001 Census of India - over 19,500 dialects with 121 languages, making it the most multilingual country in the world. 20 of these languages are officially recognized by the government together with Hindi and English, among them Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Punjabi, Nepali, Marathi [7].

Nevertheless, various steps were taken to spread Hindi throughout the nation, with great caution still, in order not to offend any regional or linguistic sentiments of the people. For instance, to encourage people to use and accept Hindi, the government established the Town Official Language Implementation Committee, and cash awards are given to government employees who write their works in Hindi.

A popular opinion is that Hindi should be accepted as an alternative to English, not to local languages thus making the official language Hindi an important part of the unity of the country [8].

## CONCLUSION

It can hardly be argued that underestimation of the state language role leads to an inevitable decline in the role of the nation and state as the main regulator of the economic, political, social and cultural life of people. Many researchers also come to the conclusion that modern study of linguistic security policy implementation experience is incomplete without taking into account the influence of geopolitical and globalization processes on society, the socio-economic structure of the state, and its linguistic landscape.

Thus, both Russia and India have been undertaking numerous steps aimed at preserving their national languages. It is worth noting that despite the evident differences in approaches to language policies, both states have been implementing a number of measures for preserving languages of their various ethnic

communities.

In comparison with Russia, more progress has been achieved by India in this direction, which contributes to reducing the possibility of interethnic disputes. On the other hand, Russia has advanced more considerably in its attempt to promote the Russian language as a consolidator of its multicultural society.

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