

# Revisiting Soviet Russia and Contemporary Russia's Language Politics

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## Abstract

*Multilingual polities have always been confronted with problems associated with linguistic and ethnic identity, with Soviet and contemporary Russia included. Language politics of the Russian state revolves around the way language and linguistic disparities amidst varying peoples are dealt with. Extant studies on the discourse of Russia since 1991, upon the collapse of the USSR, have espoused the link between the USSR and contemporary Russia, with little attention paid to the linguistic factors that constitute identity and cultural significance, as well as the language politics devised. This implies that language politics attempt at crafting a unique identity for the Russian state and this calls for holistic review. This study is, therefore, carried out to look into this very important aspect in order to better understand contemporary Russia's relations within the global space. Historical methods enriched the study, while interpretive design was used. Secondary data were collected and subjected to historical analysis. The concerns addressed in this study stemmed from the idea of Soviet authoritarian expression. Language use in socio-cultural and socio-political spheres indicates identity construction. The creation of political ideology is an essential component of the complex indicators that determine the identity of the Russian state. The study unravelled the significance of language use in Russia's relations. Russia's world is preoccupied with language politics which showcases lines of allegiance, friendship and enmity. The linguistic relevance of "US," that is, Russia and its allies, and "THEM" that are against Russia, becomes instrumental in better understanding the language politics of Soviet and contemporary Russia.*

**Keywords:** cultural significance, identity, language politics, Russia

## 1. Introduction

Language politics is an attribute of multi-ethnic and multilingual socio-cultural polities. The major focus of language politics is identification of linguistic problems associated with the presence of varying ethnic nationalities in society and devising efforts at addressing such phenomena. Of course, Soviet Russia and contemporary Russia exemplify a typical multi-ethnic and multilingual society. The choice of these two phases in the trajectory of the metamorphosis of Russia is very significant as the two phases typically exemplify plural societies with degrees of ethnic and language disparities, with measures of curbing language and identity question (Oluwafemi, 2025). Although the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) ceased to exist owing to its collapse in 1991, it symbolised a model of language politics to plural societies across the globe. Little wonder that the contemporary Russia, though it inherited the overlapping ethnic pluralism from the defunct USSR, also, since its inception in 1991, has devised measures in addressing its multi-language situation, thereby serving as a contemporary prototype in the discourse of language politics. Within the context of language politics, this study explores how these regimes employed specific vocabulary, historical references, and emotional appeals to forge a sense of national unity and legitimize their rule as multilingual states.

The era of the USSR is very symbolic in the academic debates that revolve around the politics of contemporary Russia (Bacon, 2014). Significantly, the discourse of Russian cultural studies is overlapping language politics of Russia as language serves as a medium of cultural expression and often explores how culture and media intersect to fashion societal norms, values and identities in relation to peoples' language(s). What this implies, of course, is the focus on the analysis of how media representations influence perceptions of the Russian culture domestically and internationally. This study focuses on language politics, that is, it serves as an overview of the broad spectrums in which cultural production reflects and responds to the holistic social and political dynamics in relation to addressing multiple language related problems in the society (Abimbola *et al.*, 2024; Omotade and Oluwafemi, 2023a).

Language and cultural expression, affiliation and inclination among the peoples of Russia significantly reveal the manner and dynamism of state control, censorship and influence on language policy and planning in the country. The apparent show of politics cannot be over-emphasised in order to better explain the political values of Russian authoritarian regimes. This justifies the historical method used in this study. The historiography of the USSR reveals the imposition of the Russian language on other non-ethnic Russian populace, provoking protracted nationalist agitations. Although the early stage of the formation of the USSR universally embraced multilingualism under Vladimir Lenin via the mass literacy campaign and the development of orthographies for other republics languages (Omotade, Oluwafemi & Abimbola, 2024), Stalin's language politics was very critical to the promotion of what is termed *Russification*, a language politics of upholding Russian as a lingua-franca, and making non-ethnic Russians embrace the Russian language and culture at the expense of theirs (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018). This review is supported by the authoritarian language definition. This has been introduced essentially with the attempt to remind the people of Russia of their nationality, personality and worldview. The concerns addressed in this study stemmed from the idea of authoritarian expression. The Soviet leadership, as it was well known, followed an ideology defined as Marxist-Leninist.

This philosophy is portrayed as a totally objective philosophy, focused on self-evaluation. So, in relation to internal expressions and in negotiating international policies, Communist Russia appears objective regardless of domestic and international tensions (Oluwafemi & Abimbola, 2020). This often culminated in a scientific debate, marked by attempts to minimise the complexity of word choice and practically avoid the push of the meaning towards interpretation. The language politics of the Stalinist regime was totalitarian, thus, it became a demonstration of force. Having identified this, it has become clear that language politics has an indescribable implication for the substantive form of language, particularly words and significance boundaries, within the general language functions of the speech communities.

Extant scholarly debates have established the relationship between language and ideology (Bakhtin & Voloshinov, 1929). Language politics goes beyond articulated linguistic elements to even incorporating semiotic consideration of attributing meanings to concept within the society (Reis, 1993). Of course, it has been established that different discourses have scholarly debated semiotic dictions in dealing with language politics, which hitherto, becomes a reality on identity construction in relation to a certain ethnic inclination (Zichermann, 2006). Language politics is evident in language use in political campaigns. This plays significant roles in relation to the importance that is attributed to different languages in a multilingual society as well as meanings that various given sign convey (Clark & Jacobs, 2002).

Importantly, semiotic significance cannot be underrated in the language politics of the USSR. It was used to explain the language situations in the Soviet language politics, having implications for cultural properties. In the administration of Stalin, the totalitarian language of the Eastern Bloc took its peak. It became very instrumental in understanding detailed features of Soviet language ideology which helped in understanding the Soviet leadership in relation to Soviet Russia's language politics (Mcilwain, 2007; Undusk, 2003; Lepik, 2008; Ventsel, 2006; 2007).

## 2. Research Design and Method

The historical method of research was used in this study. An interpretive design formed the basis on which historical events are communicated without bias. Interpretive design is usually intertwined with the historical method of research because of its uniqueness in communicating meanings in historical study (Rabiya, 2014). With the aid of interpretive design, code messages were simplified, synthesised, organised and utilised (Schwartz-Shea, & Yanov, 2012). Veritable academic debates have shown that the development of an effective research approach is important to the progress of any project and must be informed by the research problem and information or condition in the field under review. It is commonly maintained that the only way to accomplish a given research goal is through a mixture of methodologies. Consequently, the research employs an historical method. Historical methods of

research border on historicising and obtaining facts via exposition of historical past, relating historical events in the past with the present in order to proffer solutions to future problems (Taiwo, 2021; Nevins, 1938; Jovita, 2015). Of course, one cannot but see the importance of primordial discourse in ethnicity and identity fragmentations among groups in a plural setting. The historical method is significantly employed in this research because of the scope and the subject matter that the study encapsulates. With the aid of the historical method, the importance of the study of language politics becomes a necessity, having understood the socio-cultural setting of the coverage of the contemporary Russian society.

Trailing the historiography of the metamorphosis of Russia over the years, how it became a plural society via expansion, invasion, hegemony, annexation and cultural assimilation, the historical method in the study enhanced proper integration of the needed facts and figures required in unravelling issues bordering on nationalism, ethnicity and factors of self-determination amidst groups in the USSR and modern-day Russia. Significantly, interpretive design was adopted for better interpretation of historical facts. This research, as well as methodology used, is purposely chosen because of the present state of the Russian Federation, having gone through various stages of transformation and power build up from the period of the Russian empire, through the era of Soviet Union, till the disintegration of the Union in 1991, when Russia became a fully-fledged geopolitical entity trailing its identity internally and externally in the global relation.

It is important to note that the most critical findings and viewpoints in connection with this research subject are explored for the scope of language politics in USSR and contemporary Russia. This is done to explain language and identity question and its related phenomenon in Russia from a very fascinating viewpoint with a view to Russian identity. To summarise this, the study uses interpretivism as a mean to get knowledge by finding meanings through deeper interpretation of the whole. The fundamental principle of interpretivism is that the whole is to be studied for a phenomenon to be interpreted. Interpretivism attempts to gather and analyse evidence from portions of a concept. Thus, crucial elements of an interpretation which other approaches may ignore are taken care of by interpretivism to attain detailed results, thus, justifying the choice of the method employed in this study.

## **2.1. Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation**

Data for the study were collected via secondary sources. As the historical method of research and the interpretive design were used, the research relied on individuals, anthropological facts and historical evidences which the use of secondary sources significantly embodied. These included archival resources via Russian government official archives. Secondary sources included published books, journal articles, dissertations, theses and internet materials. Data were collected and interpreted in relation to the discourse of language politics in the USSR and contemporary Russia. On this note, the historical materials were collected. Hence, the published and unpublished books, academic journals and articles, periodicals, as well as authenticated materials which are available on the internet, having direct and indirect relation with language or identity issues in general, and the narrowness of the discourse to language politics in the Russian state were collected, thus, forming the bulk of data for the study. The data for the study were analysed and presented in relation to the methodology employed. As the bulk of the data for the research revolve around historical method, incorporating secondary sources, the research resources were historically content analysed.

## **2.2. Conceptualisation: Multilingualism, Identity and Language Politics**

Multilingualism, identity and language politics are conceptualised for better understanding of the subject matter of this study. These concepts as enumerated earlier, are very important in relation to debates that revolve around both Soviet and contemporary Russia. Also, these concepts are interrelated in plural polities such as the Russian state. Multilingualism simply implies a situation of having two or more languages co-functioning in a society. As a result of many languages, the concept of identity sets in. A typical instance in identity inclination can better be explained using a

multilingual country like Nigeria. Here, there are over 400 languages attributed to divergent ethnic groups within Nigeria. As such, a Yoruba man/woman sees himself/herself firstly, as a Yoruba, before an attribution of being a Nigerian (Oluwafemi, 2025). The questions of language use and language attitude manifest in language politics. Hence, language politics is conceptualised as attempt at crafting a unique identity and socio-cultural function for language(s) in a multilingual state, Russia inclusive.

Going by historical methodology, Russia has been a plural state from time immemorial, especially, trailing the formation of the Kievan Rus state, which comprised the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian. Thus, identity and language politics could be said to have been an attribute of the Russian state but with salient attention drawn to its scholarly debates. Russian empire is of great attraction in the discourse of multilingualism and identity polarisation. The growth of the Russian state was empowered via invasion and colonisation of new territories and subsequent transforming such groups into Russian territory. Thus, more peoples of alien languages and cultures were incorporated into the Russian linguistic coverage, thereby compounding identity and language situations in Russia. The Soviet Russia is a typical prototype of a multilingual states as a result of the conglomeration of fifteen (15) formerly independent states, with their varying individual diversities and peculiarities, coming together to form a formidable USSR. This important peculiarity of the USSR was inherited by the contemporary Russia in 1991 upon the collapse of the USSR (Omotade *et al.*, 2024).

Importantly, in order to proffer a better understanding of a subject-matter, it is very expedient to substantiate and attribute meaning to certain concepts around which the discourse revolves, such as multilingualism, identity and language politics, as in the case of this study. In other words, it is important to ascertain the locum that upholds virtually every scholarly debate in academic enquiry. The term conceptualisation involves mental parameter by which holistic ideas or concepts about academic enquiries are formulated. It is significant in scholarly debates as it serves as a link between raw sensory experiences, that is what is conceived, and the general explanation that will offer better understanding of the conceivable, thereby, allowing expert categorisation of objects, events as well as interrelated relationships. This endeavour helps shape the framework for unravelling prevailing discourses.

Extant studies have shown that there are two main aspects to conceptualisation (Smith & Medin, 2018; Valentine & Oaksford, 1990). According to Smith and Medin (2018), conceptualisation is important in scholarly debates as it enhances formation of concepts. As aptly captured by these scholars, it involves obtaining data via senses, while at the same time, upholding the key features in the obtained data for analysis. Thus, similar things are grouped together, considering their shared characteristics, similarities and dissimilarities, while in general, creating a mental representation, overtly making a concept understandable (Smith & Medin, 2018). The importance of conceptualisation is upheld also by Valentine and Oaksford (1990) to be an instrument of the interpretation of reality.

According to these scholars, it is believed that the moment concepts are formed; they are significantly adopted for the provision of valid interpretation to new academic enquiry. By so doing, the making of predictions, problems solving as well as effective communication is enabled with the aid of conceptualisation (Valentine & Oaksford, 1990). It is very important to note that conceptualisation is not a process that is static in nature. This implies that conceptualisation is a dynamic process of proffering explanations to enquiry. Generally, the understanding that one has of a concept may be modified based on the circumstances that revolve around it. Also, additional encounters in relation to new discoveries can lead to modification in interpretation so as to better showcase the significance of the enquiry. It is worthy of noting that there are new discoveries, especially in the field of science, which may obviously result in a shift in the manner and nature by which the conceptualisations of things are done.

As it has been scholarly noted for instance, “disease,” as a conceptualised phenomenon, has undergone notable dynamism in historiography, ranging from spirituality to a germ causative matter (Rosenberg, 2009). It is very important to note that theoretical perspectives on how conceptualisation

occurs are divergent. While certain scholarly propositions claim that experience and interaction with the environment result into the formation of concepts (see Smith & Medin, 2018), that humans possess distinctive certain innate cognitive structures which are significantly responsible for the guidance of the mannerism of categorizing information was aptly upheld by others (Carey, 1985). Be that as it may, the most important reality is that these schools of thought play significant roles generally in relation to conceptualisation. Thus, human interaction with nature around him is dependent upon the manner by which conceptualisation of things and the world around man is conceptualised. For instance, our conceptualisation of time can impact our planning and decision-making (Boroditsky, 2011).

Also, cultural background, in the same vein, can shape the manner by which social norms and behaviour are conceptualised (Nisbett *et al.*, 2003). Hence, the understanding of conceptualisation as an academic enquiry exerts implications across divergent fields. Taking a cursory look at the field of education, it is crucial to recognize the importance of helping students develop a strong conceptual understanding. This goes beyond memorizing facts and involves grasping the underlying principles and relationships between them (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). The term conceptualisation becomes very relevant in every research as it helps in developing explanations that can lead to effective learning and the reasoning which requires understanding the manner in which concepts are formed and utilised (Lake *et al.*, 2017).

Conceptualisation is a fundamental cognitive process that allows us to make sense of the world around us. Through forming concepts and using them to interpret new experiences, we build a framework for understanding and interacting with our environment. Conceptualisation is an on-going process, continuously influenced by new information and experiences. By delving into this concept, we gain a deeper understanding of how our own minds work and how we construct our knowledge of the world. This study conceptualises multilingualism, identity and language politics in relation to shaping narratives in the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia. Thus, language politics is viewed as the strategic use of language to construct and manipulate national identity by USSR and contemporary Russia. This, therefore, has been a potent tool in shaping the socio-political landscape of both the USSR and contemporary Russia.

Conceptualising language politics is essential to this study. Significantly, language politics, as conceptualised, enhanced overt and insightful concerns in understanding the role of language in identity construction and political mobilisation. In both Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, language has functioned not merely as a medium of communication but as a symbolic marker of inclusion and exclusion. During the Soviet period, the promotion of Russian was associated with access to higher education, urban employment, and social mobility. The instrumental value of Russian remains high in contemporary Russia, but minority languages are often relegated to the private sphere, if not completely endangered.

Thus, stratification reinforces hierarchies of power, where Russian-speaking populations are perceived as normative citizens, and speakers of minority languages are frequently marginalized. The sociolinguistic implications are profound: language policies shape not only how people speak but also how they perceive their cultural heritage and political agency (Blommaert, 2006). This dimension is especially pronounced in conflict-prone regions like Tatarstan or the North Caucasus, where language politics intersect with broader struggles for autonomy and recognition (Zamyatin, 2016).

### **3. Lingo-Identity Rhetoric and Political Discourse in the Soviet Russia: Implications for the Russian Federation**

Very significant in the discourse of lingo-identity rhetoric in the USSR is the fact that the Soviet Union's political discourse was a carefully constructed instrument that was used to fashion the identity of the Soviet states and citizens. This process, known as lingo-identity rhetoric, involved the strategic use of language to promote a unified Soviet identity that transcended pre-existing ethnicities and nationalities. It has been revealed that the term "Homo Sovieticus," that is the (Soviet Man) was

upheld as the locum of the USSR's rhetoric. This implies that the state constructed its own peoples, distinct from other people, socially and politically. According to Harris (2010), the term referred to a prototype national of the Soviet state who has attributed the core values of the state as well as ideologies and the Communist Party. As ably pointed out, elements of these core values comprised loyalty, collectivism, and dedication to building a socialist society. Thus, this concept was at various occasions employed by political office holders, politicians and other stakeholders as well as the media in order to construct a constant image of the ideal Soviet citizen. It is very interesting to acknowledge the fact that the pre-existing ethnic and national identities were downplayed by the Soviet government.

Although there were divergent nationalities and ethnic formations within the vast coverage of the USSR, these peoples were officially acknowledged by the government and their ethnic identity formations were often seen as secondary to the overarching Soviet identity (Geyer, 2009). As Gödlik (2018) has substantiated, concepts such as the 'Soviet people', 'fraternal republics', among others, became the yardstick for portraying unity in diversity. Within the context of external relations, lingo-identity rhetoric pragmatically involved the demonization of the "Other." The West, particularly capitalist countries and the United States, were often portrayed as enemies of the Soviet state and the "Soviet Man." This created a sense of "us" against "them" mentality, further solidifying the in-group identity of Soviet citizens (Subtelny, 2004). The philosophy of the Soviet period has been acclaimed to be scientific based on extant academic debates. This means that the philosophy has taken an objective world description. Thus, it was maintained as: (1) the scientific base for society creation, (2) the scientific explanation of the struggle of the working class, (3) the justification for revolution staged by the proletarian, (4) the scientific reason for building society for the socialists (Lühikursus, 1951:38). This was also the principle which has been called the theory of Marxist-Leninism. The underlying scientific essence of Stalin's Russian identity was thus demonstrated by Marxist ideology. After claiming that science critically represents the universe, the scientific representation of the world is the only perfect medium that describes truth (Arendt, 1973: 460-483).

In the 1920s, a number of bodies in the Soviet Russia addressed the genuine base by which the universe emanates from the consciousness of the right proletarian class, the circumstances that recall such, and the obligations it entails. The Association of Proletarian Authors was representative of these. Stalinist social realism took full shape, having been inspired by the scientific representation of the environment, monopolised and made axiological theory of the philosophy of Soviet Russia (Groys, 1992). Whatever is incompatible with Communist ideals is deleted and has a negative meaning from current practices. The criterion of scientificity that the Soviet philosophy upholds is widely recognised in this discourse. The idea of objectivity in relation to law and order from the viewpoint of Soviet totalitarianism was of great significance for the analytical view of the world, and indeed the objective rules that are in line with history and the laws of life and nature synonymous synchronised with the subjects of science and reality (Chalmers, 1992). In line with the above, it has come to light on a daily basis that science in a language which is distinct and simple and does not have any sort of ambiguity can communicate the worldview.

Ideally, the changing of meanings in relation to context should be avoided, and each word should conform to a highly clear substance. As it has been scholarly affirmed by Marr (1936), the Soviet language theory had to be based on mainly straightforward scientific reasoning. In these theories, the masses should be identified in an intercontinental novel language that is connected with the emergence of a new set of language users. In this sense, therefore, expression in relation to material culture is clarified by the speech community. According to this description, language is represented by human collectivism as a creative force, not only the imaged viewpoint but the social rank that continues in the lexis, syntax, grammar and the semantics. As a consequence, language itself does not exist in isolation. It only survives in an intrinsic association that is connected with human beings, material culture and the historiography of human society, most especially, past occurrences. Within the context of this language framework, the signs and what they imply are closely related. Whatever the signs are, the real instances of the symbol being used are (Romanenko, 2003: 189).

Whatever systemic change in the physical world should be, it must specifically be interpreted in language in the human consciousness. Kupina (1995) says that the theoretical analyses of the varying degrees of the Stalinist Russian language directions are thoroughly represented in *Totalitarian Language: The Dictionary and Utterance Reactions*. A dictionary showcases the linguistic aspect and requirements of a given time, via scholarly exposition. It then defines and prescribes the rules for using the signs and sign systems correctly and assigns them accordingly. Here, the dictionary is an apt analysis with its normative uses to address state language policies and encourage totalitarian language. As Kupina (1995) claims, the Soviet totalitarian vocabulary is ably depicted. The first one which is established was the movement towards continuous, ideological semantic concepts reduction and transformation. Secondly, the propensity to synthetic and quasi-ideological growth is established.

The following is the propensity in the directions of dualistic linguistic axiologisation. The ideological extension of frontiers concerns the various layers of the semantic organisation of a word, defines the meaning of the word, and puts the word on the divided axis of good and bad values concurrently. There is also a propensity to establish antonymic rows that synonymously confirm ideological dogmas. Normally, terms that generally should not be ideological at first glance, or every day, turn into ideologies. Finally, there has been an important trend to codify ideologically untraditional lexical compounds. The ideological rationales for pronouns, adverbs, among others are inclusive as well. This is the political dimension's subordinate position to the other fields that make up society. In the Stalinist totalitarian vocabulary, this became evident in a specifically radical and explicit way. The main ideologies are established in political debate and other semantic domains gain political and ideological meaning from them (Kupina, 1995: 23). This will be the groundwork for the creation of principal semantic-ideological disparities and of axiological laws. In this way a new set of ideological principles will be chosen.

This of course, becomes an important aspect of Soviet Russia's totalitarian language, culture and it obviously conformed to either the Marxist approach to language or the Soviet ideology's emphasis as being a scientific-based world. This can be said to postulate that the authoritarian language is the language that focuses primarily on explaining a primitive person's linguistic consciousness. The sense of selfishness and superiority is clearly primitive reasoning. Thus, an absolute value evaluation, which showed us to be the image marker of positive value, became openly apparent in relation to the authoritarian language. In addition, this is considered to prevent multifaceted reasoning practices which may pose a serious threat to break the already-existing world view (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993: 74-75).

The whole approach towards the said political and ideological argument can be summed up in two common lines of derision from the discourse in relation to the true theory. These two wings are considered in the lines of two pronouns that are metaphorical in nature, namely: (1) the *us* and, (2) the *them*. In other words, *(us)*, which refers to the Russians, is favourably showcased. On the other hand, *(them)*, meaning other people, is negatively depicted. In these two terms, there is a strong difference. As Dijk (1998) has shown, people can never talk negative about *(us)*. At the same time, whoever is in friendship with *(them)* is against the Russians. The essence and strength of the interest groups that contributed to the development of the ideology are focused on how these pairs of opposition surface in texts, whether covertly or openly.

It can be discussed that an asocial societal personality was created through the intrusion of the repressive language in order to obstruct fully the social dealings of people. The spiritual and educational essence of authoritarian language indoctrination during the Stalinist regime has been proactively and clearly articulated. The average Soviet citizen was an adult child whose conscience the authorities of Soviet Russia would easily direct and exploit (Dobrenko, 1993: 45). This linguistic primitivism, axiologically polarized, directly opposes the transparency and excludes empirical debate in principle. A dialogue on the position of political rhetoric provides the key parameter to understand this inconsistency. This is simply because it is politics that are the subject matter of totalitarianism and other semanticised fields. From the context of the modern-day Russia, the Contemporary Russia rejects Western-style democracy as inauthentic. From the perspective of the Russian Federation,

especially under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, concepts such as "sovereign democracy" are adapted in redefining democracy. Of course, this is done in relation to Russian values and historical experience, justifying limitations on political freedoms. Lingo-Identity Rhetoric in Post-Soviet Russia is importantly discussed in relation to the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced the challenge of forging a new national identity. While Soviet-era rhetoric lost some influence, lingo-identity strategies continue to shape political discourse.

#### **4. The Russo-lingual Metamorphosis; Origin and Development**

Russian is regarded as one of Europe's largest mother tongues of communication. Many scholars have provided the possible variety of the Russian language speakers in Europe at large (Babich, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Nikonov, 2011). The dominant language of about 175 million Russians, Belarusians, Uzbeks, Kazakhstans and Kirghizstans is Russian. In most of the countries that disintegrated after the USSR's official breakup, Russian speaking was also substantial. The Russian language has been said to be the widest geographically-used language on the borders of Eurasia since it is spoken in the former republics of the USSR. Lewis (2009) argues that approximately 144 million native users in about 33 countries, potentially including African countries, use Russian as a communication medium.

The native speaker is estimated to be about 160 million in relation to number (Nikonov 2011). This accorded Russian the glory of being the 8<sup>th</sup> most widely spoken language in the world. Babich (2007) affirmed that Russian is acclaimed the world's fifth most widely spoken language. Thus, its speakers are increasing above 275 million, after only the English, Chinese, Spanish and Hindi languages. Russian is among the most used languages in cyberspace and has always been among the top ten languages used to communicate in the Internet (IWS, 2013; Economist, 2012; Minenko, 2012).

The history of the Russian language is concise (Cubberley, 2002). The provision of important dates for the growth and development of Russian is known by everyone in Russia, as well as the lingo-cultural rhetoric. It was significantly argued that only rarely had Slavs formed any formal state from Slovenian expansion into the Balkans in the sixth to the mid-ninth centuries. It is reported that the West Slavs, in the Bohemian and the Moravian region, established one under Samo in the early seventh century, especially following the defeats of the Avars in 623 (Cubberley, 2002). This lasted for some years and the death of Samo in 658 brought it to an end. In 680, the Asparuch Bulgarian Khanate was established. Significantly, this was first founded in the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (1014) (Cubberley, 2002). The eastern Slavs lived in tribal groups until the middle of the ninth century. Cubberley (2002: 12) vividly captures this period as it is maintained that during this time.

The 'Norsemen' or Vikings, also identified as Varangians, were invited by those residing in the Novgorod region to step in and help them set up a state; the confirmed date for this invite is 860, and between then and 862, the first incoming Norsemen arrived in Novgorod.

In Novgorod, Rurik, who was followed by Oleg in 879, was the first king. The Kievan Rus was founded around 882 as Oleg moved his seat to Kiev. Cubberley (2002) further argues that the name 'Rus' is contested. Some academics observe that perhaps the name adapted from Scandinavians, and possibly to the Scandinavian ethnonym of ancestry, which was then linked to the population of the nation and, in turn, to the nation as a whole. On the other hand, particularly from the Soviet, it represents the old Slavic tribal name, with the variant 'Ros,' from which the toponym 'Rossija' was later established in the fifteenth century, premised on the European-Latin-Style nomenclature of states (Cubberley, 2002).

In the course of this process, a novel strategy has begun to reshape cultural norms, particularly in relation to names and naming systems. Rulers, in particular those supporting Rurik, have slavicised the Scandinavian names. Originally, Kievan Rus composed of several principalities and became very loose in nature as a supranational state. However, the popularity of the Grand Prince, the Prince of Kiev, was acknowledged by the Kievan Rus Principality. Cubberley (2002) argues that the State

endured with numerous high and low points throughout the ensuing two hundred and fifty (250) years - the key high points were the dominion of the powerful grand princes of Vladimir I (Great) who saw the state baptism, that is to say, its formal adoption of Christianity by Jaroslav I (the Wise) and the flowering of the Faith by the Great, in the course of which there was a religious flourishing (1113-39).

With the death of Jaropolk, Cubberley (2002) maintains that the seventeen princes of Kiev had been squabbling over the Principality of Kiev for the next thirty years, rendering the state very small. Other principalities then began demanding dominance of them. Multiple reforms took effect. Novgorod, among others, became autonomous in 1136. The events continue until the advent of the Tatar-Mongols, the Tatar yoke in the Russian history that held the entire area for about 250 years (Cubberley, 2002). Russia was led by Peter the Great, who effectively implemented various reforms such as 'Europeanisation' or 'Westernisation' of Russia as a linguistic conduit. Russia passed through different training stages. He occupied the Baltic coast, where he established his new capital, St. Petersburg, in 1703, and divorced church and state in cultural matters, including language and writing. In accordance with Cubberley (2002; 15), Peter introduces a 'civil script,' creating his first newspaper, and establishing the Academy of Sciences, founded in 1725, for non-religious publications.

Russia's history has been one of regular expansion and political consolidation since that time. The Russian language was the normative and standardising sector. Finally, Russian developed its traditional forms in the nineteenth century. This will summarize the historical evolution of the language with Cubberley's study. (1). Sixth and ninth centuries: East Slavs live by geographical boundaries segregated from West Slavs and establish dialectal features. (2). Nineteenth and fifteenth centuries: The languages of Kievan Rus are linguistic parameters, and they are an ancient Russian language. (3). 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries: The Western and the South political division between Lithuanians and Poles thus lead to separate language trails in the Nord-East and the South-West. Later Moscow's rise as a hub led to the rise of the 'central' transitional dialect community. (4). 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, creating a formidable, Western-facing Russia, particularly under St Peter the Great, and a rising empire, standardizing with the liberation from religious bonds of the literary language and the production of western debts. (5). 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century: the creation of modern standards.

## **5. The Russian Language as an Identity Factor in USSR and Contemporary Russia's Discourse**

As with most major languages in the world, Russian has increased its regional achievement and the overall number of speakers by imperialism, a fact indicated by the list of countries in which it is still used at an elevated level of everyday use (Oluwafemi, 2025). Like English, French and Spanish, Russian was used in a relatively limited location worldwide some 500 years ago, compared to its present linguistic coverage with a relatively small population. Russian was promoted by the Romanov Empire for many decades. Russian also became the official language of Soviet Russia when it metamorphosed into the USSR. Although they tried to gain more land, over the course of the Moscow history Fireman (2009) said that Russians marched in lock-step with Russian imperialists as both their mother tongue and language, eventually turning westward to the Pacific Rim, to the south of the Karakum Desert, to the Pamir Mountains, north of North America. As verified by other well-known scholars, Russian is represented in the various directions and at all stages, as a language of business and trade, a language of science, a legal and literary language at its core, a language of naval and military knowledge, as a language younger than Armenian or Georgian, but accruing territories (Medvedev, 2007; Lomsadze, 2012).

Russia extends the tentacles of Russian through public education and a comprehensive body of bureaucratic instruments in early Soviet era to ensure that Russian is understood and used even in the very remote areas of the USSR (Oluwafemi, 2024). Paradoxically, Russian fluency evolved in parallel with the emergence of formalised written local language types across Eurasia. Languages such as Evenki and Khakas were also encouraged by the new Soviet education system (Aitmatov, 2008). It is noteworthy that the target of full Soviet Russian bilingualism was a mere shadow-hunting objective of the Soviet leadership by the end of the 1970s (Solchanyk, 1982). Nevertheless, the language enjoyed

some direction of internationalism (Fierman, 2009). As capitals of the numerous republics teeming with Russian speakers, the rhythm of Russian in nearly every schoolroom and media outlets across 10-time areas became perverse within Soviet Russia's geographical coverage. During the Cold War, the Russian language has played a key role as a lingua franca among the various Russian allies, especially the allies of the COMECON. This led to the participation of millions of speakers in Eastern Central Europe and Mongolia as well as in countries further afield, such as Vietnam, Cuba and Syria. Russian language was a precipitous drop in prestige outside of the Soviet Union's borders, following the political system in the 80's, as a foreign language under the Gorbachev regime, as well as the following decades, especially in relation to Russia-European Union integration (Omotade and Oluwafemi, 2016).

In places like Poland and Czechoslovakia, the off-shooting nationalism in the East Bloc decreased Russian standing. The political-economic challenge within the Kremlin resulted in less fervour for Russian language study in foreign allies and African countries like Nigeria (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2023b). This shift has also always impacted the study of Russian in enemy countries as a consequence of the Cold War, which has been the interest and government funding for the regional studies programmes. Competition has also started. As Fodor and Pelauau (2003) argue, German, known in Eastern Bloc as a fraternal language, and a language known as having a long history in the area, has already attracted reasonable speaker populations from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. German witnessed an upsurge at the end of the 1980s and also in the 1990s with the coming realization of an increased inclination among people for Western European society and culture.

In recent decades, English appeared in the countries of Poland, Hungary and other central European countries as a popular choice for learners of foreign languages, showing itself as a globally widespread language of modernity, modern technologies and communication. Gorbachev's policy of perestroika and glasnost in Soviet Russia opened the way for the Baltic-Georgian centrifugal nationalisms that had been agitated against Soviet linguistic Russification since the late 1970s (Solchanyk 1982). In the regions of the Central Asian republics, the influence of *Korenizatsia*, called native action, became fruitful. This is why the formerly only Russian language of trade, education, industry, research, transport, technology, medicine, construction and high culture is the only practical language (Mikhachenko & Trushkova, 2003). When the USSR split up in the 1990s, 14 non-Russian republics gained freedom and their nationalist elite instantly used their newly developed independence for language policy, steadily depleting Russian speakers in millions in the next 20 years. The number of native Russian users was estimated at around 188 million in 1994, according to Rudensky (1994).

In the last twenty years, 44 million have dramatically contracted. The consequence of this decrease is aligning the people of Russia with a catastrophic drop in life expectancy within the first decade of independence. Analogous falls also occurred among Russophones who lived in newly independent republics. As noted by Atnashev (2011) in the conflict regions of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan, this decrease in the number of Russian speakers is evident in conjunction with a sharp drop in birth rates among Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians in general.

However, it should be determined, as Clover (2012) pointed out, that current developments in Russia are representative of a stabilised population rise. The greatest possible end result of the late and post-Soviet language policies developed by post-Soviet nations is the most significant decline of a critical observation beyond the demographical causative agents (Brubaker, 1996), particularly Central Asia, the Baltic States, Moldova and Ukraine, where Russian bilingualism once stood as a reality of higher Soviet institutions. According to Singer (1998), the fall in the populace of Russian-speaking individuals depicts the decline of global Kremlin influence after the end of the West-East ideological war. Not only that, Russia's failed post-socialist authority remains remarkable (Kolossov & Treivish, 2009), particularly in its relation with countries that were formerly of the USSR (Abimbola *et al.*, 2024).

## 6. Discussion

This section aims to synthesize findings, reflect on their implications, and connect to broader themes. Language politics in both the USSR and contemporary Russia reflect broader socio-political dynamics, including nationalism, identity formation, state control, and minority rights. While the Soviet Union engaged in complex language politics as a means of consolidating power and promoting ideological conformity, contemporary Russia exhibits both continuity with and divergence from these policies. Thus, this discussion evaluates the findings, identifies key limitations of the study, and proposes directions for future research. The examination of language politics in the USSR and contemporary Russia showcases a multifaceted interconnectedness of ideology, identity, and state power, by shifting of political agendas and evolving conceptions of nationhood were shaped. Throughout the Soviet era, language politics was a central tool in the state's effort to construct a unified socialist identity while simultaneously managing the diversity of its vast multiethnic citizenry. The policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization), followed by a gradual shift toward Russification, reflects the tensions between promoting local languages and consolidating Russian as a unifying force. This duality was never fully resolved and laid the groundwork for contemporary challenges in the language politics of contemporary Russia.

In the USSR, language politics was inherently ideological. For instance, while minority languages were promoted by the early Soviet state for the main purpose of garnering support among non-Russian groups, the garnered support was conditional and of course, superficial. Over time, the advantage accorded Russian language became more evidently pronounced, especially under Stalin, who saw linguistic unification as a means of centralizing power. The Soviet state framed Russian as the "language of internationalism," masking coercive assimilation policies as instruments of modernization and unity. Yet, this policy generated resistance, particularly in the Baltic states, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, where language served as a marker of cultural autonomy and national identity.

In contrast, language politics in contemporary Russia is shaped by post-imperial anxieties, nationalistic revivalism, and the geopolitical recalibration of Russia's place in the world. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has sought to reassert the dominance of the Russian language within its borders and in the "near abroad," particularly through educational reforms and media outreach. The revival of Russian as a symbol of national pride is coupled with a more assertive stance against minority languages. This discussion underscores the instrumental role of language in constructing political legitimacy. In both Soviet and contemporary Russia, language policy has been used not only to manage diversity but to define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the imagined political community. As Soviet language politics was tailored towards centralisation under the guise of multiculturalism, language politics of the contemporary Russia appears more overt in its centralisation efforts and at the same time, reflects holistic ethno-nationalism in relation to peoples of the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, the legacy of Soviet language politics continues to influence post-Soviet states, where questions of language remain deeply entwined with issues of identity, sovereignty, and geopolitical alignment. Ukraine's recent linguistic reforms, for instance, cannot be fully understood without reference to the long shadow of Russification and the politics of language during and after the Soviet period. Similarly, in Central Asia, language policies oscillate between de-Russification and pragmatic bilingualism, illustrating the enduring complexities of post-colonial linguistic landscapes. Ultimately, the comparison between Soviet and contemporary Russian language politics reveals both continuity and change. While the mechanisms and ideological justifications have evolved, the strategic use of language to assert control, shape identity, and influence regional dynamics remains a constant. Understanding this continuity is essential for comprehending the broader political trajectory of Russia and its interactions with both its internal minorities and neighbouring states.

The USSR and contemporary Russia served as prototypes to addressing multilingualism and its ethnic related issues via the language politics. Language politics unravelled how language itself was

manipulated to promote a Soviet identity. Russian, the dominant language of the USSR, was promoted in non-Russian republics through education and media. While other languages and linguistic functioning were not prohibited, Russian fluency was often seen as a mark of loyalty and advancement (Jahn, 2012). The *lingua franca* status of Russian in Eastern Central Europe in the years following the Second World War was typically hyperbolic. Mikhalkchenko and Trushkova (2003) noted the importance in categorically defining and of course, attributing significance to Russian which in no small measure is the expression of the peoples' cultural values and norms. Russian, the only higher education portrayal in the territory of USSR in the past, was rapidly replaced in the New Independent States by the national linguistic function. The former titular languages of the former member countries of the USSR were these national languages. Similarly, in place of Russian as the second language of choice in post-Soviet Eurasia, languages such as English, German, Turkish, and even Chinese soon emerged.

Not only was the Russian language confronted with the other languages in countries like Slovakia, Romania and Mongolia, which once were the natural option of Foreign Language Studies. Furthermore, the Russian language has lost its place as an eminent second language in developing states, such as Ethiopia, India, Nicaragua and Nigeria and the collapse of the Soviet Union has greatly affected the status of the Russian language worldwide. Although the Soviet Union has collapsed, its language politics of us and them, which was basically for the construction of political borderlines of relations, via identifiable friends and foes in both domestic and international dealings are still very much attributable of the contemporary Russian Federation, especially via the leadership of Putin, whose political fingerprints in Russia's political discourse are traceable to the tail end of the year 1999, upon the voluntary resignation of President Boris Yeltsin, with Putin completing the tenure, and the year 2000, upon his selection as the elected president of the Russian Federation. Cultural significance in Russia's political discourse is subject to Russia's linguistic rhetoric.

## **7. Limitations to the Study**

The current study includes a number of limitations that should be discussed despite its contributions. First, a large portion of the analysis is predicated on policy documents and secondary literature, which might not accurately represent linguistic communities' actual experiences. Interviews with minority language speakers or ethnographic fieldwork may provide deeper, more complex understandings of the sociocultural effects of language policy. Furthermore, the comparative approach may unintentionally mask regional unique characteristics even though it is helpful for detecting overall continuities. Owing to differences in historical legacies, demographic makeup, and local government, minority groups' experiences in places like Buryatia or Chuvashia are very different from those in Chechnya or Dagestan. Our comprehension of language politics at the local level would be improved by a more dissected approach. Furthermore, the study may have underestimated the significance of informal language usage, community action, and digital media because it mainly concentrates on formal language rules and state-level activities. To encourage linguistic revival, minority language supporters have been using internet platforms more and more in recent years. The literature currently in publication does not adequately examine the effects of these bottom-up initiatives. Lastly, the study's temporal focus covers over a century, from the early Soviet era to modern-day Russia. The post-Stalinist thaw, perestroika, and the emergence of ethno-nationalism in the 2000s are only a few examples of significant temporal ruptures that could be flattened by this long *durée* perspective, notwithstanding its benefits. A more stratified approach that emphasises these pivotal moments in greater detail may be beneficial for future research.

## **8. Suggestions for Future Research**

In light of the above raised constraints, a number of directions for further research become apparent. First and foremost, researches that advocate for minority language usage across several generations may provide information about the processes of language change and maintenance. When evaluating the long-term impacts of governmental reforms on language vitality, this kind of research would be quite helpful. Also, it is important that additional comparative approach to studies in relation to

various post-Soviet states is carried out. Although Russia is the biggest and most powerful successor state, other nations have pursued different language politics with differing results, including Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. The precise elements that lead to effective revival of languages or extinction may be identified with the use of a comparative model. Furthermore, the study of language politics may benefit from interdisciplinary purviews, which draw on knowledge from media studies, anthropology, and political science. This implies that a more comprehensive view of the current situation may be obtained, for example, by investigating how language politics mediates nationalist discourses or how multilingualism, nationalism, linguistic and ethnic identity is debated on social media outlets. In addition to the foregoing, the influence of legislative structures and international bodies on language politics, policy and planning should also be considered. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is one of the international agreements on minority rights that contemporary Russia has ratified. Nonetheless, there is still disparity in how these pledges are being implemented domestically. The discrepancy between national practices and international norms may be the subject of future studies. In a nutshell, further research on the emotional and psychological aspects of language loss is required. Native language loss is not just a linguistic issue; it can also result in identity conflicts and cultural upheaval. Thus, creating more effective and sympathetic language policies requires an understanding of how people and communities deal with these changes.

## 9. Conclusion

Notwithstanding that the language politics of the USSR and contemporary Russia favoured the Russian state in ascertaining lines of friendship and enmity within the international space, it still faced significant challenges. It is very important to note that the vastness and ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union that made forging a singular identity difficult. National and religious traditions remained strong in many regions, often clashing with the imposed Soviet identity. Not only that, the realities of life in the USSR often fell short of the utopian ideals promoted official discourse and created a sense of disillusionment among some citizens. In a nutshell, the Soviet Union's political discourse heavily relied on language politics to construct a new type of citizen, that is, the "Soviet Man." Through the use of specific terms, the downplaying of ethnicities, and the promotion of Russian language, the government attempted to forge a unified national identity. However, the project faced significant obstacles, and the ultimate success of language politics in shaping Soviet citizens remains a subject of debate till date as evident in the modern-day Russian Federation. Despite significant differences in ideology, both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia share some commonalities in their language politics. Notably, both regimes use historical narratives to legitimize their rule and foster national pride. This study is mainly limited to language politics in Soviet and contemporary Russia, further studies on language politics in other multilingual climes are also welcome, having the outcome of this study as a template for further discourse. Based on the findings of this study, new research on the emotional and psychological aspects of language loss is required in relation to language politics in the multilingual Russia, as native language loss is not just a linguistic issue, but also results in identity conflicts and cultural upheaval in addressing language politics in multilingual settings.

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