University of Alberta

Avoiding Uniformity: Language Policy in the Soviet Union, 1950 to 1965

by

Gregory R. Fowler 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

Department of History and Classics

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2007

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33124-8
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33124-8

Abstract

This study analyses newspaper publication data from Soviet district-level newspapers from 1950 to 1965 in four different regions of the USSR, with the aim of examining the practical application of Soviet language policy. This implementation of Soviet language policy is subsequently contrasted with official language policy pronouncements from the Soviet leadership. The result of this juxtaposition suggests that Soviet language policy was not implemented in a uniform manner across the USSR, nor did a consistent policy of linguistic Russification exist. Moreover, this study reveals further details about language policy in the 1950 to 1965 period, such as subtle differences between the policies of Stalin and Khrushchev.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), along with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the Department of History and Classics at the University of Alberta for their generous financial contributions, which allowed me to complete this project. Likewise, I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor David Marples, both for his invaluable advice on research and editorial matters and for his patience with my insistence on arbitrarily transforming 'data' into a singular noun throughout the entire text. Moreover, I am most grateful for the support I received from my family and friends throughout the duration of this academic endeavour. Finally, this work is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Helen Fowler, without whose unflagging encouragement I would never have made it this far.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Language Abbreviations Used Within Tables

ARM - Armenian

AZR - Azerbaijani

BLR - Belorussian

LAT - Latvian

LTG - Latgal

KAR - Karakalpak

KAZ - Kazakh

RUS - Russian

TAD - Tajik

UZB - Uzbek

List of Abbreviations Used Within the Text

ASSR	-	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
ArSSR	-	Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic
BSSR	-	Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CPSU	-	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
LaSSR	-	Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic
LPI SSSR	-	*Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR* (Chronicle of Periodical Publishing in the USSR)
RSFSR	-	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SSR	-	Soviet Socialist Republic (referring to any one of the so-called "Union Republics" comprising the USSR)
USSR	-	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UzSSR	-	Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

Chapter One – Introduction

During the Cold War years, Western society tended to characterize the USSR as a monolithic Russian-speaking entity. In fact, the Soviet Union was a multi-national and multi-ethnic state in which over one hundred languages were spoken at any one time by a comparable number of ethnic groups.[1] This figure should by itself provide some explanation for why successive Soviet governments, like their tsarist predecessors, believed that some sort of policy regulating language use was necessary in order to maintain a coherent governmental structure. In terms of explaining what is meant by "language policy" as it relates to the Soviet Union, many scholars of the subject refer to the following definition provided by Soviet linguist V.P. Grigoriev:

> *Language policy* [in the USSR] is the theory and practice of a conscious influencing of the course of language development on the part of society, in short, goal-oriented and scientifically grounded guidance of the functioning of existing languages and of the creation and perfecting of new linguistic means of social communication.[2]

Grigoriev's definition places what most sociolinguists today would call "language policy" (generally meaning any policy governing language use) and "language planning" (essentially the linguistic engineering of a language or languages to serve a social or political function) under the same umbrella term of language policy. However, since these two distinct activities were largely inseparable in the USSR, Grigoriev's definition will be used as the basis for the present analysis. Moreover, considering the complex

---

[1] Determining the exact number of languages spoken in the USSR is highly problematic for several reasons, the most obvious of which is the often-ambiguous distinction between languages and dialects. For further discussion on this issue, see Bernard Comrie, *The Languages of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6-9. Citing Soviet census data, Lenore Grenoble reports that 194 "nationalities" (she may have meant "ethnic groups") were reported in 1926, while this number had declined to 101 by 1971. Grenoble also suggests that the number of languages spoken in the USSR may have been as high as 200. See Lenore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 2, 28.

[2] V.P. Grigoriev, as cited in M.I. Isaev, *National Languages in the USSR: Problems and Solutions*, translated by Paul Medov (Moscow: Progress, 1977), 13-14. Original emphasis.

social processes involved in language acquisition and language assimilation, when discussing aspects of Soviet language policy it would be prudent to consider linguist Sue Wright's reminder: "A language can do nothing. Only speakers can decide or not [*sic*] whether they will use a language."[3] This is to say that the language policy of any state – even a totalitarian one – is still subject to everyday societal and linguistic constraints.

Unquestionably, language policy played an important role in Soviet "nationalities policy" – one has only to take a cursory glance at Soviet history to come to this realization. The variety of language policies adopted by successive Soviet leaders led to an interesting *mélange* of linguistic results. Early Leninist language policy emphasizing linguistic diversity succeeded in raising dramatically the literacy rates throughout the entire Soviet Union, as well as in creating alphabets for numerous languages which were previously without written forms. Subsequent attempts at promoting Russian as a "second native language" or "language of inter-nationality communication" succeeded in promoting a limited degree of bilingualism amongst only a plurality of the non-Russian peoples of the Union.[4] Essentially, Soviet language policy wavered between, as linguist Lenore Grenoble puts it, "two opposing yet concurrent trends"; that is, between the promotion of "national" or local languages and the promotion of Russian as the single language of a unitary state.[5]

As one might expect, these two trends are the main focus of virtually all scholarly literature on this topic. Likewise unsurprising is that a substantial divergence of opinion

---

[3] Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 250.
[4] See Michael Kirkwood, "Language Planning: Some Methodological Preliminaries," in Michael Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* (London: MacMillan, 1989), 20; Grenoble, *Language Policy*, 195. According to figures cited by Grenoble, by 1989 21 out of the 31 most populous ethnic groups in the Soviet Union had collective fluency rates in Russian of over 50 percent.
[5] Grenoble, *Language Policy*, 1.

exists between those scholars writing from within the USSR and their colleagues writing from without. What is interesting about language policy as a field of study, however, is that it creates a somewhat unusual blurring of disciplinary boundaries between sociolinguists, historians and political scientists. Given the wide variety in methodological approaches to the topic and its evident importance to studies of the Soviet Union, one might expect a veritable wealth of secondary literature on the topic. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as very few comprehensive examinations of Soviet language policy exist in print. Moreover, an examination of the available literature reveals several gaps in the historiography of this period of Soviet language policy, particularly regarding source materials, time periods and certain methodological approaches. Most significantly, the period from 1937 to 1959 remains substantially understudied, due largely to a lack of reliable census data. Likewise, what is conspicuously absent from the historiography is a methodological approach that does not remain rooted within the traditional disciplinary bounds of history, political science, or sociolinguistics.

This thesis thus represents an attempt at eliminating certain lacunae from the historiography of Soviet language policy. In an effort to cover the late Stalinist period, the interregnum between Stalin and Khrushchev and the Khrushchev period itself, this thesis examines an under-utilized primary source: newspaper circulation data from 1950 to 1965. In this time period, there are surprisingly extensive data on district-level newspapers in the USSR; data which indicate the language choice and – generally speaking – the circulation levels of each newspaper. Furthermore, this thesis analyzes data on four different Union Republics, each of which represents an ethno-geographical

"type" of republic: the Belarusian SSR (Slavic), the Latvian SSR (Baltic), the Armenian SSR (Caucasian) and finally the Uzbek SSR (Central Asian).

Such a detailed and comprehensive analysis of newspaper circulation data is only possible due to the fact that each officially-sanctioned newspaper published in the Soviet Union after 1950 is listed in *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR* (Chronicle of Periodical Publication in the USSR).[6] Beginning in 1954, these volumes were published at approximately five-year intervals, comprehensively chronicling all journals, magazines, newspapers, and any other printed material distributed at regular intervals over the course of a year. The data in *LPI SSSR* is further augmented by a yearly Soviet publication known as *Pechat'*. *Pechat'* essentially summarizes, in tabular format, annual printing and circulation data for the Soviet publishing industry, including everything from books to local newspapers. Thus, by consulting both of these Soviet sources, it only takes a very simple quantitative analysis to determine how many papers were published in which languages in which republics.

Despite the promise of this type of analysis, there are certain limitations as to how much Soviet newspaper circulation data can reveal about the USSR's language policy. Let us take the example of the Balskii district in the Latvian SSR during 1952. According to *LPI SSSR*, there was a single official newspaper in this district at this time, which was printed in Latvian with a circulation per issue of 1,900 papers. The reader of this listing has no idea what happened with those 1,900 copies of *Znamia Truda*.[7] They could well

---

[6] As listed in the bibliography, three separate listings of this work (1950-54, 1955-60 and 1961-65) were consulted for this research project. When these three listings are referred to collectively, the abbreviation used hereafter will be *LPI SSSR*.

[7] Note that the 1950-1954 volumes of *LPI SSSR* list all newspaper titles in Russian, even if the newspaper was published in a different language. Thus, this title is the Russian translation of the actual Latvian one. *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety, (*Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 430.

have languished in a basement amidst sacks full of potatoes for the entire year. It is indeed possible that very few of these copies were ever read. As a result, the data in *LPI SSSR* and *Pechat'* do not provide solid evidence of what sort of newspapers Soviet citizens would read. Rather, this data proves most useful in determining what the CPSU *believed* Soviet citizens would read. In other words, by compiling data for each district in a given republic, one thus assembles a quantitative analysis of language use and circulation data for that republic's newspapers. This analysis, in turn, generates a fairly clear "top-down" picture of how the Soviet bureaucracy and leadership conceptualized the linguistic divisions within their various jurisdictions. Moreover, when analyzed over a period of several years, this type of data would certainly reveal any long-term movement amounting to the government's promotion (or lack thereof) of certain languages as compared to others. Finally, the results of this analysis may be juxtaposed with statements by CPSU officials and official pronouncements by Soviet leaders – such as Khrushchev's 1961 party program – as a means of comparing the theory and practice of Soviet language policy.

In its essentials, this examination of Soviet newspaper circulation data allows for three general conclusions to be drawn that can be related to language policy. First, no increase in the circulation levels of Russian-language newspapers existed simultaneously in all of the four republics studied. Second, there did exist, however, a consistent decrease in the number and circulation levels of newspapers published in languages other than Russian and the dominant language of each republic. Third, if one correlates newspaper circulation data to the only available census data for the period, that of 1959, then it becomes obvious that all national minorities that did not have official newspapers in the

language of their nationality largely spoke either Russian or the main language of their republic as their native language. What these three conclusions suggest about the 1950 to 1965 period is that Soviet language policymakers did not pursue a uniform policy of linguistic Russification throughout the entire USSR. However, the data strongly support the interpretation that both Russian and the dominant language of every Union Republic were promoted at the expense of the languages of other minority groups.

In order to present this analysis in a clear and comprehensible manner, it is first necessary to give a survey of the currently available literature on the topic. Consequently, the remainder of this chapter explores the different schools of thought on Soviet language policy, taking note of both non-Soviet and Soviet perspectives, as well as the discipline-specific methodological approaches. Following this introduction, the subsequent chapter contains a detailed presentation of newspaper circulation figures in the Belorussian, Latvian, Armenian and Uzbek SSRs between 1950 and 1965. Chapter Three then brings together these disparate results in an analysis of language policy in the Soviet Union during this time period, while Chapter Four offers general conclusions on the theory and practice of Soviet language policy.

Geographic and Disciplinary Boundaries in the Literature

Geography is by far the most obvious divisive factor in the literature on language policy in the USSR. As might be expected, the methodology and conclusions of scholars writing within the Soviet Union are markedly different from those writing in other parts of the globe. Likewise, Russian scholarship from the post-Soviet time period is uniquely distinct. Nonetheless, what are without question the two major geographical divisions in

the literature can best be termed "non-Soviet" and "Soviet". These two geographical divisions can then be further subdivided and categorized in terms of the discipline-specific methodological approach employed in each work. In general, most non-Soviet literature on language policy in the USSR follows one of three methodological approaches, which can be correlated with a specific academic discipline: sociolinguistics, history and political science.[8] As for Soviet literature on this topic, discipline-based methodological approaches are less readily identifiable, since most Soviet works from the same time period arrive at more or less identical conclusions. Nonetheless, it should be noted that most writing specifically on the topic of language policy in the USSR stems principally from two disciplines: linguistics and ethnography.[9] To explain this system of categorization, an in-depth examination of each methodological sub-grouping listed above is necessary.

Characteristics of Non-Soviet Literature

In terms of non-Soviet literature, one could of course break down the sociolinguistics, history and political science groupings further, following specific techniques used in each discipline. To avoid over-categorization, this essay considers the above three groupings as being the most manageable. In examining the literature on this topic, it is immediately apparent the sociolinguistic approach is widespread. Its significance may be summarized by noting that the only two comprehensive surveys of Soviet language policy were

---

[8] This is, of course, not to say that crossing between disciplines by a single author is impossible in this categorization. For example, Isabelle Kreindler – a sociolinguist – has written or edited at least two works on this topic, one of which takes a sociolinguistic approach, while the other a more historical one. These two works are: Isabelle T. Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," *Slavic Review*, 36, 1 (March 1977): 86-100; Isabelle T. Kreindler (ed.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages: Their Past, Present and Future* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1985).

[9] Soviet literature tends to distinguish more specifically between language policy and "nationalities policy", as will be discussed below.

written from a sociolinguistic perspective: Glyn Lewis's 1972 work entitled *Multilingualism in the Soviet Union*, and Lenore Grenoble's somewhat less comprehensive *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (2003).

Works such as these that follow the sociolinguistic approach to studying Soviet language policy have three main characteristics. First, the works are focused directly on language policy itself. Although it is generally acknowledged that Soviet language policy was merely an element of Soviet nationalities policy, most sociolinguists tend to disregard other non-linguistic aspects of the latter in their examination of the former.[10] For instance, Lewis's conclusions are entirely related to language issues; even when making historical and contemporary comparisons of Soviet language policy with policies undertaken in other states, he mentions only linguistic issues, without discussing other issues surrounding relations with ethnic minority groups. Issues of autonomy from the central government, for example, are not discussed.[11] Nevertheless, this is not to say that sociolinguists are ignorant of the full implications of language policy reforms. In a later article, for instance, Lewis notes that "[t]he planning of minority languages is only superficially a purely linguistic exercise: it is basically one of the means of promoting the political and economic interests of the minority."[12] Second, the works place less emphasis on the historical context of the events described, concentrating largely on the linguistic processes at play. This is exemplified by Grenoble's book, which examines trends in Soviet language policy as a whole, rather than using an event-centred historical narrative.

---

[10] See Kirkwood, "Language Planning," 7.
[11] See E. Glyn Lewis, *Multilingualism in the Soviet Union: Aspects of Language Policy and its Implementation* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), 88-89.
[12] E. Glyn Lewis, "Implementation of Language Planning in the Soviet Union," in Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fisher (eds.), *Progress in Language Planning: International Perspectives* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1983), 311.

Bernard Comrie's work, *Languages of the Soviet Union* (1981), is also typical of the sociolinguistic approach, as Comrie's introduction concentrates on the linguistic classification of Soviet languages, while less than ten pages are left for a historical chronology of language policy developments.[13] Third, works following the sociolinguistic approach generally dedicate large sections of the text to describing linguistic phenomena that occur in specific groups of languages in the Soviet Union. Again, Comrie's work is typical in this regard; approximately four-fifths of the book focuses on the linguistic features of five major language groupings found in the Soviet Union.

Another widespread approach to language policy in the Soviet Union is rooted in the discipline of history. This approach focuses on the historical context of the language policy events described, which generally leads historians to concentrate on Soviet nationalities policy in general, rather than language policy specifically. A classic example is the work of Ronald G. Suny, whose studies frequently discuss Soviet nationalities policy, yet he only mentions language policy issues in passing, as they relate to his larger discussions on nationalities. To take one example from his text, Suny's book *The Revenge of the Past* (1993) discusses the Leninist concepts of "drawing together" or "rapprochement" [*sblizhenie*] and "merger" or "fusion" [*sliianie*]. These two concepts, which in the ideology of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) refer to the anticipated eventual union of all Soviet peoples, are often cited by scholars of Soviet language policy in discussions of the promotion of Russian as a precursor to *sblizhenie* and *sliianie*. However, Suny's work concentrates on all aspects of these Soviet concepts, and only briefly discusses the implications of Soviet doctrine for a handful of Soviet

[13] See Comrie, *Languages of the Soviet Union*, 1-36.

languages.[14] Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that no non-Soviet historian has ever written a comprehensive survey of Soviet language policy. This is not to say, however, that no historical studies of language policy exist: Roman Szporluk's comparative examination of post-World War II language policy in West Ukraine and West Belorussia stands out as a particularly good example, as does Kenneth Farmer's discussion of Ukrainian linguistic nationalism.[15]

The third, somewhat less widespread, approach to the USSR's language policy can best be categorized as a political science methodology. Like the historical approach, political scientists generally consider nationalities policy as a whole, rather than deconstructing this policy into its component parts. Unlike for historians, however, the focus of the political science approach is on the present, as opposed to the past. These two characteristics are evident in Roman Solchanyk's assertion that, "[l]anguage policy is an integral part of overall Soviet nationalities policy."[16] As well, the introduction to Robert Kaiser's *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*, for instance, explains how the study's methodology considers nationality policy developments over the entire period of Soviet history, focusing on long-term trends in the development of ethnic nationalism in the USSR.[17] Kaiser's work is typical of the political science approach to studying Soviet language policy; the subject is only mentioned in passing in the midst of larger discussions on nationalism. Consequently, few non-Soviet scholars using this approach have addressed the issue of language policy in any significant detail,

---

[14] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 106-110.
[15] Roman Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," *Soviet Studies*, 31, 1 (January 1979): 76-98; and Kenneth C. Farmer, "Language and Linguistic Nationalism in the Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers*, 6, 2 (1978): 125-149.
[16] Roman Solchanyk, "Russian Language and Soviet Politics," *Soviet Studies*, 34, 1 (January 1982): 33.
[17] Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), xviii.

although Solchanyk's examination of Brezhnev's policies regarding the Russian language does stand out as an exception to the rule.[18] The political science approach surfaces in articles such as Alfred D. Low's 1963 study on the nationalities question which appeared in *Russian Review*. In this article, Low compares and contrasts contemporary Soviet nationalities policy announcements with their actual ground-level implementation. In so doing, Low's approach is typical of the political science methodology in that it amounts to an analysis of contemporary political events, with concentration on Soviet party theory and on concepts such as nationalism. For instance, Low attempts to forecast what the future holds for Soviet policy on nationalities, positing that "the Party does not contemplate any radical change in its nationality policy in the near future; as a matter of a fact, no change is considered at all."[19] The focus on the present and on political decision-making epitomized by Low is characteristic of the political science approach to studying Soviet language policy.

As a final note on classifying non-Soviet literature, it should be pointed out that not all scholarship on this topic can be easily "pigeon-holed" into one of the above three methodological categories. Naturally, some works do employ a blend of different methodologies; for instance, Suny's writing appears on occasion as a *mélange* of political science and historical methodologies; while his studies have a largely historical focus, his arguments sometimes relate concepts such as ethnic nationalism to the present to an extent greater than that exemplified by others employing a historical methodology. Other monographs, such as Michael Bruchis's 1980 analysis of Soviet translation methods, approach the study of Soviet language policy from an entirely different perspective.

---

[18] Solchanyk, "Russian Language and Soviet Politics."
[19] Alfred D. Low, "Soviet Nationality Policy and the New Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *Russian Review*, 22, 1 (January 1963): 12.

Bruchis is one of the very few scholars (perhaps the only one) to have conducted extensive research on Soviet translation of Russian texts into Soviet national languages, using a methodological approach grounded both in historical methods and applied linguistics translation theory.[20] Nevertheless, most works can generally be placed into one of the sociolinguistic, historical or political science categories.

Characteristics of Soviet Literature

In contrast to the clear methodological divisions in non-Soviet writing, the main characteristic of Soviet scholarship on language policy in the USSR is the uniformity in the conclusions of different authors. Isaev and Kozlov, for instance, are two authors coming from separate disciplines – respectively linguistics and ethnography – who employ substantially different methodologies and yet reach nearly identical conclusions about language policy from 1917 into the 1970s. These two authors both argue, for instance, that increased fluency rates in Russian among all peoples of the USSR are highly beneficial to Soviet society as a whole.[21] Ultimately, it appears that virtually every single Soviet scholar writing on the topic manages to summarize Soviet language policy in such a fashion that it amounts to a justification of Soviet nationalities policy. For instance, Isaev writes in his *Sto tridtsat' ravnopravnykh* (1970) that "[t]he blossoming of the languages of the people of the USSR, their mutual influence and mutual development cause[d] the same type of nationality treatment in a socialist society" stressing "the new

[20] See Michael Bruchis, "Pratiques et théories de la traduction dans l'URSS: causes et effets dans l'interaction des langues des peuples soviétiques dans la periode d'après-guerre," *Nationalities Papers*, 8, 2 (1980): 147-177.
[21] Isaev, *National Languages*, 337-346; Viktor Kozlov, *The Peoples of the Soviet Union*, translated by Pauline M. Tiffen (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 214-215.

historical commonality of the Soviet people."[22] The title of this particular work of Isaev's is also significant, since it translates roughly to "one hundred thirty with equal rights," with the number referring naturally to the approximate number of languages spoken in the USSR at that time. Of course, Soviet scholarship also distinguishes itself with its compulsory and ubiquitous references to Marx and Engels, neither of whom had anything particularly worthwhile to say about how a multi-national socialist state should structure its language policy. Nevertheless, Isaev incorporates the ideas of the founders of Marxism in his discussion of the early formation of "nations" along linguistic boundaries in Europe and in an incongruous mention of how Italy was "the first capitalist nation."[23]

Moreover, Soviet scholarship differs from non-Soviet scholarship in that, while language policy is implicitly recognized as a component of nationalities policy, there is still a significant amount of literature dedicated specifically to language policy itself. Two prominent post-war Soviet linguists, Isaev and Yu. D. Desheriev, have both published rather extensively on this and related topics. Of their various publications, Isaev's seminal work, *National Languages in the USSR* (1977), is probably the most comprehensive, since it amounts to a detailed explanation of the USSR's linguistic diversity and language policy, dating back to pre-Soviet times. As for Desheriev, it appears that his most significant contributions to the field have come with him occupying the position of editor. Two of Desheriev's more prominent editorial works include: *Teoreticheskiye problemy sotsial'noi lingvistiki* ("Theoretical Problems of Social Linguistics"), published in 1981, and *Sovremennaia ideologicheskaia borba i problemy iazika* ("The Contemporary Ideological Struggle and Language Problems"), which

[22] M.I. Isaev. *Sto tridtsat ravnopravnykh (o iazykov narodov SSSR)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 35, 43.
[23] Isaev, *National Languages*, 193, 207.

appeared in 1984. As these titles suggest, neither of Desheriev's works represents a comprehensive summary of Soviet language policy; rather each one presents a series of articles on various aspects of the topic.

In addition, the most notable post-Soviet Russian-language work should be mentioned in this section. V. M. Alpatov's *150 Iazikov i politika: 1917-2000* ("Language and Politics: 1917-2000", published in 2000) serves as a solid post-Soviet successor to Isaev's *National Languages*, in terms of providing a detailed retrospective summary of Soviet and post-Soviet language policy. Not surprisingly, Alpatov opens his book with a preface – which reads more like an apology – explaining how previous writing on the topic has often suffered from undue ideological or nationalistic influences. As he explains: "Often we see an intelligent person, quite intelligently reasoned on all other questions, begin foaming at the mouth 'arguing' a manifestly absurd position in only a small speech on the history of his nation and the situation with his mother tongue."[24] The rest of the monograph amounts to a post-Soviet revisionist-style analysis of language policy in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia, the reader of which will appreciate a much more nuanced interpretation of the facts than that offered by Isaev, Desheriev or Kozlov. Nonetheless, while Alpatov's work represents a post-Soviet exception, Soviet writing on language policy in the USSR generally demonstrates two ostensibly contradictory characteristics: first, unlike many Western writers, it tends to classify language policy as an independent field of study; yet second, Soviet works on language policy invariably use their conclusions to justify the USSR's policy on nationalities. This realization would suggest that, for Soviet scholars, language policy was at the same time a field of inquiry

[24] V.M. Alpatov, *150 Iazikov i politika: 1917-2000* (Moscow: Kraft and IV Pan, 2000), 4.

worth studying as a subject unto itself while remaining subordinate to the larger field of nationalities policy.

Conclusions of Soviet and Non-Soviet Scholars

Scholars who have researched the field of Soviet language policy have reached one of two conclusions. First, there is the standard Soviet conclusion: Soviet language policy was articulated by Lenin, the main tenet of which was the equality of all languages and Leninist doctrine was subsequently followed without exception. As Isaev writes, "[t]he principle of equality of all languages without exception is a cornerstone of the language policy of the multinational state."[25] He further supports this assertion by quoting Lenin, who wrote: "there must be no compulsory official language [in the USSR]...the population must be provided with schools where teaching will be carried on in all the local languages."[26] Through the creation of alphabets for numerous languages and the establishment of local-language schools, according to Soviet scholars, the USSR allowed minority languages to flourish, leading to soaring literacy rates and the general enlightenment of the Soviet people. The fact that several of the new alphabets were created using the Latin script is rationalized by linguists such as Isaev as "a historically necessary stage in language development," with the subsequent transformation of many of these alphabets to Cyrillic-based systems explained as "a factor promoting convergence among Soviet peoples."[27] Moreover, the USSR was able to promote Russian as the "language of inter-nationality communication," while continuing to promote all national languages in an egalitarian manner. Russian was only chosen for this role, Soviet

[25] *Ibid.*, 21.
[26] V.I. Lenin, quoted in Isaev, *National Languages*, 22.
[27] Isaev, *National Languages*, 237, 255.

scholars argue, since it was the only language suitable for the task.[28] Significantly, the emphasis is uniformly placed on the "voluntary" character of the adoption of the Russian language by non-Russians, as is explained best in "Theoretical Problems of Social Linguistics":

> The CPSU supports the growing tendency among the peoples of the USSR to voluntarily master the Russian language, while simultaneously and in future providing for the free development of the languages of the peoples of the USSR, not tolerating any limitations, privileges or coercion whatsoever relating to [the use of] this or that language.[29]

According to the Soviet perspective, therefore, language policy in the Soviet Union is able to accomplish two very divergent objectives: encouraging linguistic assimilation to Russian while promoting minority language use. Given the utopian character of this position, it is thus not particularly astonishing that Soviet scholarship offers up the USSR's language policy as a model for all other states on how to resolve minority languages issues.

Second, there is the view held by non-Soviet scholars and some post-Soviet writers such as Alpatov, which essentially argues that language policy in the USSR was guided by a combination of pragmatic and ideological considerations. According to this interpretation, Lenin's language policy of promoting minority languages was implemented as the most expedient manner in which to promote socialism. The dramatic increases in literacy rates throughout the entirety of the Soviet Union were thus a byproduct of the CPSU's need to gather support for its socialist policies from all regions of the Soviet Union. Stalin's language policy is viewed to varying degrees as some sort of attempt to set up Russian as a language "*primus inter pares*," as Michael Kirkwood

---

[28] See, for example, the discussion in *ibid.*, 339-351.
[29] A.I. Kholmogorov, "Nauchnoe upravlenie iazykovoi zhiznyu narodov SSSR," in Yu. D. Desheriev (ed.), *Teoreticheskiye problemiy sotsialnoi lingvistiki*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), 131.

describes it – in line with Stalin's "glorification" of the Russian people, particularly during the Great Patriotic War.[30] Subsequently, from Stalin's death until the Union's demise in 1991, Soviet language policy pursued the goal of making all non-Russian Soviet citizens bilingual in their native language and Russian.

The principal debate-generating subject in the non-Soviet scholarship remains this policy of promoting Russian as a "second native language." Scholars such as Roman Szporluk, for instance, support an interpretation that the post-Stalinist period represents an attempt by Khrushchev and Brezhnev to pursue national unity through linguistic unification via the spread of the Russian language:

> The Soviet authorities, ever since Stalin, have, in practice, believed that the safest way to integrate the peoples of the U.S.S.R. into a single community is through linguistic assimilation rather than through ideology or class solidarity.[31]

On the other hand, Kenneth Farmer maintains that "the Soviet regime strongly [promoted] a policy of encouraging bilingualism, rather than one of complete linguistic assimilation."[32] As one can see, these two views do not stand out as being highly incompatible. Essentially, all non-Soviet scholarship agrees that active measures were taken to promote the spread of Russian after World War II, such as promoting Russian as a second language, creating Russian-language newspapers in certain regions and ensuring

---

[30] Kirkwood, "Language Planning," 20; Roman Szporluk, "Nationalities and the Russian Problem in the USSR: An Historical Outline," *Journal of International Affairs*, 27, 1 (1973): 32; Silvia P. Forgus, "Nationality Question in the Resolutions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *Nationalities Papers*, 5, 2 (1977): 193. Having spent considerable energy during the war promoting the Russian nation in an attempt to unify the Soviet war effort, Stalin is noted for a particular toast he gave following the Soviet victory over Germany in 1945, in which the Soviet leader toasted the *Russian* people, as the highest-ranking of all the peoples of the Soviet Union.

[31] Szporluk, "Nationalities and the Russian Problem in the USSR," 37.

[32] Farmer, "Language and Linguistic Nationalism," 128.

that Russian remained the principal language of higher education in the USSR.[33] Most debate centres merely over the CPSU's intent in implementing these measures.

Likewise, some debate also surfaces over whether the promotion of Russian had negative consequences for all Soviet national languages. Most detailed studies on this topic are concerned primarily with the Ukrainian and Belorusian languages. For instance, Szporluk's comparative analysis of linguistic assimilation in West Ukraine and West Belorussia reveals that "a high-level political decision...[was] made...to promote a Russian-language press in west Belorussia but not in west Ukraine"; therefore, Szporluk continues, it is clear that two different language policies existed in these two neighbouring regions.[34] That said, other scholars such as Grenoble, when considering language policy in the USSR as a whole after World War Two, argue that the USSR maintained essentially the same language policy in every single Union Republic, notwithstanding occasionally divergent results of this policy in different republics.[35] However, once again, these two views represented here by Szporluk and Grenoble are by no means incompatible. One can see that it is possible to argue that the existence of regional variations in language policy, such as those highlighted by Szporluk, does not necessarily preclude the existence of a single, overriding policy objective for the entire USSR such as the promotion of Russian, as Grenoble suggests.

In order to better appreciate the divergences in non-Soviet scholarship, it is useful to examine which conclusions were reached during certain time periods. To begin, it is helpful to refer to Orest Subtelny's 1994 article in *Nationalities Papers* entitled

---

[33] Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 83-94; David R. Marples, "National Awakening and National Consciousness in Belarus," *Nationalities Papers*, 27, 4 (1999): 571; Farmer, "Language and Linguistic Nationalism," 138.
[34] Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 76.
[35] Grenoble, *Language Policy*, 58, 194-195.

"American Sovietology's Great Blunder: the Marginalization of the Nationality Issue." The article amounts to something of a post-mortem of how Western scholars of the Soviet Union failed to predict that ethnic nationalism would lead to the ultimate demise of the USSR. In his article, Subtelny notes that, in part due to Sovietology's "Russocentrism," the issue of nationalities (including language policy issues) did not come under serious consideration until the 1960s.[36] This observation is borne out by the existing scholarship on language policy, since the only major Western contribution to the subject prior to the 1960s arrived in 1951, with the publication of *Languages of the U.S.S.R.* by linguist W.K. Matthews.

Non-Soviet scholarship on language policy may thus be divided into four distinct phases. Phase one, which ends approximately at 1970, is largely split between scholars who are dramatically critical of Soviet nationality policy and those who are only tentatively critical of "the Soviets' repeated claim to having solved the nationality problem,"[37] Robert Conquest's *The Nation Killers* (1970), a work on Stalin's deportations of entire ethnic groups from the Caucasus and Volga regions, epitomizes the first group with its biting indictment of Soviet policy, arguing that the 1961 CPSU Program's mention of the future "complete unity" of all "nations" in the USSR "is a document which flatly states [an] assimilationist position."[38] Similarly, Geoffrey Wheeler's 1968 study entitled "The Problem of the Nationalities" notes that the 1961 Program "plainly indicated the official intention of stepping up the stage of *drawing*

---

[36] Orest Subtelny, "American Sovietology's Great Blunder: the Marginalization of the Nationality Issue," *Nationalities Papers*, 22, 1 (1994): 142, 147.
[37] Subtelny, "Sovietology's Great Blunder," 147.
[38] Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 138. The quotation from the 1961 Party Program is as cited on the same page of Conquest's book.

closer...as a preliminary to *fusion*."[39] The second group of scholars is represented by the works of Low and Lewis, which point out Russifying trends in Soviet language policy, but are tentative in their conclusions on the matter. For instance, Low's assessment of the 1961 Program's comments on nationality issues is clearly more cautious than Conquest's:

> There is, on the one hand, the theoretical inclination toward and practical policy of favoring assimilation and the disappearance of nationalities...; on the other hand, there is, in response to the still strong national feelings of the non-Russian nationalities, the traditional Soviet policy of favoring, within limits, the development of national languages and cultures.[40]

Likewise, Lewis's conclusions on Soviet language policy are clearly guarded in nature, as he notes that the USSR has consistently pursued "a judicious...balance between the needs of the centre in promoting homogeneity...and the claims, both 'sentimental' and practical, of the local languages."[41] Nonetheless, all phase one authors are evidently sceptical of the USSR's claim of safeguarding the linguistic and cultural rights of its minorities.[42]

Phase two lasts from the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, and centres around the realization that Soviet language policy may pose less of a threat to Soviet minority languages than was thought by many Soviet dissenters and others. Typical of this view is Brian D. Silver's *Soviet Studies* article entitled "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education," which appeared in 1974. Silver opens his piece with a general criticism of the existing historiography on Soviet language policy:

---

[39] Geoffrey Wheeler, "The Problem of the Nationalities," *Studies on the Soviet Union*, 7, 4 (1968): 107. Original emphasis.
[40] Low, "Soviet Nationality Policy," 27-28.
[41] Lewis, *Multilingualism in the Soviet Union*, 293.
[42] See, for example, *ibid.*, 89. Lewis writes that "it is doubtful whether the Soviet policy for language can claim convincingly to safeguard the non-Russian languages when it represents at different times three such attempts to ensure the continuing supremacy of one language, namely Russian."

> Western scholars have tended to ignore or under-emphasize the important role that [the] provision of native-language cultural facilities [largely native-language schools] has played in preserving the distinctive identities of the nationalities.[43]

Silver goes on to conclude that there is some decline in usage amongst Soviet national languages, but they are generally under no immediate threat of elimination.[44] Moreover, a 1978 article by Farmer in *Nationalities Papers* contends that: "the threat to the vitality of the Ukrainian language is perhaps overestimated by Ukrainian dissidents."[45] In support of his argument, he produces Soviet census data indicating that the number of Ukrainians declaring Ukrainian as their native language declined by only 2.1 percent between 1959 and 1970; moreover, this decline turns into a slight increase, when only rural areas of the Ukrainian SSR are considered.[46] In a similar vein, Szporluk's comparative article mentioned above on West Ukraine and West Belorussia notes that the West Ukrainians were able to maintain their native Ukrainian language to a high degree, in part through the existence of Ukrainian-language newspapers.[47] Moreover, Roman Solchanyk's 1982 article "Russian Language and Soviet Politics" provides a somewhat ambivalent conclusion on Brezhnev's language and nationality policies. Noting that Brezhnev expressly stated that suggestions of the elimination of the Council of Nationalities were "unacceptable," Solchanyk argues that "one [Soviet policy] aim is to establish a predominant position for the Russian language throughout the Soviet Union", but that this aim is subordinate to "the exigencies of the day."[48] Indeed, Comrie summarizes Soviet language policy by stating that the USSR is "in the middle of a very long process

---

[43] Brian D. Silver, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education: An Assessment of Recent Changes," *Soviet Studies*, 26, 1 (January 1974): 28.
[44] *Ibid.*, 39-40.
[45] Farmer, "Language and Linguistic Nationalism," 128.
[46] *Ibid.*, 128-130.
[47] Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 86-89.
[48] Solchanyk, "Russian Language and Soviet Politics," 38-39.

of gradual linguistic assimilation."[49] In sum, most authors writing on Soviet language policy in this period appear to focus on the promotion of Russian as a part of the USSR's language policy. Their general conclusion essentially appears as a more nuanced assessment of the continued promotion of Russian, since examinations of the post-war period do not reveal a consistent trend showing a marked decline in the usage of minority languages.

Phase three corresponds largely with Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* – in other words, the time frame covering the second half of the 1980s and ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While surprisingly few non-Soviet works on language policy emerged from this period, most of these discuss the continued promotion of the Russian language since Stalin's time, with varied conclusions. Kreindler, for one, stresses the increased promotion of Russian under Brezhnev, particularly in book publishing and in CPSU operations.[50] She also argues that Khrushchev's decision to encourage the spread of Russian as a "second native language" stemmed not from a personal desire to Russify all Soviet peoples, as may have been the case with Stalin; rather, Kreindler suggests, Khrushchev viewed Russian as a pragmatic tool for advancement in a Soviet society.[51] Likewise Kirkwood contends that Stalin and Khrushchev were the two dominant policymakers, as regards tinkering with Leninist language policy. He also goes on to note that Gorbachev continued to encourage "mother tongue plus Russian" bilingualism amongst non-Russians, while the CPSU's stated policy of encouraging

---

[49] Comrie, *Languages of the Soviet Union*, 37.
[50] Isabelle T. Kriendler, "Soviet Language Planning since 1953," in Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning*, 56.
[51] *Ibid.*, 51.

Russians to learn another Soviet language was "not working."[52] It should also be noted that non-Soviet scholarship from the *glasnost* period singled out Isaev's works – in particular his *National Languages in the USSR* – as being representative of "official thinking" in the Soviet Union during the 1970s.[53] Otherwise, non-Soviet works from this time period are unremarkable. Essentially, the scholarship from the late 1980s appears to affirm the view that, as Comrie suggested at the beginning of the decade, the Soviet Union's gradual move towards unilingualism began with Stalin, was modified and moderated by Khrushchev, and should not be considered a fast-moving process.

Phase four represents all scholarship written following the collapse of the USSR at the end of 1991. This period of writing is significant for two reasons in particular. First, the fact that few scholars writing on the Soviet Union had predicted that the smouldering "nationalities problem" would greatly contribute to the collapse of the USSR, has thus far failed to generate any critical retrospective analyses of Soviet language policy. Grenoble's survey of Soviet language policy, for instance, largely corresponds with the conclusions of previous seminal works in the field, such as those by Lewis and Comrie. Second, one might have expected the progressive opening of various Soviet archives in Russia and other Soviet successor states to have precipitated different conclusions on the topic; however, such a drastic change has not occurred. For example, David Marples's 1999 article in *Nationalities Papers*, "National Awakening and National Consciousness in Belarus," incorporates a brief discussion on Soviet language policy in the Belorusian SSR. Essentially, although Marples's discussion of the post-war period also covers the 1980s and 1990s, his conclusions are more or less the same as Szporluk's

[52] Kirkwood, "Language Planning," 18.
[53] Nigel Grant, "Mechanisms: Policy Formation and Implementation," in Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning*, 66.

1979 analysis of West Belorussia. Both authors note the high extent of linguistic assimilation to Russian in the republic, most notably in urban areas.[54] Consequently, it must be said that post-1991 analyses of language policy in the USSR by non-Soviet authors do not differ substantially in terms of their conclusions from pre-1991 studies.

Thus, by way of summarizing the conclusions of non-Soviet authors, it may be stated that the following five areas of Soviet language policy have received extensive treatment in the literature. First, the Leninist foundations of Soviet language policy are discussed extensively, with considerable mention made of Lenin's explicitly stated principle that all languages are equal. Second, much is made of the creation of alphabets for a wide variety of Soviet languages in the 1920s and 1930s, along with the corresponding rise in literacy rates in all regions of the USSR. In fact, most observers describe the promotion of literacy as the greatest single achievement of language policy measures in the history of the Soviet Union.[55] Third, extensive comment on Stalinist language policy manoeuvres exists in the literature. Particular attention is paid to the decision to change many of the new Latin alphabets to Cyrillic ones; likewise, Stalin is considered to have made the first real moves towards the promotion of Russian as the superior language of the USSR, beginning in the 1930s. Fourth, while there is little mention of the late Stalinist period and the transition to Khrushchev, Khrushchev's education reforms of 1958 and 1959, which represented a clear step towards a language policy favouring Russian, are frequently discussed. Fifth, the general promotion of Russian as a "second native language" since Stalin's time is probably the most-discussed

[54] See Marples, "National Awakening," 571; Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 89, 92-94.
[55] See, for instance, Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning 1917-53," in Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning*, 36.

feature of non-Soviet writing on this topic. Nonetheless, these five areas of concentration in the literature leave certain historiographical areas underexplored.

Problems and Lacunae in the Literature

Given the above survey of available literature on language policy in the Soviet Union, it is possible to gain the impression that an abundance of writing exists on the topic. Such an impression, however, proves deceptive. In reality, there are only two comprehensive non-Soviet works on language policy in the USSR, those by Lewis and Grenoble. Admittedly, there are a handful of journal articles dedicated to specific language policy issues, such as those authored by Szporluk, Farmer and Kreindler, but these are restricted in scope to either a select few geographical regions of the USSR or to a specific time period. Likewise, there are but three main books on the languages of the Soviet Union – those by Matthews, Comrie and Kreindler. Although the lack of scholarly writing on the topic is not an issue when examining the works of Soviet authors, other difficulties present themselves. For instance, when reading the works of Isaev and Kozlov, one is confronted with a bizarre mix of promising academic analysis incongruously inserted into a conclusion-oriented framework acceptable to the CPSU. What results from this mixture are monographs that choose to completely ignore entire series of facts in order to arrive at a certain conclusion, giving the text an air of superficiality. Thus, examples of solid analyses of Soviet language policy are rare within both Soviet and non-Soviet literature.

A serious obstacle to constructing a well-reasoned argument on this topic based on incontrovertible evidence lies with the available source material. The principal primary source for any study of Soviet language policy is, naturally, the Soviet census.

The problem is not with the choice of source material, since the census provides the only solid quantitative data on language usage readily accessible to historians studying the USSR. Rather, the problem is that the census cannot be considered a reliable source of information since, as Grenoble explains, "deliberate and calculated manipulation of the quantitative side of the census" was commonplace with all censuses undertaken in the Soviet Union.[56] Moreover, census questions regarding language usage were often ill-defined. For instance, the censuses of 1959, 1970, 1979 and 1989 all asked Soviet citizens to give their "native language" [*rodnoi iazyk*], a term potentially confusing to non-Russians, given the USSR's promotion of Russian as a "second native language." Unfortunately, due to the imprecise definition of *rodnoi iazyk*, this question sometimes generated "the rather absurd result of respondents identifying as 'native' a language in which they [were] not fluent."[57] Hence, it must be assumed that all Soviet censuses contain a margin of error which is difficult – if not impossible – to determine.

The Soviet census data – or lack thereof – is also responsible for the existence of an understudied time period in the history of Soviet language policy. Due to the immense societal disruption caused by the Great Patriotic War, no post-war census was taken until 1959. Keeping in mind that the previous census was only taken in 1939, this leaves a twenty-year gap in language usage data that covers the entire late Stalinist period. Furthermore, the 1939 census can be considered to be even less reliable than average, since it was undertaken primarily because the 1937 census failed to satisfy the CPSU's expectations of population numbers.[58] As a result, analyzing language policy in the Soviet Union between 1937 and 1959 is extremely difficult; given the lack of population

[56] Grenoble, *Language Policy*, 28.
[57] *Ibid.*, 28-29.
[58] *Ibid.*, 27.

data, one thus has to rely essentially on CPSU policy pronouncements in terms of primary source material. It is thus not surprising that the 1937-1959 time frame is easily the most understudied chronological period of Soviet language policy. In any case, despite the problematic Soviet census data, it is nonetheless possible to further the study of Soviet language policy by using alternative sources, such as the newspaper circulation statistics employed in the present study. Although this thesis does not address the need for a comprehensive, cross-discipline survey of the topic throughout the full history of the Soviet Union, the analysis contained herein should go some way towards covering the transitional gap between the late Stalinist period and the Khrushchev years.[59]

[59] Grenoble's 2003 book does go some way towards achieving this objective, yet her survey is nowhere near as comprehensive as it could be. Nor does her book adopt a cross-discipline approach, as it stays firmly rooted in sociolinguistics For example, Grenoble dedicates barely two pages to the period 1945-1965. See *ibid.*, 57-58.

Chapter Two – Newspaper Circulation Figures

The Source Material

The present study uses Soviet newspaper circulation figures as a means of furthering the study of Soviet language policy. By means of a foreword to the presentation of this quantitative analysis, some basic comments on the nature of the source material are required. As mentioned previously, the various editions of *LPI SSSR* chronicle all officially-sanctioned newspapers printed in the Soviet Union from 1950 onwards giving detailed information about each publication. This particular source presents the listings of Soviet newspapers in a geographical manner, with the newspapers of each Union Republic listed in a separate chapter. Within each chapter, all republic-wide newspapers are noted first, with the remainder of the listings proceeding in alphabetical order according to *oblast* (province). Under the name of each oblast are listed all oblast newspapers, followed by city, inter-district [*mezhraion*] and district [*raion*] papers. With respect to the 1950 to 1965 period, only the mezhraion and raion-level newspapers appear to provide consistent circulation data for most, if not all, papers listed in these categories.[1] For reasons that are not entirely clear, the listings for republic, oblast and city-level newspapers do not provide circulation data regularly enough for comparisons to be made within the 1950 to 1965 period.[2] Consequently, this analysis only focuses on mezhraion and raion-level newspapers since their circulation figures provide the only common means of comparison between different regions. Additionally, the publication

[1] For the regions and time periods under study here, *mezhraioni* only appear in the BSSR and UzSSR. Due to the limited number of mezhraion-level newspapers and the insignificance of the geographic distinction, the following analysis places mezhraion-level newspapers on the same comparative level as raion-level newspapers.

[2] This mysterious fact has also been noted by Szporluk in one of his analyses of Belorussian newspapers. See Roman Szporluk, "The Press in Belorussia, 1955-65," *Soviet Studies*, 18, 4 (April 1967): 486. Szporluk and Stephen L. Guthier appear to be the only non-Soviet writers on Soviet language policy who have ever consulted the *LPI SSSR* listings.

Pechat' is referred to at points during this analysis. Newspaper publication figures in *Pechat'* are presented in tabular format and provide some general information on the number and type of periodicals published in the Soviet Union. Being designed with readability and not detail in mind, these figures are best utilized as a limited means of cross-referencing the data from *LPI SSSR*, and for some limited figures on the All-Union press.[3]

There is also a need to address the inevitable question of reliability that plagues any academic analysis of Soviet quantitative data. Historians must analyse the source's possible shortcomings and determine whether any corroborating evidence exists in order to make a general decision about its accuracy. In this particular case, with *LPI SSSR* and *Pechat'* as the print sources under scrutiny, one can make a brief list of potential problems. The main difficulty with these sources is the near-complete lack of corroborating data. The two sources can only corroborate each other to a limited extent, beyond which no other source contains the same information. In essence, thus, the historian must trust that the figures listed are completely accurate. Likewise, particularly with *LPI SSSR*, the historian must accept unexplained absences of data. For instance, in certain regions at certain times, there is a conspicuous lack of data on circulation levels. Since the reason for this lacuna is not explained anywhere in the source, the reader has no choice but to proceed on the assumption that this missing data in no way compromise the entire data set.

That said, one must consider the possible motivation for any data manipulation that might have occurred. In the case of *Pechat'*, one might be suspicious that the given

[3] To clarify, the All-Union Press refers to the publications disseminated across the entire USSR, or what one might consider "national" publications for the entire Soviet Union. The All-Union Press should not be confused with the republic-level press, meaning the central newspapers of any of the Union Republics.

circulation figures had been inflated, since *Pechat'* is designed for a much broader audience than *LPI SSSR*. This suspicion would not in fact be ill-founded, given the Soviets' noted penchant for inflating statistics deemed politically unsatisfactory, as was mentioned in the first chapter in connection with the 1939 census. Nonetheless, it is hard to construe of possible motivations for Soviet bureaucrats to manipulate the data in *LPI SSSR*. These volumes are manifestly geared towards anyone wishing detailed data on the Soviet Union's newspapers. As this author can attest, it takes a significant amount of time and patience to generate any concrete data on Soviet newspapers by tabulating the entries in *LPI SSSR*. Unless the Soviet leadership was ludicrously fabricating an elaborate hoax by inventing several thousand pages' worth of data on newspaper circulation to cover up, say, the non-existence of newspapers in the USSR, it appears highly unlikely that the *LPI SSSR* data are completely inaccurate. One might anticipate, perhaps, that the occasional statistic is incorrect, but there is no obvious motivation for the wholesale manipulation of this source material. Thus, it appears reasonable to suggest that although the data in *Pechat' and LPI SSSR* likely contain certain imperfections, there is little reason to assume that the source material does not present generally accurate information.

As a result, it appears that relying extensively on the *LPI SSSR* data should not compromise this study. This chapter thus utilizes these data to analyse newspaper circulation figures for the Belorussian, Latvian, Armenian and Uzbek SSRs. For each of the four republics examined, three data sets will be analysed covering the 1950 to 1965 period, each with a five-year interval between data points. Thus, with data points from 1950, 1955, 1960 and 1965, it should be possible to analyse trends existing over the entire fifteen-year period. The three data sets considered for each republic will be: first,

the number of raion-level papers in the entire republic and their language of publication; second the total circulation per issue of each of these papers, again divided by language and; third, the average circulation per issue of each raion-level paper, again classifying papers based on the language of publication. The reader will also note that although data from the 1959 census are cited extensively throughout the text, this information is provided solely as background, since it provides a rough indicator of the ethno-linguistic composition of each republic during the time period under examination.

The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

From its inception on 1 January 1919 until its independence from the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the BSSR was the smallest of the three Slavic republics, both in terms of population and size. At the time of the 1959 census, its 8,054,648 inhabitants were spread out over approximately 200,000 square kilometres, surrounded by the RSFSR, the Latvian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian SSRs as well as their Warsaw Pact ally Poland.[4] It is significant to note that although approximately 2.23 million Belorussian residents perished in the Second World War, the republic's territory expanded following the war's conclusion. Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939, the oblasts of Brest and Grodno became detached from Poland and incorporated into the BSSR, while the city of Vilnius and the surrounding region were taken from the BSSR and made part of the Lithuanian SSR. The net territorial gain understandably altered the ethnic composition of the BSSR, particularly by increasing the number of Polish-speaking Belorussians.[5] As a

[4] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' III: Belorusskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 124.
[5] David R. Marples, *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 4; Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 79.

result, by the time the 1959 census was taken, Poles represented the third-largest national group within the BSSR. Another significant wartime population event was the decimation of the Belorussian Jewish population, which in pre-war years had comprised a sizeable population group in the republic's urban centres.[6]

Nonetheless, throughout the republic's history, Belorussians have formed the vast majority of the population, with Russians as the largest single ethnic minority. Providing concrete data on ethnicity and language use, Table 2.1 indicates how Belorussians responded to two census questions in 1959. The first asked them to identify their "nationality" [*natsionalnost'*]; the second asked for their "native language" [*rodnoi iazyk*]. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the latter question could prove problematic, particularly since a respondent could not identify more than one "native language." Moreover, when the census results were published, the figures were listed in tables which categorized native language use in terms of "the language of one's nationality" [*iazyk svoyei natsionalnosti*], the implication being that, in line with Soviet thought on nationalities issues, each nationality corresponded with a single "national" language. Unfortunately, in the case of some nationalities, it was not always clear what the "national" language of a nationality ought to be.[7]

---

[6] Steven L. Guthier, "The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897-1970 Part 2: 1939-70," *Soviet Studies*, 29, 2 (April 1977): 272.

[7] For instance, those declaring their nationality as Jewish might consider either Yiddish or Hebrew to be the language of their nationality. The inverse problem can also arise: scholar Brian D. Silver notes a specific example from the 1970 census where census-takers used a person's declared native language to determine his or her nationality: Russian-speaking Cossacks were classified as "Russians" whereas Ukrainian-speaking Cossacks were classified as "Ukrainians." Examples such as this one emphasize the definitional problems inherent in Soviet census data. See Brian D. Silver, "The Ethnic and Language Dimensions in Russian and Soviet Censuses," in Ralph S. Clem (ed.), *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 85.

Table 2.1 – National-Linguistic Composition of the BSSR in 1959[8]

Nationality / National Language	% of BSSR population identifying this as their nationality	% of BSSR population who identified this as their native language
Belorussian	81.1	78.9
Russian	8.2	16.1
Polish	6.7	3.2
Jewish (Yiddish)	1.9	0.4
Ukrainian	1.7	0.8
Total Accounted For	**99.6**	**99.4**

As evidenced by the above figures, while Belorussian was declared to be the native language of the overwhelming majority of the population in 1959, the number of Russian-speaking Belorussians was roughly twice the number of those respondents who considered themselves "Russian". Moreover, among those who considered themselves Polish, less than half of them claimed to speak Polish as their native language. Based on these census figures, one may generally state that Belorussians were the dominant national group, their "national language", Belorussian, was the language of the majority in the BSSR and that despite the relatively small Russian minority in the republic, Russian served as a prominent minority language. These generalizations are supported by the data in Table 2.2, which summarize the results of the census question on native language in a different light.

[8] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' III: Belorusskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 124-125.

Table 2.2 – Linguistic Composition of the BSSR (data on "Native Language" use)[9]

Nationality	% whose native language is same as "national" language	% whose native language is Belorussian	% whose native language is Russian	% whose native language is neither Russian nor Belorussian
Belorussian	93.2	-	6.8	0.1
Russian	100.0	0.0	-	0.0
Polish	48.6	47.3	4.0	0.1
Jewish	21.9	1.9	76.1	0.1
Ukrainian	46.8	8.2	45.0	0.1

Of note in the above table is the high percentage of Russians and Belorussians whose native language is the same as the titular language of their respective nationalities. Likewise noteworthy is that within the other three significant ethnic groups – Poles, Jews and Ukrainians – the majority of these people had adopted either Russian or Belorussian as a native language, further reinforcing the image of these two languages as being dominant throughout the BSSR.

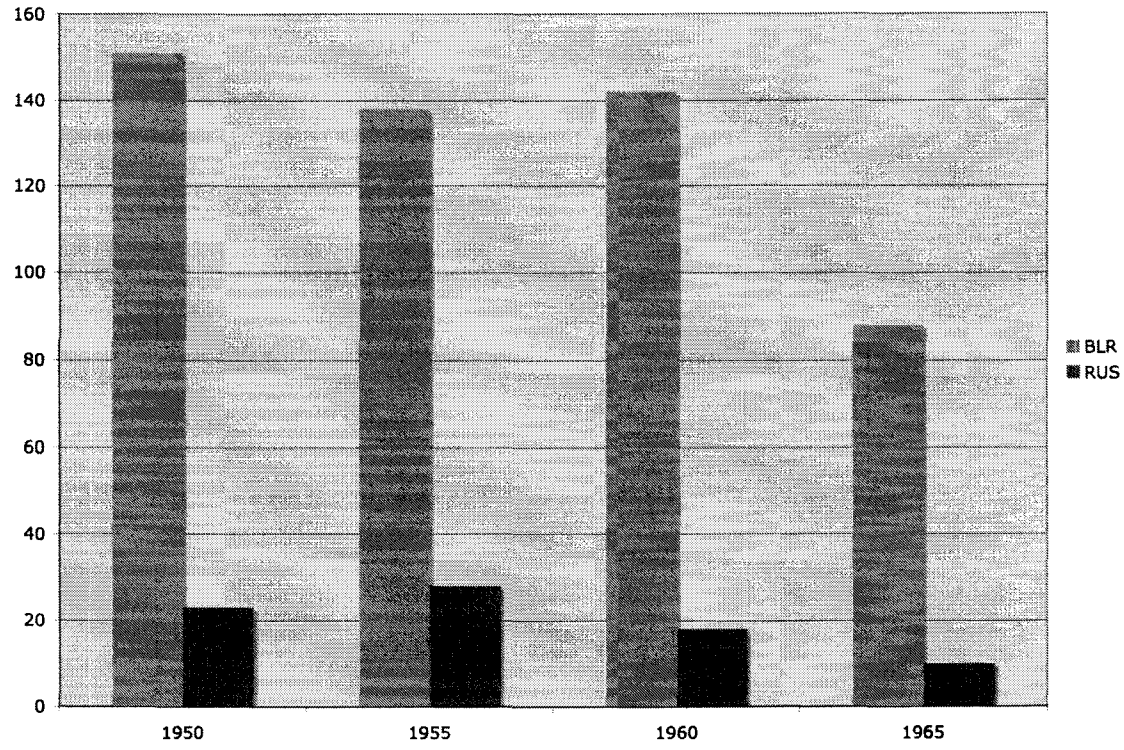
With this 1959 census data as background on the BSSR's ethno-linguistic composition, one can now begin to analyse newspaper circulation figures for this republic. The first thing to note about newspaper publication in the BSSR from 1950 to 1965 is that Belorussian and Russian were the only languages of publication. Generally, raion-level papers were published in only one language, although the records in *LPI SSSR* indicate that the occasional bilingual newspaper did exist.[10] In any case, this meant that

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] For instance, in 1950 residents of the Latvian SSR's Preil'skii district could read either the Latvian or the Russian edition of their district newspaper, *Leninskoe znamia. Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 432. For the sake of consistency throughout this thesis, bilingual papers are counted as two separate publications. Thus, the aforementioned example has been tabulated as two papers, one in Russian and one in Latvian. This decision was based on two factors: first, so few bilingual papers existed at the district level that creating a separate category for them only complicated the statistics; and two, the nature of the listings in LPI SSSR makes it difficult to distinguish between bilingual editions of a newspaper and separate publications of the same newspaper in different languages.

despite the republic's substantial Polish minority, not a single district in the BSSR published an official Polish-language newspaper. Apart from lack of linguistic diversity, the statistics on the number of raion-level papers are relatively unsurprising, as is graphically illustrated by Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 – Number of Raion-Level Papers in the BSSR, 1950-1965[11]



As one can see, Belorussian-language papers remained the norm throughout this period, while Russian-language publications were the exception. Interestingly, the number of papers published declines significantly between 1960 and 1965, although the number of Russian papers as a percentage of the total only fluctuates within a window of seven percent, as Table 2.4 demonstrates.

[11] Data for Tables 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 calculated based on entries in: *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 380-389; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1955-1960gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1962), 433-459; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1961-1965gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Kniga, 1973), 370-393.

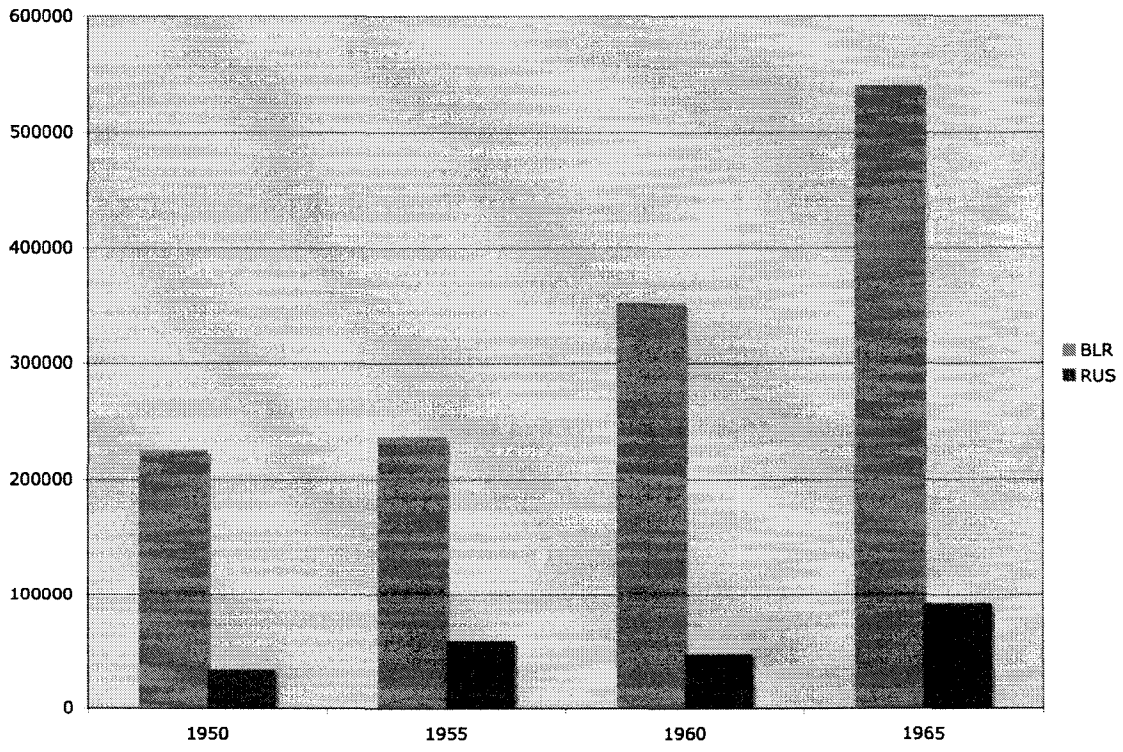
Table 2.4 – BSSR Newspapers Published per Language

	1950	1955	1960	1965
BLR	87%	83%	89%	90%
RUS	13%	17%	11%	10%

In sum, it must be noted that apart from the overall decline in the number of papers published towards the end of the period in question, little else appears remarkable about these figures.

In direct contrast to the number of papers published, the figures for total circulation per issue – i.e. the combined sum of the circulation per issue of all raion-level newspapers in the republic – rise sharply over this fifteen-year period (Table 2.5). However, this trend is most noticeable when looking at the Belorussian-language papers.

Table 2.5 – Total Circulation per Issue in the BSSR



If one were surprised by the sharp decrease in the number of papers, one must certainly regard these circulation figures as some measure of explanation; the number of papers was decreasing, yet each paper was reaching a much broader audience by 1965. Moreover, there is again little change over the fifteen-year period when one looks at the number of Russian papers as a percentage of the total (Table 2.6)

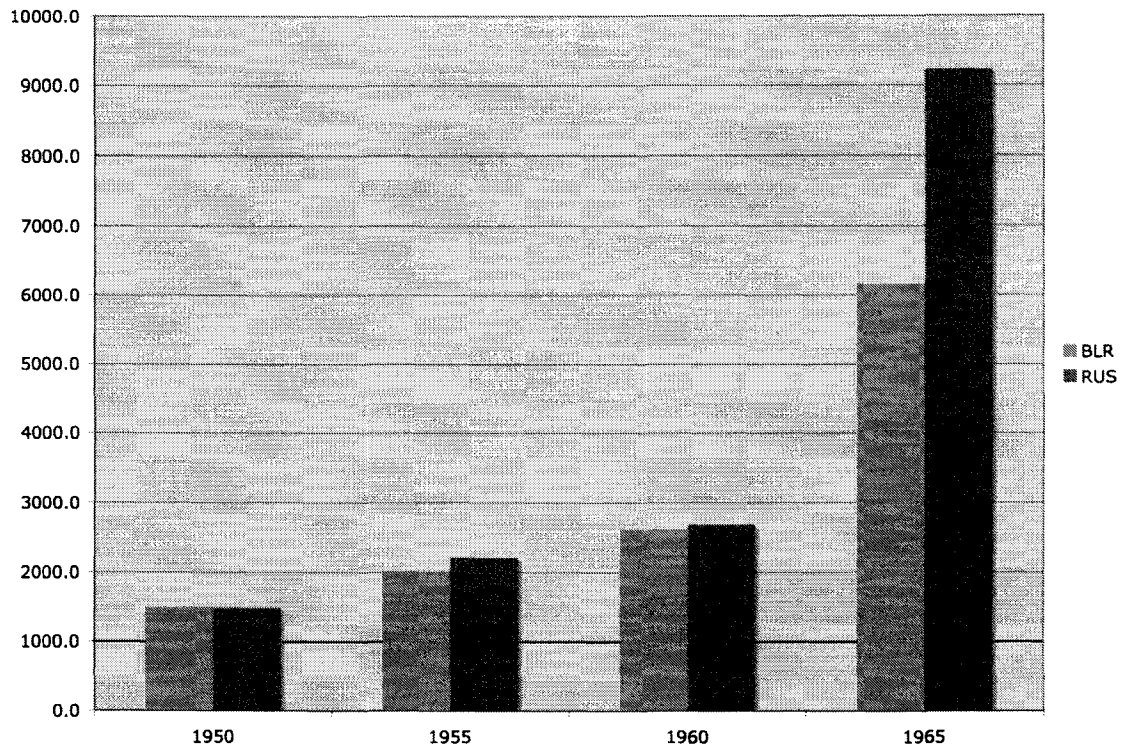
Table 2.6 – Total Circulation per Issue as a Percentage (BSSR)

	1950	1955	1960	1965
BLR	87%	84%	88%	85%
RUS	13%	16%	12%	15%

Thus, it would appear that in terms of both the number of papers and total circulation, the balance of Belorussian- and Russian-language works remained largely unchanged throughout the 1950 to 1965 period.

That said, when one considers the average circulation per issue of all BSSR newspapers, the graph looks very different, as is clear from Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 – Average Circulation per Issue in the BSSR



In 1950, both Belorussian- and Russian-language district newspapers had an average circulation of around 1,480 copies per issue. However, as the graph clearly shows, a substantial language gap appears by 1965, where the average circulation of a Russian language paper was 9,224 copies per issue, compared to just 6,146 for a Belorussian-language publication. While one can only speculate as to the reasons for the emergence of this gap, perhaps the most likely possible explanation might focus on urbanization. As has been documented by Szporluk, Marples and others, the vast majority of the BSSR's Russian speakers from the 1950s onwards lived in urban areas.[12] Moreover, the post-war period in the BSSR saw a large wave of migration to the cities, which served as the industrial centres of the revitalized economy. As a result, the urban areas made

[12] For a more comprehensive explanation, see Marples, *Belarus: Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe*, 29-35; Guthier, "The Belorussians," 275-276.

significant population gains compared to rural areas, where the Belorussian language generally remained dominant. Thus, one could attribute the disproportionately sharp increase in the average circulation of Russian-language district papers to the fact that these Russian newspapers would likely have served urban districts, whose populations would have increased at a higher rate than surrounding rural areas between 1950 and 1965.[13]

At any rate, the analysis of raion-level newspapers in the BSSR can be summarized as follows. Newspapers were published in one of two languages, Belorussian or Russian, with the Belorussian-language newspapers comprising between 83 and 90 percent of the total number of papers published. This language ratio is similarly maintained throughout the circulation figures, in which Belorussian-language circulation ran between 84 and 88 percent of total circulation for all raions in the BSSR. Interestingly, the number of papers published in both languages declined markedly after 1960, although this decrease appears insignificant next to a consistently strong increase in circulation figures throughout the entire period. Nonetheless, the most striking feature of the BSSR circulation figures is a dramatic rise in the average circulation of Russian-language newspapers, a figure that in 1950 was nearly identical to the average circulation of Belorussian-language papers. By 1965, however, the same figure for Belorussian was only two-thirds that of the Russian total. As has been shown, this rapid growth in Russian-language circulation may have been connected with the urbanization occurring within the republic at that time, yet this is difficult to determine.

---

[13] Parenthetically, Szporluk's analysis of West Belorussia demonstrates that urban Belorussians were very likely to adopt the Russian language as their language of everyday communication. See Szporluk, "West Ukraine and West Belorussia," 92.

The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic

To the north of Belorussian territory lies the Latvian SSR, sandwiched between the other two Baltic republics, the Estonian and Lithuanian SSRs. Latvia was not formally incorporated into the Soviet Union until after World War Two, although it – along with Estonia and Lithuania – had been annexed by the USSR in June 1940 as per the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Nonetheless, the Baltic States' annexation by a Russian-dominated power did not represent anything novel, since they had remained a part of the Russian Empire until 1917, with all three republics finally becoming officially independent during the interwar period. Following its re-occupation by the Red Army after Germany's surrender in May 1945 Latvia subsequently became incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Latvian SSR, occupying an area of approximately 65,000 square kilometres.

According to the 1959 census, Latvia's territory was inhabited in 1959 by just over two million people, the majority of whom predictably identified themselves as "Latvians." Table 2.8 provides a detailed breakdown of how these inhabitants responded to the census questions on nationality and native language.

Table 2.8 – National-Linguistic Composition of the LaSSR[14]

Nationality / National Language	% of LaSSR population identifying this as their nationality	% of LaSSR population who identified this as their native language
Latvian	62.0	62.2
Russian	26.6	30.4
Belorussian	2.9	1.3
Polish	2.9	1.6
Jewish (Yiddish)	1.7	0.8
Lithuanian	1.5	1.2
Total Accounted For	**97.7**	**97.4**

Thus, based on this census data, one can state that Latvians formed a clear ethnic and linguistic majority within the LaSSR, and that Russians formed a minority much more significant than in the BSSR. Moreover, it is noteworthy that while just over a quarter of the population claimed Russian as their nationality, just under a third of the LaSSR's inhabitants claimed Russian as their native language. Table 2.9 gives some indication as to the ethnic background of the LaSSR's Russian-speaking non-Russians.

Table 2.9 – Linguistic Composition of the LaSSR (data on "Native Language" use)[15]

Nationality	% whose native language is same as "national" language	% whose native language is Latvian	% whose native language is Russian	% whose native language is neither Russian nor Latvian
Latvian	98.4	-	1.5	0.2
Russian	98.5	1.5	-	0.0
Belorussian	42.6	3.5	53.0	0.9
Polish	55.3	13.9	28.1	2.7
Jewish	47.9	1.5	50.0	0.5
Lithuanian	76.5	18.0	4.3	1.3

[14] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' X: Latviiskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 92-93.
[15] *Ibid.*

Evidently, census respondents who identified themselves as Belorussians, Poles, Jews or Lithuanians were less likely than Latvians or Russians to speak the titular language of their nationality, with a majority of Belorussians and Jews having adopted Russian as their native language. Consequently, with many non-Latvians speaking Latvian and even more non-Russians speaking Russian, Latvian and Russian clearly stand out as the two dominant languages of the LaSSR.

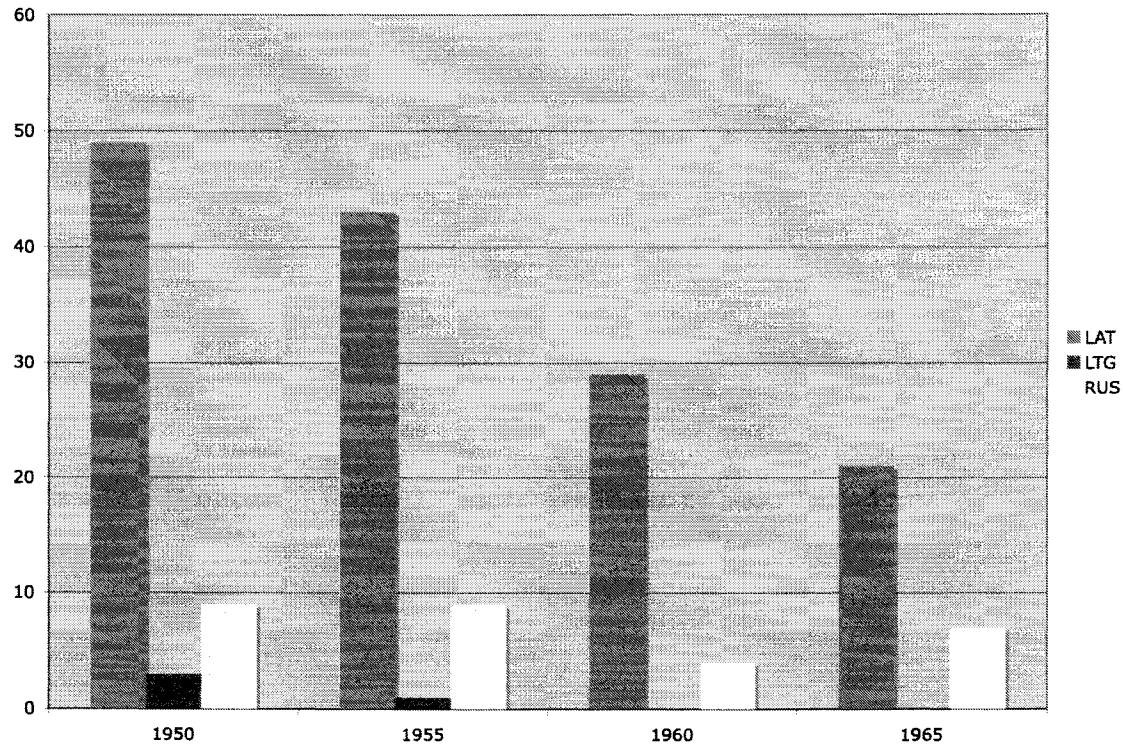
As regards newspaper publication in the LaSSR, however, there is one minor linguistic detail that is not reflected in the 1959 census data: dialectical variance within Latvian. During the 1950 to 1965 period, there existed considerable regional discrepancies within the Latvian language, to the point where separate dialects of the language could be identified. Furthermore, these dialectal differences were not merely confined to phonological variance, but also accounted for regional distinctions within written Latvian. As a result, prior to 1960, Latvian newspapers published in the LaSSR employed one of two dialects. Thus, newspapers published in "standard" Latvian are labelled in *LPI SSSR* simply as "Latvian-language" newspapers; on the other hand, a small number of papers employed the written form of Latgal, "a dialect of High Latvian".[16] Sadly, since the same distinction was not made during the 1959 census, it is impossible to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many Latvians spoke each dialect of Latvian in the 1950s.

This linguistic distinction is of some significance since the Soviet regime in the LaSSR only published raion-level newspapers in three languages: Latvian, Latgal and Russian. The linguistic breakdown of the number of raion-level papers published in the LaSSR from 1950 to 1965 can be found in Table 2.10.

---

[16] Comrie, *Languages of the Soviet Union*, 147.

Table 2.10 – Number of Raion-Level Papers in the LaSSR, 1950-1956[17]



Three salient features jump out from this graph. The first is that the small numbers of papers in Latgal (3 in 1950 and 1 in 1955) disappear by 1960. The second point is that the number of papers published in Latvian steadily declines from 49 to 21 over the total of the fifteen-year period. However, the third point is somewhat intriguing, in that the number of Russian language papers remains relatively constant, considering that the number of papers fell only by two, from nine in 1950 to seven in 1965. This third point becomes particularly obvious in Table 2.11, which illustrates the percentage of papers published per language.

[17] Data for Tables 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14 calculated based on entries in: *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 430-433; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1955-1960gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1962), 531-541; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1961-1965gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Kniga, 1973), 469-477.

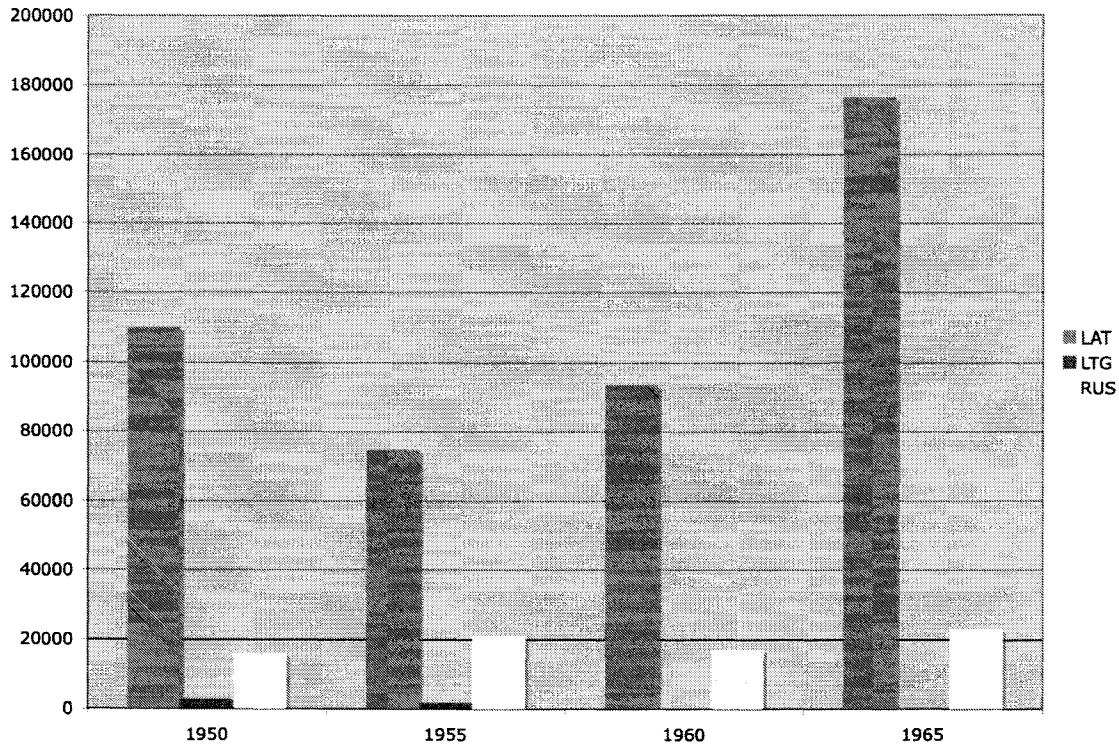
Table 2.11 – LaSSR Newspapers Published per Language

	1950	1955	1960	1965
LAT	80%	81%	88%	75%
LTG	5%	2%	0%	0%
RUS	15%	17%	12%	25%

The percentage figures thus reveal that the percentage of LaSSR papers published in Russian increased by 10 percent over the fifteen-year period, whereas the corresponding percentage of Latvian-language papers decreased by 10 percent, if one groups Latvian- and Latgal-language papers together.

The figures for circulation, however, tell a different story. As indicated by Table 2.12, circulation figures for Latvian-language papers increased dramatically between 1955 and 1965. Again, the situation appears to have been similar to that which occurred in the BSSR, in that a smaller number of newspapers were reaching an increasingly wider audience. Interestingly, unlike in the BSSR, the Russian-language circulation figures do not keep pace with the Latvian ones, remaining instead relatively constant.

Table 2.12 – Total Circulation per Issue in the LaSSR



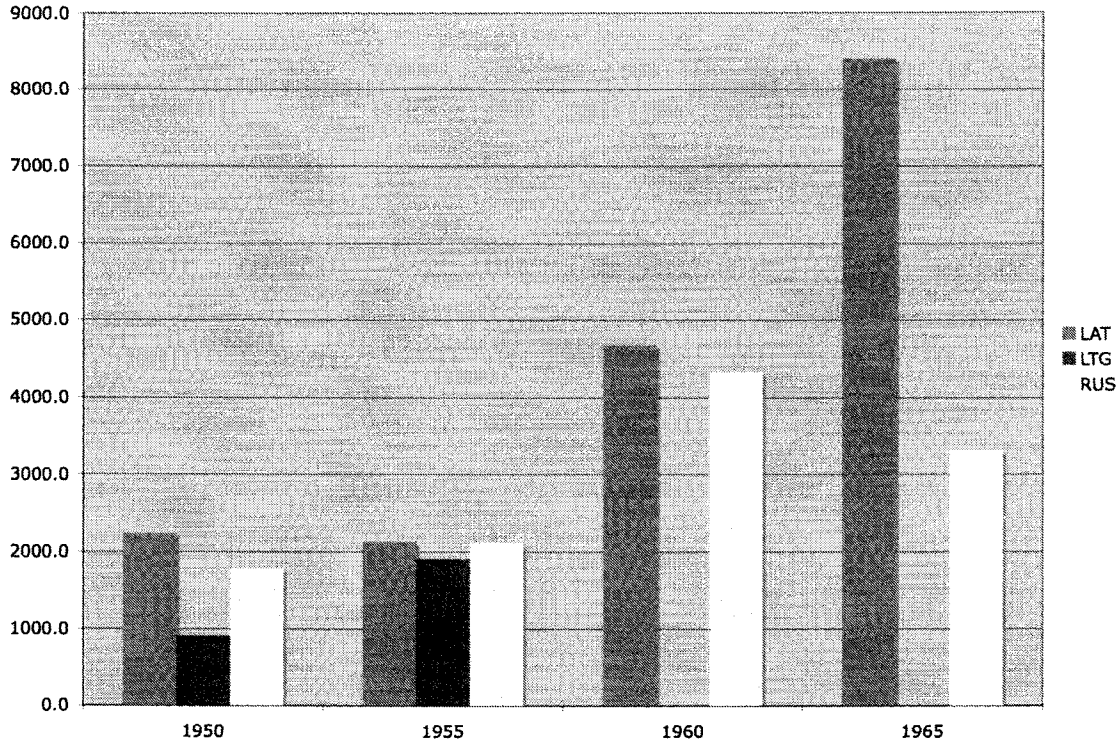
Indeed, when one looks at the circulation breakdown in terms of percentages, one does not see much of a change from 1950 to 1965. Looking at Table 2.13, if the Latgal-language newspapers are counted together with the Latvian-language publications, then the ratio of Latvian to Russian newspaper circulation in 1950 is essentially identical to the same ratio for 1965. Curiously, the 1955 figures differ substantially from the other three years, and for no obvious reason.

Table 2.13 – Total Circulation per Issue as a Percentage (LaSSR)

	1950	1955	1960	1965
LAT	85%	76%	84%	88%
LTG	2%	2%	0%	0%
RUS	12%	22%	16%	12%

Another difference between the Latvian and Belorussian results can be noted in the average circulation per issue statistics. The BSSR statistics showed a significant proportional increase in Russian-language average circulation. However, the same phenomenon does not repeat itself in the LaSSR, as evidenced by Table 2.14.

Table 2.14 – Average Circulation per Issue in the LaSSR



The statistics demonstrate that Latvian- and Russian-language papers had comparable average circulation levels, at least until 1965, when the circulation of Latvian-language papers dramatically outpaced that of their Russian-language counterparts. As a result, even though the BSSR and LaSSR possessed similar ethno-linguistic characteristics – both having a dominant non-Russian national linguistic group and a significant Russian-speaking minority – the linguistic divides which formed in the circulation patterns of each republic's raion-level newspapers were clearly very different. In the Belorussian

figures, it was the minority language newspapers that made significant gains following 1960, whereas the Latvian figures reveal a correspondingly strong circulation advantage for the majority language papers in the same time period.

Overall, the raion-level newspaper publication statistics for the Latvian SSR are relatively straightforward. Papers were published in three languages through 1955 – Latvian, Latgal and Russian – after which time Latgal-language papers disappeared and any Latgal-speakers not comfortable with standard Latvian or Russian were thrust into the same situation as the other 7.4 percent of the LaSSR population whose native language was neither Latvian nor Russian and who were without a newspaper to read in their native language. In terms of the language balance between Latvian- and Russian-language papers, the proportion of newspapers published in Russian increased by approximately 10 percent between 1950 and 1965, while the overall number of papers published decreased dramatically. In terms of circulation figures, the linguistic balance differs, with Russian-language circulation figures remaining generally constant, while Latvian-language circulation levels increased dramatically after 1955. Interestingly, when comparing 1950 directly with 1965 in terms of total circulation, the ratio of Latvian-language newspapers to Russian-language ones remains virtually unchanged. On a final note, the average circulation of Latvian-language newspapers increases dramatically after 1960, following ten years of relative parity with Russian-language average circulation.

Similarities and Differences: the BSSR versus the LaSSR

To conclude this section, it is useful to compare the analyses of the Belorussian and Latvian SSRs before entering into the Armenian and Uzbek results. Both of these

republics possessed some similar ethno-linguistic characteristics, since each republic's population contained a numerically dominant single national group with a significant Russian-speaking minority. Indeed, this similarity presents itself in the above analysis of newspaper publication. In both republics, the number of raion-level newspapers published decreased significantly over the course of the 1950 to 1965 period. Likewise, the vast majority of papers published in the BSSR and LaSSR were printed in the language of each republic's dominant national majority – respectively Belorussian and Latvian. Moreover, newspapers were not published in any minority languages other than Russian, with the possible exception of Latgal in the LaSSR. In any case, the main common thread between the BSSR and LaSSR would appear to be the publication prominence given to each republic's so-called national language as well as to Russian.

Nonetheless, three crucial differences surface in the comparison of these two Union Republics. First, although raion-level newspapers experienced significant growth over the fifteen-year period under study in both republics, in the LaSSR this increased circulation applies only to Latvian-language newspapers; unlike in the BSSR, Russian-language papers saw their circulation levels remain relatively stagnant. Second, the two sets of average circulation figures differ greatly. In the BSSR, the average circulation level of newspapers published in the predominant minority language – Russian – grew substantially, outpacing Belorussian-language circulation in the republic by a considerable margin by 1965. In the LaSSR, however, the opposite occurred, with the average circulation of a majority-language (Latvian) newspaper growing at the expense of the Russian-language publications. Lastly, a discrepancy exists in terms of the number of newspapers published in each language throughout both republics. The proportion of

Belorussian- versus Russian-language papers in the BSSR remains virtually unchanged from 1950 through until 1965, while in the LaSSR, Russian-language papers increase their share of the total number of newspapers published by roughly ten percent in an identical time frame.

Essentially, what this analysis of the BSSR and LaSSR indicates is that raion-level newspaper circulation in one Slavic republic and one Baltic republic did not follow an identical pattern in the time period under examination. This is despite the fact that the two republics shared similar trends in ethno-linguistic composition, and despite some parallel developments in terms of newspaper circulation. Why two different circulation patterns were developed is not easy to determine. Soviet newspaper circulation levels "were determined by plan with little or no regard for demand," until the beginnings of a demand-based subscription system took shape in the early to mid 1960s, meaning that the policy difference between the two republics cannot be explained by bureaucrats reacting to the preferences of the general public.[18] The implication, therefore, is that two deliberately crafted circulation policies existed, one for each republic. Perhaps the Soviet authorities believed that Belorussian-speakers moving to the cities would be able to easily assimilate into the increasingly Russophone urban culture of the BSSR, and would soon be able to pick up enough Russian to read Russian-language newspapers. It appears that the same capability for assimilation was not assumed of Latvians, given the relatively constant levels of Russian-language newspaper circulation in the LaSSR. On the other hand, the increased number of Russian-language newspapers in the Latvian SSR might suggest that the CPSU believed in promoting Russian as the dominant second language in

[18] Szporluk, "The Press in Belorussia," 487. Szporluk notes that subscription systems for various levels of the newspaper press were introduced in different years, beginning in the mid-1960s. He does not indicate in which year this applied to raion-level papers.

the LaSSR. In any event, it is too early yet to draw firm conclusions about these policy differences. What is important for the moment is to underline the fact that newspaper circulation patters differed between the BSSR and LaSSR from 1950 to 1965.

The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic

Moving far southward and eastward from the northwest corner of the USSR, one arrives in the Caucasus, a region remarkably different, in terms of both geography and culture from the Slavic and Baltic republics. Nowhere else in the Soviet Union could one find such linguistic and cultural diversity in such a small territorial area. As a result, the region was home to a number of small Soviet republics (eight ASSRs and three SSRs), split essentially along ethnic lines. Typifying these small republics, the Armenian SSR measured just 29,800 square kilometres, sandwiched by the Georgian SSR to the north, the Azerbaijani SSR to the east, and Turkey, Iran and the Nakhichevan ASSR (part of the Azerbaijani SSR) to the west and south. Also typifying the Caucasus region, a single national group emerged as being numerically dominant within the borders of the ArSSR. Indeed, the Armenian SSR could be described as "the most homogenous republic in the USSR", owing to the high percentage of its population identifying their nationality as Armenian (88 percent in 1959), of whom 99 percent considered Armenian to be their native language.[19] This high concentration of Armenians within the ArSSR at once made the republic atypical of the Caucasus region and ensured that the ArSSR would retain a certain distinctive ethnic and cultural character, especially in light of the uniqueness of the Armenian language within the USSR and particularly because the vast majority of

[19] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Soviet Armenia," in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times.* Volume II (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 375; *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' XIII: Armianskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 102-103.

Armenians remained faithful to their unique church.[20] In some ways, the maintenance of the Armenian SSR as a political entity benefited Armenians, since Soviet rule offered some measure of protection against potentially hostile neighbours, such as Turkey.

Table 3.1 – National-Linguistic Composition of the ArSSR (1959)[21]

Nationality / National Language	% of ArSSR population identifying this as their nationality	% of ArSSR population who identified this as their native language
Armenian	88.0	87.4
Azerbaijani	6.1	6.1
Russian	3.2	4.0
Kurdish	1.5	1.4
Ukrainian	0.3	0.2
Total Accounted For	**99.1**	**99.1**

As shown by the above figures, while the vast majority of the 1.76 million residents of the ArSSR in 1959 were Armenians, what is particularly noteworthy is that no single minority national group displayed a significant presence in the republic. Significantly, Russians ranked third, representing just over 3 percent of the population. Unlike in the BSSR and LaSSR, Russians in the ArSSR were outnumbered by nearly a two-to-one margin by Azerbaijanis who, accounting for just over 6 percent of the population, represented the republic's largest national minority. The other salient ethno-linguistic point to be made with these figures is that the figures for nationality and for native language are close to identical. Essentially, it would therefore be accurate to generalize the ArSSR in 1959 as a place where virtually all residents retained the main language of their national group as their native tongue.

[20] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Soviet Armenia," 357, 377.
[21] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' XIII: Armianskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 102-103.

Table 3.2 – Linguistic Composition of the ArSSR (data on "Native Language" use)[22]

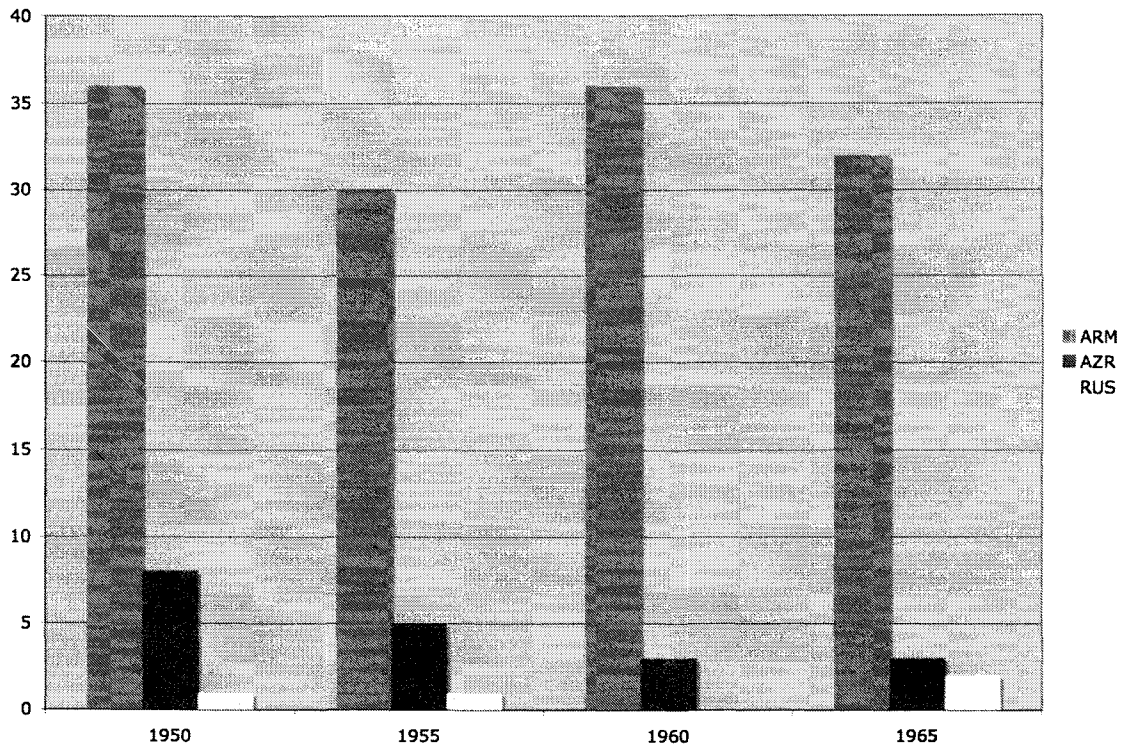
Nationality	% whose native language is same as "national" language	% whose native language is Armenian	% whose native language is Russian	% whose native language is neither Russian nor Armenian
Armenian	99.2	-	0.7	0.0
Azerbaijani	99.3	0.3	0.3	0.0
Russian	99.6	0.4	-	0.0
Kurdish	94.6	4.4	0.6	0.3
Ukrainian	49.3	0.7	49.9	0.1

Nonetheless, Table 3.2 reveals a minor commonality between the ArSSR and the other two republics studied thus far, in that the two least significant national groupings in the republic – Kurds and Ukrainians – were more likely to adopt either Armenian or Russian as their native language.

Turning to newspaper circulation figures from 1950 to 1965, one is thus unsurprised to see newspapers published in the Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani languages. Unfortunately, for reasons that are not at all clear, some of the data in *LPI SSSR* are lacking, especially circulation information. For instance, there are hardly any circulation data for Azerbaijani-language papers. Moreover, virtually no circulation figures are given for any of the newspapers published in 1955 and 1960. Fortunately, however, the data on the number of newspapers in circulation remains quite solid. Table 3.3 indicates the number of raion-level papers published in the ArSSR from 1950 to 1965.

[22] *Ibid.*

Table 3.3 – Number of Raion-Level Papers in the ArSSR, 1950-1965[23]



At first glance, one notices a conspicuous lack of obvious trends in the above graph. On the whole, the number of Armenian-language papers declines slightly over the fifteen-year period, from 36 to 32, while Azerbaijani-language papers become much more scarce, falling from 8 in 1959 to 3 in 1965. Finally, the number of Russian-language newspapers doubles; however, considering that there was only a single Russian-language paper in 1950, the fact that there were two by 1965 cannot be considered especially significant. Overall, the number of papers published declines slightly, from 45 in 1950 to 37 in 1965, a pattern similar to that seen in chapter two with the BSSR and LaSSR. In terms of the split between languages Table 3.4 is most useful in identifying patterns.

[23] Data for Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 calculated based on entries in: *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 442-444; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1955-1960gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1962), 426-432; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1961-1965gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Kniga, 1973), 361-369.

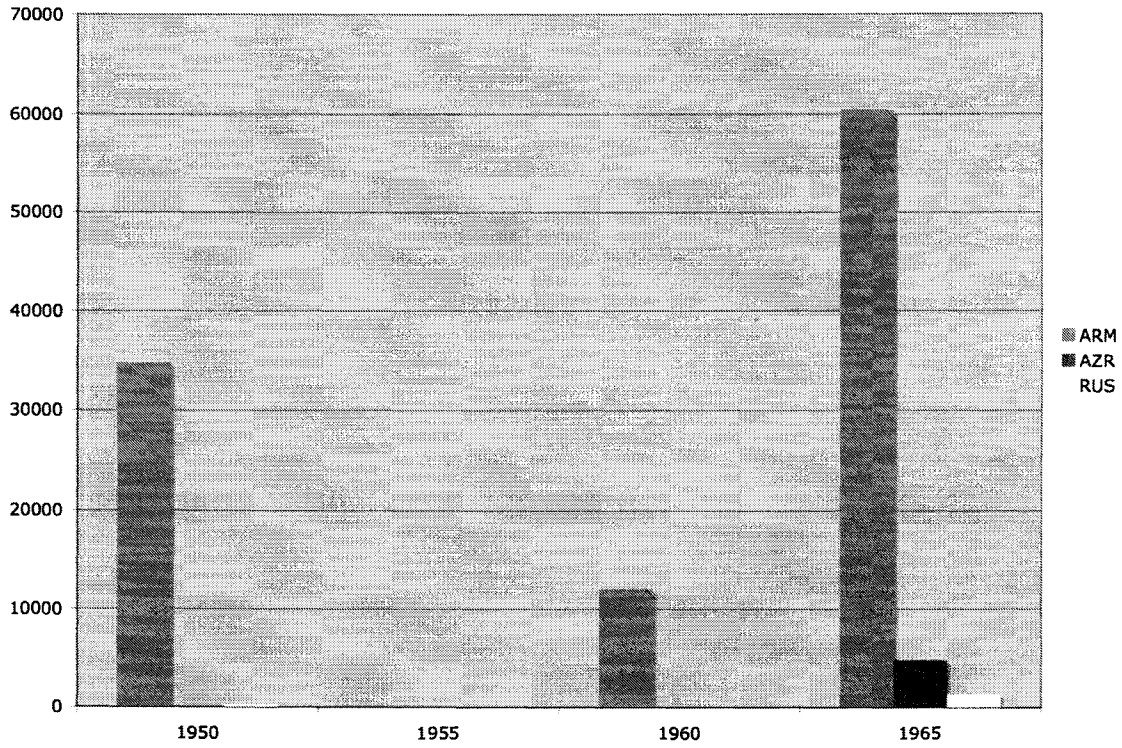
Table 3.4 – ArSSR Newspapers Published per Language

	1950	1955	1960	1965
ARM	80%	83%	92%	86%
AZR	18%	14%	8%	8%
RUS	2%	3%	0%	5%

The only major pattern that emerges from this graphic is the significant drop in the percentage of papers in Azerbaijani (a 10 percent drop over fifteen years). Admittedly, however, one must take care not to place too much emphasis on this particular statistic, given that the 18 percent in 1950 only represented eight newspapers to begin with and that the number of papers (as shown in Table 3.2) declined overall by 22 percent during the same time period. By way of a summary, all that can be stated therefore is that the number of papers decreased, and the percentage of Azerbaijani-language papers declined at the expense of Armenian- and Russian-language publications.

The circulation figures for the ArSSR are more difficult to analyse, given the problems with the source data stated above. In fact, the only year for which the circulation figures are of much use is 1965. Nonetheless, Table 3.5 illustrates the available data on the total circulation per issue of all raion-level papers in each language.

Table 3.5 – Total Circulation per Issue (ArSSR)



The only figures that are at all reliable on this graph are the Armenian-language figures from 1950 and 1965. From these, we can only ascertain that the total listed circulation per issue rose from 32,205 in 1950 to 60,400 by 1965. Unfortunately, circulation data for Azerbaijani- and Russian-language papers are too sparse to be of any use. Expressing the figures as a percentage of the total circulation per issue is likewise unhelpful, as Table 3.6 demonstrates.

Table 3.6 – Total Circulation per Issue as a Percentage (ArSSR)[24]

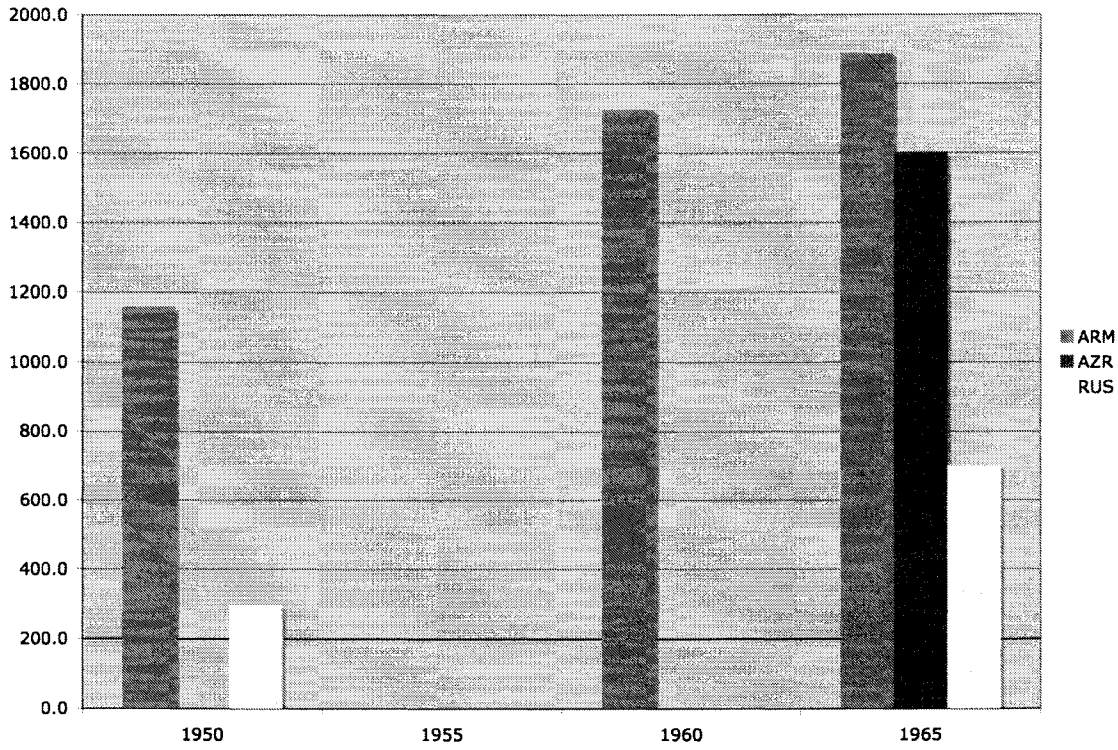
	1950	1955	1960	1965
ARM	99%	No Data	No Data	91%
AZR	0%	No Data	No Data	7%
RUS	1%	No Data	No Data	2%

[24] Shaded boxes represent statistically unreliable data due to insufficient circulation figures.

Nonetheless, the Armenian-language figures suggest the presence of the same trend as visible in Chapter Two: an increase in total circulation over the entire fifteen-year period.

The figures for average circulation per issue represent only a slight improvement, as visible in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 – Average Circulation per Issue in the ArSSR



The only improvement over the previous table is that calculating the average circulation per issue adds more meaning to the 1960 Armenian-language circulation data (since *LPI SSSR* only gives circulation figures for 7 out of 36 Armenian-language papers for that year).[25] Nonetheless, the trend toward increased circulation is again visible in this graph. Indeed, despite the deficiencies in the circulation data, the limited figures that do exist suggest that newspaper production in the ArSSR holds to the general pattern visible in the

[25] *Ibid.*

BSSR and LaSSR between 1950 and 1965: the number of papers declined while circulation levels increased.

To summarize, there are certainly plenty of concrete statistical data to generate a more-or-less accurate image of newspaper circulation in the Armenian SSR, data imperfections notwithstanding. In general, from 1950 to 1965, the number of newspapers published decreased, while circulation levels appear to have grown significantly. Moreover, it is indisputable that the republic's raion-level newspapers were published in one of three languages: Armenian, Azerbaijani or Russian. Interestingly, the proportion of papers published in the Azerbaijani language decreased by approximately 10 percent over the course of the fifteen-year period examined. More importantly, however, the data on the number of minority-language newspapers published stand out as being unique to the ArSSR. Unlike in the Belorussian and Latvian SSRs, where the only minority-language newspapers published were in Russian, in the Armenian SSR the Azerbaijani-language papers outnumber the Russian-language ones. While this statistic appears logical from a demographic standpoint, given that Azerbaijanis outnumbered Russians by nearly a two-to-one margin in the republic in 1959, it is worth highlighting the point that Russian-language newspapers did not always dominate a republic's minority-language press.

The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

The second-largest of the Soviet Central Asian republics, the Uzbek SSR covered nonetheless a rather sizable area of 447,400 square kilometres, bordered by the Kazakh, Turkmen, Tajik and Kirghiz SSRs, as well as by Afghanistan. What makes the UzSSR

unique amongst the four Union Republics encompassed by this study is that it was the only one in which the majority ethnic group's nationality was a twentieth-century construct. While it remains far beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the lengthy and turbulent history of the Uzbek people and the formation of an Uzbek republic, a few select details are necessary. The republic was created in the mid-1920s by the Soviet government as part of an attempt to divide the region of Turkestan, which had been a province of the Russian Empire, into smaller administrative units. Basing their decision largely on ethno-geographic divisions, the Soviet leaders created the Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen and Kirghiz SSRs, as well as the Karakalpak ASSR within the UzSSR.[26] Although these new boundaries drawn on the map represented a reasonable attempt on the part of the Soviet government to contain the region's major ethnic groups within their own administrative units, this goal was nearly impossible to achieve in practice. Imperfections in the cartographic formula, therefore, were to be expected. For instance, the creation of the Tajik and Uzbek SSRs left a significant proportion of Tajiks in the Uzbek SSR and a smaller number of Uzbeks in the Tajik SSR.[27]

More importantly, at the time of the UzSSR's creation an Uzbek people, as such, did not yet exist. Rather, the people who would become known as the Uzbeks possessed strong local or tribal identities; there was as yet little sense of a larger Uzbek "nation". As a result, a principal preoccupation of the early Soviet years in the UzSSR was the formation of a national Uzbek identity, in order to facilitate internal cohesion within the republic. One method of accomplishing this objective was the creation of a standard

---

[26] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 4.
[27] *Ibid.*, 11.

Uzbek language, which was by no means an easy task.[28] Essentially, between 1924 and 1945, the Soviet government in the UzSSR managed to create a written alphabet for a chosen Uzbek dialect group, making this group of dialects into the "standard" form of Uzbek, and subsequently began teaching this language throughout the country with remarkable success.[29] Creating a fully literate Uzbek society represented a daunting task for the Soviet administration, especially considering that a "reasonable estimate" of the region's literacy rate at the time of the October Revolution places the figure at two percent.[30] Nonetheless, despite complicating matters by changing the Uzbek language's new alphabet to a Cyrillic-based writing system in 1940, the Soviet-created Uzbek language flourished following the Second World War to the point where, by the 1960s, "[i]n grades one through ten, 68.9% of all children of all nationalities in the republic were attending Uzbek-language schools."[31]

By the time of the 1959 census, the dual concepts of an Uzbek nationality and an Uzbek language had thus become well-entrenched. As Table 3.8 indicates, the majority of the Uzbek SSR's residents indicated their nationality and native language as Uzbek in 1959.

---

[28] For a detailed description of this process, see William Fierman, "Language Development in Soviet Uzbekistan," in Isabelle T. Kreindler (ed.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages: Their Past, Present and Future* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1985), 205-227.
[29] *Ibid.*, 209-211. At the time of the UzSSR's creation, the majority of the republic's inhabitants spoke one of many different Turkic dialects, most of which subsequently became reclassified as dialects of "Uzbek."
[30] *Ibid.*, 206.
[31] *Ibid.*, 216, 222.

Table 3.8 – National-Linguistic Composition of the UzSSR (1959)[32]

Nationality / National Language	% of UzSSR population identifying this as their nationality	% of UzSSR population who identified this as their native language
Uzbek	62.2	61.8
Russian	13.5	14.1
Tatar	5.5	4.9
Kazakh	4.1	4.0
Tadjik	3.8	3.6
Karakalpak	2.1	2.0
Total Accounted For	**91.2**	**90.3**

Evidently, the UzSSR was similar to the BSSR and LaSSR in that it possessed a numerically dominant national group and correspondingly numerically dominant native language, with a sizeable minority of Russian-speaking ethnic Russians making up the second-largest national group. However, this Central Asian republic's census results are similar to those of the ArSSR in one aspect: the members of each national group tended to retain their national language as their native language. Of the republic's six major national groupings, the Tatars were most likely to adopt the language of another national group as their native language, and yet nearly 90 percent of all Tatars still retained Tatar as their native language.

[32] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' IV: Uzbekskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963), 138-139.

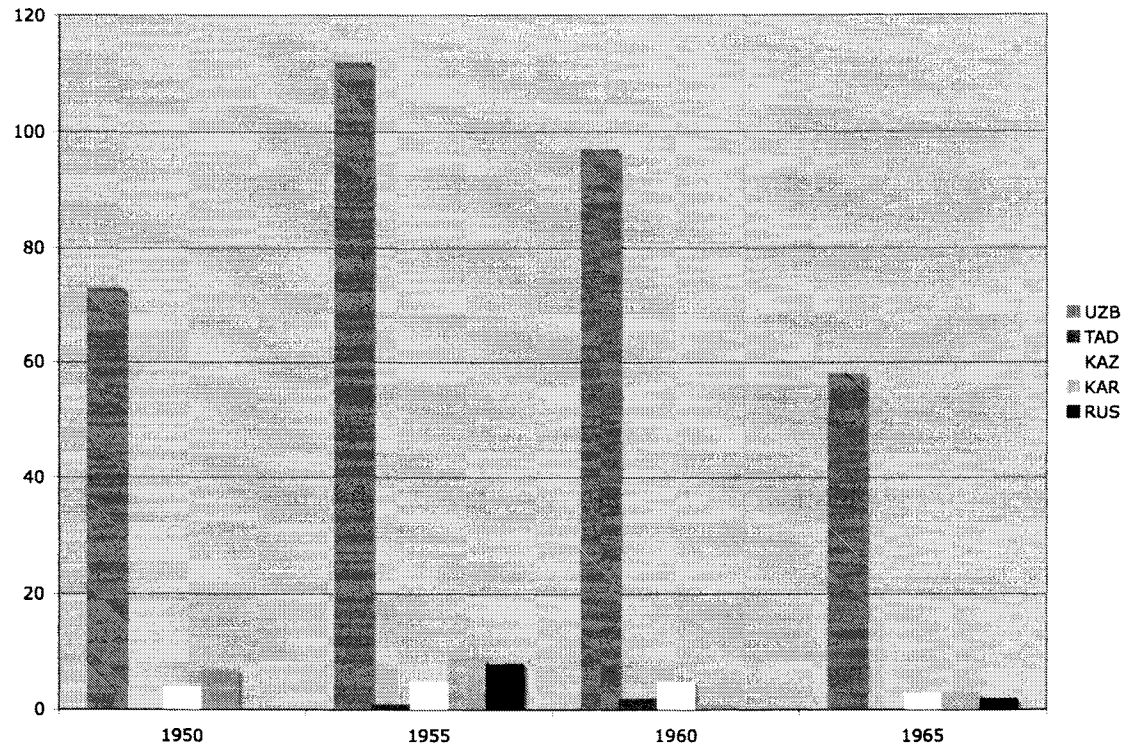
Table 3.9 – Linguistic Composition of the UzSSR (data on "Native Language" use)[33]

Nationality	% whose native language is same as "national" language	% whose native language is Uzbek	% whose native language is Russian	% whose native language is neither Russian nor Uzbek
Uzbek	98.6	-	0.3	1.0
Kara-Kalpak	95.3	3.7	0.2	0.9
Russian	99.9	0.0	-	0.0
Tatar	89.0	2.3	6.6	2.1
Kazakh	96.4	1.8	0.9	0.9
Tadjik	94.9	4.4	0.5	0.1

With regard to newspaper circulation figures, as is the case with the ArSSR, there are problems with conspicuously absent data. Fortunately, these absences are less complete than in the Armenian figures. Mainly, there are insufficient circulation data on Tadjik- and Karakalpak-language papers for 1955 and 1960. Apart from this one area of difficulty, however, the data for the Uzbek SSR can be considered quite comprehensive. Newspapers in the UzSSR were published in one of five languages: Uzbek, Tadjik, Kazakh, Karakalpak or Russian. It should be noted as an aside that although the Karakalpak-language papers appear quite insignificant when grouped in with the publication figures for the entire Uzbek SSR, the lion's share of newspapers in the Karakalpak ASSR are published in Karakalpak. However, as is made quite clear by Table 3.10, the vast majority of raion-level newspapers in the UzSSR were published in the Uzbek language.

[33] *Ibid.*

Table 3.10 – Number of Raion-Level Papers in the UzSSR, 1950-1965[34]



Looking at the number of raion-level papers published, the general trend is the same as for the other three republics: the number of papers decreases over time. Interestingly, the one difference here is that the peak publication year appears to have been 1955, not 1950. In the decade between 1955 and 1965, however, the total number of papers published fell from 135 (112 of them in Uzbek) to just 66 (58 in Uzbek). Looking at the number of papers per language (table 3.11), one notes that the share of papers published in Uzbek, Kazakh and Karakalpak remains constant over the fifteen-year period. The only real fluctuation occurs with the Tadjik- and Russian-language papers; the former appear only

[34] Data for Tables 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 calculated based on entries in: *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955), 390-398; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1955-1960gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1962), 592-622; *Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1961-1965gg. Chast' II: Gazety* (Moscow: Kniga, 1973), 514-538.

in 1955 and 1960, while the latter do not appear until 1955, and their percentage share of publication falls off over the course of the subsequent decade.

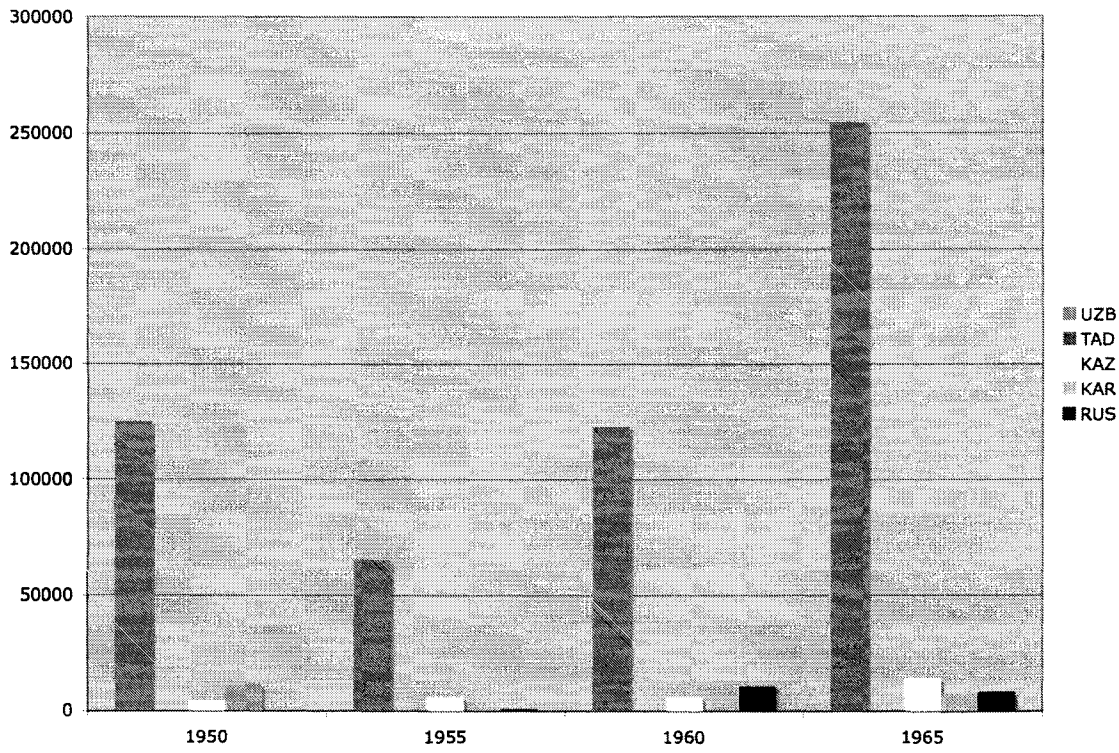
Table 3.11 – UzSSR Newspapers Published per Language

	1950	1955	1960	1965
UZB	87%	83%	86%	88%
TAD	0%	1%	2%	0%
KAZ	5%	4%	4%	5%
KAR	8%	7%	1%	5%
RUS	0%	6%	7%	3%

Thus, no great shift between languages occurs during this time period. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the percentage of Russian-language papers in the republic actually decreased between 1960 and 1965.

Circulation figures, while incomplete, are nonetheless consistent with the general trend observed in each of the four republics studied.

Table 3.12 – Total Circulation per Issue in the UzSSR



Again, the same pattern repeats itself, the number of papers published decreases while circulation rises. It is notable that the 1955 figures represent the lowest point on this graph. When one recalls that this was also the peak publication year in the UzSSR (as shown in Table 3.10), one is struck by the extent to which the number of newspapers published appears inversely proportional to the figures for total circulation. When the circulation figures per issue are expressed as a percentage (Table 3.13), the results are unsurprising.

Table 3.13 – Total Circulation per Issue as a Percentage (UzSSR)[35]

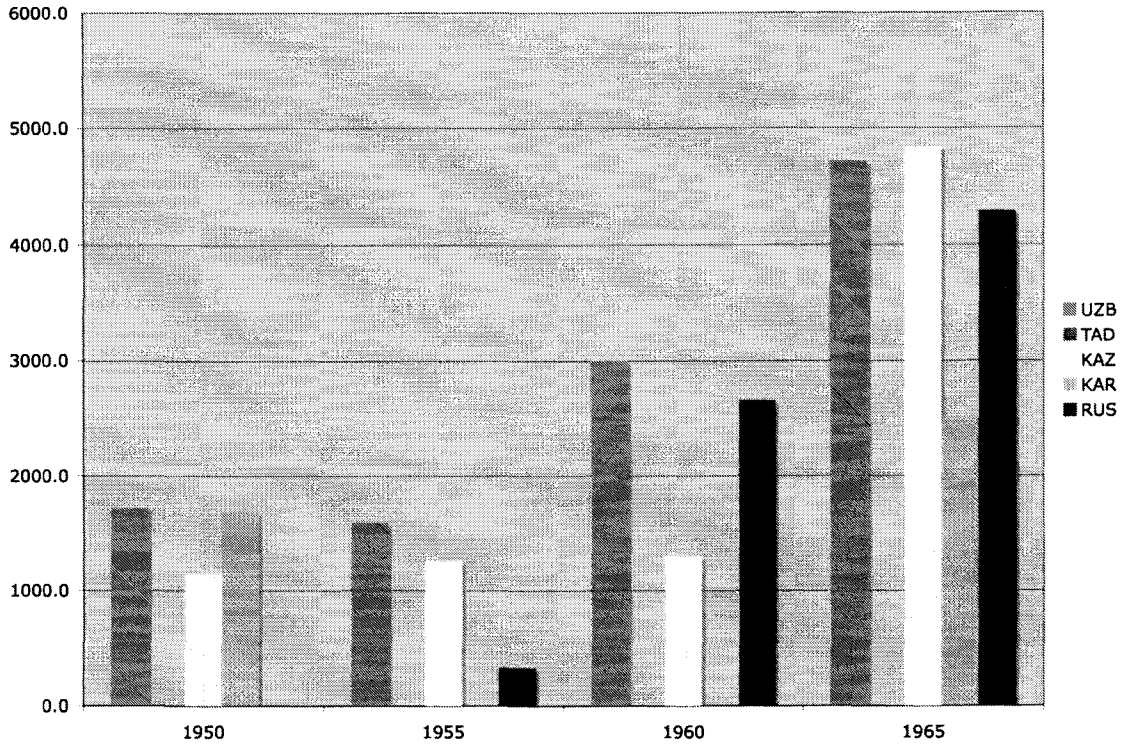
	1950	1955	1960	1965
UZB	88%	90%	88%	89%
TAD	0%	No Data	No Data	0%
KAZ	3%	9%	5%	5%
KAR	8%	No Data	No Data	3%
RUS	0%	1%	8%	3%

Here, the percentage figures for total circulation correspond well with the other percentage figures in Table 3.11: Uzbek and Kazakh remain constant (one can only guess at the Tadjik figures, since they are not provided in *LPI SSSR*) while Russian and Karakalpak experience minor fluctuations, decreasing by 1965.

The graph of average circulation figures (Table 3.14) provides perhaps the clearest visual image of the circulation data, given that the lack in quantity of non-Uzbek language papers makes for a particularly lopsided "Total Circulation" graph.

[35] Shaded boxes represent statistically inaccurate data due to insufficient circulation figures.

Table 3.14 – Average Circulation per Issue in the UzSSR



Average circulation increases generally over the fifteen years in question, which is logical given the general trend observed in all four case studies. The increase in Kazakh-language and Russian-language circulation between 1960 and 1965 is noteworthy, although neither is grossly out-of-step with the similar increase in Uzbek-language figures. The main salient feature revealed in Table 3.14 is that the linguistic divide is not significant. The average circulation levels for all languages appear generally comparable, with the one exception being the 1955 Russian-language figures.

In summarizing the data on the Uzbek SSR as a whole, one is struck by the dominance of the Uzbek language in raion-level newspapers, despite the fact that the UzSSR possessed the most linguistic variety in its newspaper publication statistics of any of the four republics encompassed by this study. At any given point between 1950 and

1965, Uzbek-language papers comprise close to 90 percent of all raion-level newspapers in the entire UzSSR, while the number of papers published in any other language never exceeds 8 percent of the total. Moreover, Uzbek-language publications also dominate the circulation statistics, although the statistics for average circulation per issue reveal a remarkable degree of parity between the five languages in which newspapers were published. Likewise significant is the fact that although Russian-speakers represented the most sizeable linguistic minority in the UzSSR in 1959, the number of Russian-language newspapers published does not consistently reflect this statistic. Indeed, out of the four years examined, only in 1960 were Russian-language newspapers second to Uzbek-language papers in terms of the number of publications printed. Thus, the general picture of newspaper circulation in the Uzbek SSR appears to be that Uzbek-language papers dominated the raion-level press across the republic, with a small number of papers in the Kazakh, Tadjik, Russian and Karakalpak languages appearing in certain regions. This pattern of newspaper circulation in the UzSSR is rather different from that uncovered in the Belorussian, Latvian and Armenian SSRs. In these three republics, most newspapers were published in the language of the majority national group of the republic's population, while a sizeable number of papers were printed in the second-most common language. The circulation figures for the Uzbek SSR, however, show that the republic's second-most common native language, Russian, was not necessarily the second-most common language of raion-level newspapers.

Comparison Summary of all Four Republics

In collating the four analyses of raion-level newspaper circulation in the Belorussian, Latvian, Armenian and Uzbek SSRs, three lists can be compiled of the following: similarities across all four republics, differences between the four republics, and significant anomalies. As far as similarities are concerned, the most obvious is the decrease in the number of papers published between 1950 and 1965, with the most significant drop in numbers occurring everywhere but in the ArSSR from 1950 to 1965. This decrease in the number of publications is counteracted by a corresponding increase in circulation levels throughout each of the four republics, although in the UzSSR this increase begins only in 1955. In all republics, the increase in total circulation over the fifteen-year time period is quite substantial, particularly when one looks at the figures for each republic's dominant "national" language. Indeed, one cannot help but note the numerical dominance of the main language of each republic in newspaper publication. Conversely, one is struck by the general decrease in the number of non-Russian minority-language papers from 1950 to 1965. This applies everywhere but the BSSR, where the only minority-language newspapers were in Russian. Elsewhere, the decrease in the number of papers published in Latgal, Azerbaijani and Tadjik is noticeable. The number of Russian-language newspapers, however, either remained constant or increased between 1950 and 1955, while subsequently decreasing between 1955 and 1960. Interestingly, the circulation levels of Russian-language papers increased across all four republics between 1950 and 1955, but the trend does not continue to 1960.

With regard to the differences between the four republics, the first item that must be noted is that there is no discernible increase in the number of Russian-language

newspapers at the expense of those in other languages. Likewise, there exists no trend common to all four republics indicating a disproportionate increase in the circulation levels of Russian-language papers. Such a trend is very much visible in the Belorussian SSR, but is negligible elsewhere. In terms of the selection of languages in which newspapers are available, the BSSR and LaSSR appear distinct from the ArSSR and UzSSR. In the former two republics, papers were only available in two languages – the dominant language of each republic plus Russian, notwithstanding the brief tenure of less than a handful of Latgal-language papers. In contrast, the second-most common language of newspaper publication in the ArSSR was Azerbaijani, followed by Russian, while in the UzSSR, no single language emerged as the second-most common language of publication over the entire fifteen-year period.

Finally, some interesting anomalies surface in this four-republic comparison. In the Belorussian SSR, for instance, the average circulation per issue of Russian-language newspapers consistently increased at the expense of Belorussian-language papers. In the Latvian SSR, however, the opposite occurs. The average circulation of Latvian- and Russian-language papers remains comparable through 1960, yet between 1960 and 1965 the average circulation of Latvian-language papers increased dramatically, whereas the Russian-language figure decreased slightly. Still another anomaly can be detected in the publication figures for papers published in the most common language of each republic. In the Belorussian, Latvian and Armenian SSRs, the number of Belorussian-, Latvian-, and Armenian-language newspapers decreased between 1950 and 1955, whereas the opposite occurred during the same time period in the Uzbek SSR.

In order to make sense of this four-way comparison, one must now attempt to interpret the results of the above analysis in a way which will allow conclusions to be drawn about Soviet language policy. To achieve this end, it will be necessary to examine the political context of the 1950 to 1965 time period, in order to grasp the main tenets of the CPSU's policy on language use. Comparing this stated policy with the results obtained from the quantitative analysis of newspaper circulation data should, therefore, result in a contrasting of Soviet language policy in theory and in practice.

Chapter Three – Analysis

1950 to 1965: A Period of Change

The 1950 and 1965 period in the Soviet Union was characterized by a great deal of social, economic and political change. In 1950, the USSR was still reeling from the demographic impact of having lost at least thirty million citizens – a disproportionate number of whom were male – over the course of the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, the immense physical damage done to Soviet infrastructure, mainly in the European regions of the country, took some time to repair. To illustrate the magnitude of the physical devastation, it is worth citing the description offered by Suny in his general history:

> 1,700 towns and 70,000 villages were destroyed; 25 million people were made homeless; 31,000 industrial enterprises were destroyed, along with 65,000 kilometres of railroad track; 17 million cattle, 27 million sheep and goats, and 20 million pigs were slaughtered.[1]

The war had not done wonders for the economy either, as the conflict had essentially cost the USSR approximately $128 billion, and overall production had declined significantly.[2] As a result, even by the 1960s the Soviet Union was still in a sense recovering from the Second World War, especially in terms of demographics and the economy (especially agriculture). Consequently, the 1950-1965 era was characterized by a strong increase in population and continuous economic growth across the Soviet Union. In fact, during the 1950s, the annual growth rate of the USSR's gross national product was 7.1 percent, a remarkable figure, considering that the corresponding figure for the United States was only 2.9 percent.[3]

---

[1] Suny, *Soviet Experiment*, 333.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 409.

Superimposed on of all this social and economic change was a significant political transition: the shift in CPSU leadership from Joseph Stalin to Nikita Khrushchev. Following the former's death on 5 March 1953, a period of interregnum ensued before the latter became ensconced in the position of First Secretary in 1955, from which office he would lead the USSR until his ousting in 1964. For historians of the Soviet Union, the shift from High Stalinism to the Khrushchev era is generally regarded as representing a notable shift in Soviet domestic policy, an opinion informed largely by Khrushchev's famous "secret speech" denouncing Stalin in 1956 at the XX Congress of the CPSU in 1956. Certainly, it is true that the Khrushchev era brought a variety of reforms, especially in the areas of agriculture and cultural policy. Moreover, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin is most decidedly viewed by Western historians as the Soviet Union's distinctive break from its troubled past. For Western Communists, 1956 represented something of a crisis, due to the implications of the Soviet about-face for the world communist movement. The British Communist and well-known historian Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, wrote that "the October Revolution created a world communist movement, the Twentieth Congress destroyed it."[4] In the area of Soviet language policy, however, it is far from clear as to whether the Khrushchev era represented a period significantly different from the Stalin years. As noted in Chapter One, Soviet historians consistently insisted that Soviet language policy followed its traditional Leninist goals from 1917 through to 1991. While Western historians generally disagree with this line of thinking, there is still a lack of consensus over the 1950 to 1965 period. M. Ster, for instance, wrote in 1960 that Khrushchev's language policies were identical to those favoured by Stalin.[5]

---

[4] Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Penguin, 2002), 201.
[5] M. Ster, "Soviet Russificatory Policy over the Years," *Problems of the Peoples of the USSR*, 7 (1960): 18.

In direct contrast to Ster's position, Silvia Forgus contends that 1958 represented a crucial "turning point" in Soviet language policy, since it was in this year that the Russian language began to receive strong government support as the dominant language of the Soviet Union.[6] Given the lack of historical consensus on this point, it is useful here to outline as best as possible "official" Soviet language policy under Stalin and Khrushchev.

Official Soviet Language Policy, 1950-1965

Deciphering Stalin's language policy is by no means an easy task, given the lack of official policy pronouncements on the subject. What does appear certain is that Stalin, especially during and following World War Two, certainly favoured an increased use of the Russian language. This preference, it should be noted, did not necessarily translate into the overwhelming state promotion of Russian at the expense of all other languages. In his analysis on the subject, linguist Simon Crisp offers a decent summary of the language policy of High Stalinism. Crisp notes that although a significant "Russian" influence on language policy became "clearly visible in the 1930s and 1940s," there was no "wholesale abandonment of the earlier [Leninist] commitment to the national languages as an essential means of socialist construction in a multinational state."[7]

Nonetheless, it was under Stalin that Latin alphabets were discouraged in favour of Cyrillic ones. Additionally, until the 1950s the accepted practice for spelling Russian loanwords (i.e. words borrowed from Russian for use in other languages) was to spell the word as one would do in Russian, regardless of whether this "often violated the

---

[6] Silvia P. Forgus, "Nationality Question in the Resolutions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *Nationalities Papers*, 5, 2 (1977): 195.
[7] Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning 1917-53," in Kirkwood (ed.), *Language Planning*, 39-40.

phonological system of the indigenous language" and generally caused confusion.[8] Moreover, in a 1950 speech during which he denounced the leading Soviet linguistic theorist, Nikolai Marr, Stalin stressed that the influence of the Russian language on other Soviet languages was only "natural".[9] Of note here is also the fact that it was Marr's contention that a gradual fusion of the different Soviet nationalities was inevitable, and with it would come the fusion of all their languages, forming in turn a new "Soviet" language. Stalin's renunciation of Marr's theories thus appears to indicate the Soviet leader's belief that Russian would emerge as the dominant language in the USSR.[10] Consequently, it is fair to state that language policy under Stalin after World War Two remained officially unchanged from the original Leninist policy of linguistic equality, while unofficially favouring the use of Russian as the Soviet Union's dominant language.

Determining official Soviet language policy under Khrushchev is by comparison a far easier task, owing principally to the fact that Khrushchev articulated his views on the subject quite clearly and publicly. In its essentials, Khrushchevian language policy represented a subtle adaptation of its Leninist grandfather: in addition to upholding Lenin's notion of the equality of all languages, Soviet language policy now openly encouraged the promotion of Russian as the second language of all non-Russian Soviet peoples. Why Khrushchev decided to make modifications to his country's language policy is not entirely clear. One scholar, Geoffrey Wheeler, has posited that the CPSU under Khrushchev became concerned with accelerating the ostensibly inevitable merger of all Soviet peoples due to "the emergence of a powerful and hostile China."[11] Language

---

[8] Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, 53.
[9] *Ibid.*, 57.
[10] Farmer, "Language and Linguistic Nationalism in the Ukraine," 127.
[11] Geoffrey Wheeler, "The Problem of the Nationalities," *Studies on the Soviet Union*. 7, 4 (1968): 107.

policy represented, of course, a central actor in the homogenization of the USSR. At any rate, the first significant language policy reform undertaken by Khrushchev was implemented in 1958 and 1959. Although the so-called Education Reforms – as the legislation is commonly referred to – were centred on changes to the Soviet education system, these policies carried important linguistic implications. Among other stipulations, this legislation decreed that it was no longer necessary to educate all Soviet citizens in their mother tongue. Gradually, this policy would lead to an increase in the scope of Russian-language education across the entire USSR, and to some decreases in native-language schooling.[12]

Subsequent to the Education Reforms, the clearest articulation of Khrushchev's language policy occurs in documents from the XXII Congress of the CPSU in 1961. In what was introduced as the Communist Party Programme, Khrushchev commented on nationality issues, noting that: "the obliteration of national distinctions, and especially of language distinctions, is a considerably longer process than the obliteration of class distinctions."[13] Reaffirming his Leninist credentials, the General Secretary insisted that the CPSU addressed "all questions of national relationships arising in the course of communist construction from the standpoint of proletarian internationalism and firm pursuance of the Leninist nationalities policy."[14] After assuring his audience of the "actual equality of all nations and nationalities" in the Soviet Union, Khrushchev then reiterated the Party's stance on language use. The CPSU's objective, he stated, was:

---

[12] Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, 57; Silver, "Minority Languages in Soviet Education," 39.
[13] Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Adopted by the 22nd Congress of the CPSU October 31, 1961)* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 103.
[14] *Ibid.*

> to continue promoting the free development of the languages of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and the complete freedom for every citizen of the U.S.S.R. to speak, and to bring up and educate his children, in any language, ruling out all privileges, restrictions, or compulsions in the use of this or that language.[15]

On the next page of his text Khrushchev shifted gears, placing emphasis on the "voluntary" nature of the adoption of Russian by a growing number of non-Russian Soviets:

> The voluntary study of Russian...is of positive significance, since it facilitates reciprocal exchanges of experience...[between] all the other peoples of the U.S.S.R., and to world culture. The Russian language has, in effect, become the common medium of intercourse and co-operation between all the peoples of the U.S.S.R.[16]

At first glance, it appears that Khrushchev's language policy was attempting to fulfil potentially contradictory aims, each to the fullest extent possible. The promotion of native languages was ostensibly encouraged, while the principal linguistic threat to the survival of these languages – the increased use of Russian – was likewise considered highly desirable.

Some clarification of Khrushchev's policy on languages can be found on his *Report on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.* After offering a précis of the salient comments on nationalities policy found in his 1961 Party Programme, the Soviet leader carefully added a caveat to his paragraph on the use of national languages:

> We propose no restrictions whatsoever on the development of national languages. But their development must not lead to any accentuation of national barriers; on the contrary, it should lead to a coming together of nations.[17]

With the addition of a supplemental sentence, less reading-between-the-lines is required to interpret this official pronouncement.[18] As a result, the most logical interpretation of

---

[15] *Ibid.*, 104.
[16] *Ibid.*, 105.
[17] N.S. Khrushchev, "Report on the Program of the Communist Party of the Sovet Union," in: *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU*, Volume 2, (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), 117.

Khrushchev's language policy may be summarized with three main points. First, Soviet citizens may speak, read, write and attend school in the language of their – or their parents' – choice. What is perhaps implied here is "where practical", since it would likely have been difficult to locate the nearest Tajik-language school in, say, a rural area of southern Belorussia. Second, the Soviet government will not actively undermine any national language, unless the growth of a single language should represent a threat to Soviet unity. Third, Russian has become the de facto lingua franca of the USSR; the learning of Russian by non-Russian Soviets is thus to be encouraged, since pan-Soviet fluency in the "intra-national" language of the USSR – Russian – would have a positive cultural and economic impact.

The subsequent literature on Soviet language policy reinforces this particular interpretation of Khrushchev's objectives. Isaev's *Sto tridtsat' ravnopravnikh*, published in 1970, stresses the "mutual enrichment and mutual development" of all Soviet languages. Isaev quickly adds that this was not simply a case of Russian "infiltrating" other languages, mentioning by way of example that "several dozen" words of Ukrainian origin found their way into Russian.[19] Several pages later, however, Isaev goes on to mention the 1961 Party Programme in conjunction with the importance of the increasing adoption of Russian as a *lingua franca* among the Soviet population.[20] In addition to Isaev, a survey of works by other Soviet authors indicates that Khrushchev's language policies were still being reiterated in the 1980s. An article in Desheriev's *Teoreticheskie problemy sotsial'noi lingvistiki* by A. I. Kholmogorov entitled "The Scientific

---

[18] Alfred Low goes as far as to argue that, because of this caveat, Khrushchev's promise of unhindered national language development becomes "qualified, if not outright cancelled." Low, "Soviet Nationality Policy," 19.
[19] Isaev, *Sto tridtsat ravnopravnikh*, 35-37.
[20] *Ibid.*, 47.

Management [*nauchnoe upravlenie*] of the Living Languages of the People of the USSR," closes its argument by recycling, nearly word-for-word in places, Khrushchev's 1961 statements on language use:

> The CPSU supports the growing tendency among the peoples of the USSR to voluntarily master the Russian language, while simultaneously and in future providing for the free development of the languages of the peoples of the USSR, not tolerating any limitations, privileges or coercion whatsoever relating to [the use of] this or that language.[21]

Indeed, the consistent regurgitation of Khrushchev's comments from 1961 suggests strongly that these statements represent official Soviet language policy from 1961 into the 1980s.

The following summary of official Soviet language policy during the 1950 to 1965 period may now be constructed. In 1950, Soviet language policy remained close to its Leninist roots, inasmuch as no one language was given official preference, despite the fact that Stalinist policy tended to reflect a certain preference for Russian in areas such as alphabet creation and lexicology. By 1961, Stalin's successor had become the first Soviet leader to modify openly the USSR's official language policy by promoting the use of Russian as a "second native language" for the entire Soviet Union. Nonetheless, although many historians characterize Khrushchev's language policy as a significant departure from Stalinism, one could make a case for the position that his Russian-language initiatives merely represented a concretization of Stalin's unofficial preference for the use of the Russian language.

---

[21] A.I. Kholmogorov, "Nauchnoe upravlenie iazykovoi zhizniyoo narodov SSSR," in Desheriev (ed.) *Teoreticheskie problemy sotsial'noi lingvistiki*, 131.

Newspaper Circulation and Language Policy – Preliminary Conclusions

Given this overview of 1950-1965 Soviet language policy, one must now compare and contrast Soviet policy with the Soviet newspaper circulation data from chapters two and three. In this manner, the theory of Soviet language policy may be contrasted with its practical application. Recalling the results of the newspaper circulation analysis as detailed at the end of Chapter Three, it is useful here to review the similarities, differences and anomalies between the data from the Belorussian, Latvian, Armenian and Uzbek SSRs while explaining the possible repercussions of these data for the present analysis of Soviet language policy.

As noted in Chapter Two, the figures for all four republics indicate a decrease in the number of raion-level papers published over the entire 1950-1965 period and a corresponding increase in the average circulation per issue of each paper. This realization by itself is of little significance to an analysis of language policy. However, one may consider the possibility that the decrease in the number of raion-level papers might have been offset by a corresponding increase in the number of all-Union papers in circulation. Were this the case, then it would be possible that the language selection for the district-level press would diminish in significance, as the all-Union papers presumably would become much more prominent. Moreover, such a theory would not appear out of place in the USSR under Khrushchev, given the common thread of centralization that characterized his leadership. Fortunately, it is possible to test this theory, since the circulation data for the all-Union newspapers are available in *Pechat'*. According to the 1965 edition of *Pechat'*, there were 23 all-Union newspapers in 1950 and the same number in 1965, while the circulation per issue of these publications had increased by

379 percent.[22] To put these figures into perspective, if the 1950-1965 figures for all-Union, republic, oblast, autonomous republic and raion newspapers are combined, on average the number of publications decreased by 9 percent, while circulation increased by 221 percent.[23] Incidentally, the group of newspapers that experienced the greatest surge in numbers was city newspapers, whose number grew by 63 percent. This latter figure could perhaps indicate a trend towards increased urbanization of the newspaper industry, with more city-level papers and less district-level ones, possibly as a result of increased urbanization in general. As regards the all-Union press, however, the figures from *Pechat'* suggest that a significant shift towards a more highly centralized press did not occur. Although there was no decrease in the number of all-Union newspapers from 1950 to 1965, this in itself does not compensate for the diminished number of raion-level papers during the same time period. Therefore, one may still consider the language of publication statistics of raion-level newspapers a useful indicator for evaluating Soviet language policy.

Another trend in the data common to all four regions surveyed was the significant increase in circulation of papers published in the majority language of each republic. The circulation levels of Belorussian-, Latvian-, Armenian- and Uzbek-language raion-level newspapers all increased substantially between 1950 and 1965. However, while the majority language clearly dominated the bulk of newspaper publication in each of the four republics, this trend appears to have occurred at the expense of non-Russian minority language newspapers, such as those printed in Latgal, Azerbaijani and Tadjik. Russian-language papers, on the other hand, tended to remain relatively consistent in all four

---

[22] Calculated from *Pechat' SSSR v 1965 gody* (Moscow: Kniga, 1966), 66.
[23] Calculated from *ibid.*, 66-67.

republics studied, in terms of their number and circulation levels. The strongest period for Russian-language publications appears to be the 1950-1955 period, when there was no decrease in any of the four republics in the number of papers printed in Russian; likewise during these five years, their circulation levels increased everywhere. At any rate, the implication of these trends for Soviet language policy is that some measure of linguistic standardization evidently took place over the course of the 1950-1965 time period as a whole. Clearly, if newspapers were not to be published in Russian, it became preferable to print them in the majority national language of the republic, rather than in a minority language, wherever possible. Moreover, it appears that from 1955 to 1965 – data points representing the Khrushchev years in this study – Russian-language newspapers were not strongly emphasized, contrary to what one might expect from the regime of a Soviet leader promoting the increased use of Russian amongst non-Russians.

Indeed, it must be stressed that the raion-level circulation data reveal no continuous, simultaneous trend in all four republics surveyed towards an increase in the number or circulation level of Russian-language papers. Such a trend is only evident in the BSSR, where the average circulation of Russian-language papers grew steadily and dramatically throughout the 1950 to 1965 period. Another significant difference between the four republics is the selection of languages in which raion-level papers were published. In the BSSR and LaSSR, papers were essentially published only in the majority language of each republic plus Russian, if one discounts for a moment the handful of Latgal-language papers existing prior to 1960. On the other hand, newspapers were published in a wider variety of languages in the ArSSR and UzSSR, although the number of minority-language newspapers decreases over the fifteen-year period

surveyed. These discrepancies between the four republics studied make it possible to declare with near certainty that no stringent uniform language policy was in place affecting newspaper circulation in the entire Soviet Union during the 1950 to 1965 period.

In sum, some tentative conclusions about Soviet language policy may be drawn from the 1950-1965 newspaper circulation data. First, the data suggest that Soviet language policy was not implemented in an identical manner across the entire Soviet Union, given the degree of regional variation in the results. In some republics, such as the BSSR, Russian-language papers grew in circulation strength, while in the ArSSR, for instance, Armenian-language newspapers overwhelmingly dominated the raion-level press. Second, despite this lack of uniformity, the data suggest that some degree of standardization began to occur somewhere in the middle of the 1950 to 1965 period. This standardization led to prominence being given to the majority native language of the republic in raion-level newspaper publication. This preference for the majority language appears to have led to the decline in publication in minority languages other than Russian, while Russian-language publication levels remained relatively constant throughout the period. Third, it is possible to discern within the circulation data a slight difference between the 1950-1955 period and the 1955-1965 period. During the 1950 to 1955 time frame, Russian-language circulation levels either remained constant or increased and more minority-language papers were published in Latgal and Azerbaijani. On the other hand, Russian-language circulation levels began to vary following 1955 depending on the region, and the number of minority-language papers had decreased significantly by 1965. This difference could prove significant, given that the leadership

transition from Stalin to Khrushchev occurred between 1953 and 1955. Tentatively, thus, one may remark that based on the raion-level newspaper data, Stalin's rule engendered strong levels of Russian-language circulation and a wider degree of linguistic variety in newspaper publication than that seen under Khrushchev. The Khrushchev years, on the other hand, appear to have been characterized by a gradual standardization of language selection in newspaper publication, with preference being given first to the majority language of a republic, and then second to Russian, with a noticeable reduction in the number of minority-language publications.

Potential Problems

Before finalizing these tentative conclusions, it is necessary to address some potentially problematic issues that could compromise the results of this data, namely literacy rates and source corroboration. First, one might question whether or not literacy rates should be accounted for in this research. If, hypothetically, Soviet literacy rates were still less than 90 percent by the 1950s, then this should perhaps be factored into the newspaper circulation equation. Second, as was mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Two, this study relies heavily on a single source for its analysis – *LPI SSSR* – due mainly to a dearth of statistical material on raion-level newspapers in the USSR. Were the data in this study to remain completely uncorroborated, the veracity of the results would likely be compromised. These two issues must be resolved before concluding this paper.

The first difficulty of literacy rates may be resolved quite easily. It is worth noting that by the onset of the Second World War, the Soviet populace was by and large

literate.[24] As Table 4.1 clearly indicates, published Soviet figures reveal that by 1939, the overall literacy rate for the entire population aged 9 to 49 was nearly 90 percent.

Table 4.1 – Soviet Literacy Rates, 1926-1959[25]

Year	Literacy Rate (% of population aged 9-49)
1926	56.6
1939	89.1
1959	98.5

According to Soviet figures, therefore, illiteracy had been virtually eliminated by the end of the 1950s. Even the figure for the rural population of the entire country is only slightly below the national average for 1959, at 98.2 percent.[26] Admittedly, one should perhaps be slightly sceptical about these figures, since they were released in the annual publication *SSSR v tsifrakh* ("The USSR in Figures") a medium designed in part for international consumption. The 1959 figures thus allowed *SSSR v tsifrakh* to claim that "the Soviet Union is essentially a country of complete literacy" and that "no backward regions" [*otstalnykh okrain*] remained in the USSR.[27]

Nonetheless, despite the probability that the statistics in Table 4.1 have been inflated, those who have studied literacy and language use in various regions of the Soviet Union have concluded that literacy rates were indeed quite high by the start of the Second World War. For instance, in his study of Uzbeks and the Uzbek language, William Fierman posits that, "[e]ven discounting the exaggerated figures published at the time, by the end of the [1930s] most Uzbeks were probably literate to some degree."[28] As

---

[24] Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, vii.
[25] *SSSR v tsifrakh v 1959 godu: kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1960), 264.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, 263, 265.
[28] Fierman, "Language Development in Soviet Uzbekistan," 214.

a result, it does not appear as though unusually low literacy rates compromise the newspaper circulation data in *LPI SSSR* for the 1950 to 1965 period. Given the manifestly high levels of literacy across the Soviet Union at this time, even in rural regions, it appears that literacy levels would not have been a serious consideration for those charged with planning newspaper circulation in the Soviet Union.

Corroborating the LPI SSSR figures, however, is somewhat difficult. As mentioned above, the only possible corroborating source is *Pechat'*. Although it provides circulation data on newspapers that is far from comprehensive, it is possible to use *Pechat'* in a limited manner to verify some general trends detected through the *LPI SSSR* material. For instance, *Pechat'* lists publication statistics for newspapers published throughout the Soviet Union. The format of these lists does tend to change slightly over the years, since *Pechat'* was published annually, but nevertheless, the statistics are generally broken down by republic, by republic and language, and by republic and newspaper classification (e.g. raion, oblast, all-Union). Unfortunately, the compilers of *Pechat'* opted – most likely for reasons of simplicity and readability – not to take the next step in cross-referencing. Thus, by examining *Pechat'* for the year 1960, it is possible to determine, for example, the number and circulation levels of Uzbek-language newspapers published in the UzSSR. It is also possible to uncover the number and circulation levels of oblast-level newspapers printed in the UzSSR for that year. However, one cannot determine how many Uzbek-language oblast-level papers existed. Such are the limits of *Pechat'* as a source.

Nonetheless, by consulting various editions of *Pechat'*, one is able to track newspaper publication data over the 1950 to 1965 period. For instance, one may compare

the number and circulation levels of Belorussian-, Latvian-, Armenian-, and Uzbek-language newspapers in 1950 to the corresponding figures for 1966, calculating the percentage change between the two, as in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 – Change in Circulation and in Number of Publications, 1950-1966[29]

Language of Newspaper	Change in Circulation (as % of SSR total)	Change in Number of Papers (as % of SSR total)
Belorussian	-23.5%	2.0%
Uzbek	16.2%	-6.6%
Latvian	-7.0%	-13.4%
Armenian	16.5%	3.9%
Average Trend	2.2%	-14.0%

While it must be noted that the figures in Table 4.1 represent all levels of Soviet newspapers in the BSSR, LaSSR, ArSSR and UzSSR, it is significant that the *Pechat'* table corroborates three trends noted in the *LPI SSSR* data. First, it confirms that Belorussian-language newspaper circulation decreased significantly as a percentage of overall BSSR circulation. Second, like the *LPI SSSR* figures, the Pechat' figures demonstrate the strong growth of Uzbek-language circulation in the same time period. Third, and perhaps most important, the data from both sources suggests that significant regional variation occurred in terms of determining the language of publication of Soviet newspapers.

A closer look at various editions of *Pechat'* also allows for further data comparison. While information on the 1950 publishing year remains sparse, it is possible to tabulate data on the relative circulation levels of newspapers published in different

[29] *Pechat' SSSR za sorok let 1917-1957* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1957), 127-132.; *Pechat' SSSR za 50 let: statisticheskie ocherki* (Moscow: Kniga, 1967), 190-193.

languages in the BSSR, LaSSR, ArSSR and UzSSR for the 1955-1965 period.[30] Bearing in mind that the *Pechat'* data encompass *all* newspapers published in each republic, Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 reveal the linguistic breakdown of all newspapers in the four republics surveyed.

Table 4.3 – Majority-Language Newspapers as a Percentage of the SSR Total[31]

	1955 # Papers (%)	1955 Circ. (%)	1960 # Papers (%)	1960 Circ. (%)	1965 # Papers (%)	1965 Circ. (%)
BSSR	81	62	77	52	76	43
LaSSR	75	80	71	75	64	75
ArSSR	92	85	94	89	87	91
UzSSR	70	65	60	65	58	68
Average	**80**	**73**	**76**	**70**	**71**	**69**

Table 4.4 – Russian-Language Newspapers as a Percentage of the SSR Total

	1955 # Papers (%)	1955 Circ. (%)	1960 # Papers (%)	1960 Circ. (%)	1965 # Papers (%)	1965 Circ. (%)
BSSR	19	38	23	48	24	57
LaSSR	23	19	29	25	36	25
ArSSR	4	13	3	9	7	6
UzSSR	21	29	34	28	34	26
Average	**17**	**25**	**22**	**28**	**25**	**29**

Table 4.5 – Minority-Language Newspapers as a Percentage of the SSR Total

	1955 # Papers (%)	1955 Circ. (%)	1960 # Papers (%)	1960 Circ. (%)	1965 # Papers (%)	1965 Circ. (%)
BSSR	0	0	0	0	0	0
LaSSR	2	1	0	0	0	0
ArSSR	4	2	3	3	7	3
UzSSR	9	6	7	6	8	6
Average	**4**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**4**	**2**

[30] Data for 1950 are incomplete owing to a lack of remaining copies of the 1950 edition of *Pechat'*. Some information about 1950 publication data may be gleaned from the 40th and 50th anniversary editions of *Pechat'* (1957 and 1967), but these data are somewhat more limited in detail.

[31] Data for tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 calculated from: *Pechat' SSSR v 1955 gody* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1956), 173-174; *Pechat' SSSR v 1960 gody* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1961), 164-165; *Pechat' SSSR v 1965 gody* (Moscow: Kniga, 1966), 187-188.

Interestingly, the *Pechat'* data reveal two slightly different trends than were found in examining the *LPI SSSR* raion-level results. For instance, Table 4.4 shows that the number and circulation of Russian-language newspapers increased slightly in each republic between 1955 and 1965, whereas this trend is not obvious from the raion-level statistics. Moreover, Table 4.3 demonstrates that the share of the publishing "market" – for want of a better term – held by majority (republic)-language newspapers actually decreased slightly across all four republics during the Khrushchev years. Nonetheless, the *Pechat'* figures do corroborate the fact that minority-language newspapers comprised a very small fraction of each republic's publishing in the 1955-1965 years. Likewise evidenced by *Pechat'* is the anomaly of Russian-language newspaper circulation in the BSSR, which expands dramatically at the expense of Belorussian-language publication. Furthermore, both the LPI SSSR raion-level figures and the Pechat' data on all republic newspapers illustrate the relative numerical dominance of majority-language publications, a trend that is most pronounced in the ArSSR.

Evidently, corroboration of the *LPI SSSR* raion-level data is complicated principally by the fact that it remains impossible to properly isolate raion-level figures in *Pechat'*. However, what is most significant is that the two sets of figures are closely similar to each other. Admittedly, there are some discrepancies due to the uneven data comparison which could be the object of further study, such as the slightly differing trends regarding the percentage of majority-language newspapers versus Russian-language newspapers. Nonetheless, the good news is that the analysis of *LPI SSSR* raion-

level circulation data contained in chapters two and three can be at least partially corroborated by data from *Pechat'*.

Chapter Four – General Conclusions on Soviet Language Policy

The Theory and Practice of Soviet Language Policy

While the data sets collected from *LPI SSSR* and *Pechat'* are not without their imperfections, it is possible to extract some firm conclusions about Soviet language policy from these sources. Examination of the 1950 to 1965 period and the language policies of Stalin and Khrushchev reveal that both leaders remained, at least theoretically, committed to preserving the equality of all languages of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Russian began to stand out as a language somehow "more equal" than all others, particularly after Khrushchev began officially trumpeting this Slavic language as the USSR's "language of internationality communication" in 1961. Nevertheless, the *LPI SSSR* and *Pechat'* data reveal that official Soviet language policy did not necessarily reconcile theory with practice. Unofficial language policy in the USSR between 1950 and 1965 differed from the official version in three distinct elements.

First, Soviet language policy was not implemented in a uniform manner throughout the entire USSR. This revelation should not be tremendously shocking, since it should not be assumed that Soviet leaders could forcibly engineer overnight linguistic change simultaneously across the whole country, had they so wished. In fact, the raion-level newspaper circulation data suggest that Soviet language policy from 1950 to 1965 followed a carefully chosen path of pragmatism. Mainly, it appears, the CPSU wanted its citizens to be able to read the country's newspapers. If this meant publishing newspapers in different languages, then that was that. Even though under Khrushchev the learning of Russian among non-Russian Soviets was being strongly encouraged, there existed no trend across the Soviet Union towards the creation of more Russian-language raion-level

newspapers or towards strongly increasing the circulation levels of existing ones. That being said, the Soviet leadership appears to have shown little hesitation in heightening Russian-language circulation in the BSSR, in a specific linguistic environment where Belorussians were becoming gradually assimilated into an urban culture that was becoming increasingly Russian-speaking. On the other hand, the CPSU structured Armenian-language circulation in the ArSSR in such a way as to allow the Armenian language – spoken by over 99 percent of ethnic Armenians – to thoroughly dominate the republic's raion-level press. The Soviet authorities appeared most concerned with disseminating the party line; any linguistic engineering that might have been desirable would have been a lesser consideration. Such a philosophy did not necessarily represent a *nouvauté* of the 1950s or 60s. An unidentified Bolshevik once explained Leninist language policy to a foreign visitor in the USSR by noting that, "We must reach the native masses...and the only way we can reach them is through their own language and their own culture."[1]

Second, contrary to the stated Soviet principle of the equality of all Soviet languages, the implementation of Soviet language policy did not necessarily place all non-Russian languages on an equal status plane. This aspect of language policy implementation represents the main discernable difference between the regimes of Stalin and Khrushchev. From 1955 to 1965, it appears that a sort of standardization movement occurred, in which languages of newspaper publication were prioritized. The *LPI SSSR* and *Pechat'* data suggest that, for the non-Russian Union Republics, newspapers were to be published either in Russian or the language of the republic's majority indigenous group. The quantitative data clearly indicate that newspapers published in other

[1] Quoted in Kriendler, "Lenin's Nationality Policy," 96.

languages decreased in number from 1955 onwards. Evidently, a decision had been made by some official at some level in Khrushchev's CPSU hierarchy that raion-level newspapers should only be published in minority languages in cases of absolute demographic necessity. Perhaps this linguistic prioritization was intended to gradually merge smaller newspapers (i.e. at the raion, city and oblast level) into the republic-level model: each SSR had its own central Russian-language newspaper with a "parallel" version in the republic's majority language.[2] Such a theory, however, remains speculative and unproven by the statistical data. In any case, Latvians wishing to read their local newspaper in Latgal, Uzbeks literate only in Tajik and other similar minority groups were simply out of luck by 1965.

Third, the official Soviet policy of linguistic equality of opportunity proves to be somewhat deceptive in reality when considering minority language groups within non-Russian SSRs. By cross-referencing the 1959 census data with the 1950-1965 raion-level newspaper circulation figures, it becomes evident that many significant linguistic minorities did not have local newspapers to read in the main language of their nationality. Intriguingly, it appears that the members of these groups often became linguistically assimilated, adopting either Russian or the majority language of their republic as their "native language." Such groups would include the Poles, Jews, Lithuanians and Ukrainians in the Belorussian and Latvian SSRs, as well as Tatars in the Uzbek SSR and Kurds and Ukrainians in the Armenian SSR. While it would be premature to conclude that the lack of newspapers *caused* these minority ethnic groups to adopt a different language from that of their ancestors, these statistics suggest that the power inherent in the selection of a newspaper's language should not be underestimated.

---

[2] Gorokhoff, *Publishing in the U.S.S.R.*, 38.

Concluding Remarks

Admittedly, this analytical project has only managed to cover a small lacuna in the historiography of Soviet language policy. By means of furthering this investigation, it would be instructive to follow raion-level newspapers from the Brezhnev era right through into the 1980s. Since Soviet literature suggests that official Soviet language policy remained relatively unchanged since 1961 – indeed, Alpatov refers to these years as the "years of stability" – it would be useful to discover whether or not the trends uncovered in the above analysis did indeed continue into the era of glasnost and perestroika.[3] For the present, however, there is one salient point which must be highlighted above all regarding Soviet language policy: it should not be simplified. To state that the Soviets "repeatedly attempted to implement the same policy throughout [their] vast territory, regardless of local particulars" is, while not wholly inaccurate, entirely misleading.[4] This quantitative analysis should make it quite clear that no uniform policy of linguistic Russification was applied to the entire Soviet Union between 1950 and 1965. In terms of planning newspaper circulation, ignoring linguistic "local particulars" was exactly what the CPSU avoided doing.

[3] Alpatov, *150 Iazykov i politika*, 102.
[4] Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, viii.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' III: Belorusskaia SSR. Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963.

Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' IV: Uzbekskaia SSR. Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963.

Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' X: Latviiskaia SSR. Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963.

Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Chast' XIII: Armianskaia SSR. Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1963.

Khrushchev, N.S. "Report on the Program of the Communist Party of the Sovet Union." In: *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU*. Volume 2. New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961.

Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1950-1954gg. Chast' II: Gazety. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1955.

Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1955-1960gg. Chast' II: Gazety. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1962.

Letopis' periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR 1961-1965gg. Chast' II: Gazety. Moscow: Kniga, 1973.

Pechat' SSSR v 1955 gody. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1956.

Pechat' SSSR v 1960 gody. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1961.

Pechat' SSSR v 1965 gody. Moscow: Kniga, 1966.

Pechat' SSSR za 50 let: statisticheskie ocherki. Moscow: Kniga, 1967.

Pechat' SSSR za sorok let 1917-1957. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1957.

SSSR v tsifrakh v 1959 godu: kratkii statisticheskii sbornik. Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1960.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. *Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Adopted by the 22nd Congress of the CPSU October 31, 1961)*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961.

Secondary Sources

Adler, Max K. *Marxist Linguistic Theory and Communist Practice: A Sociolinguistic Study*. Hamburg: Buske, 1980.

Alpatov, V.M. *150 Iazikov i politika: 1917-2000*. Moscow: Kraft and IV Pan, 2000.

Bruchis, Michael. "Pratiques et théories de la traduction dans l'URSS: causes et effets dans l'interaction des langues des peuples soviétiques dans la periode d'après-guerre." *Nationalities Papers*. 8, 2 (1980): 147-177.

Clem, Ralph S. (ed.) *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Cobarrubias, Juan and Joshua A. Fishman (eds.). *Progress in Language Planning: International Perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1983.

Comrie, Bernard. *The Languages of the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Comrie, Bernard. "The Spread of Russian Among the Other Speech Communities of the USSR." *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*. 16, 1 (1989): 145-152.

Conquest, Robert. *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*. London: MacMillan, 1970.

Critchlow, James. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991.

Desheriev, Yu. D. (ed.). *Sovremennaia ideologicheskaia borba i problemy iazika*. Moscow: Nauka, 1984.

Desheriev, Yu. D. (ed.). *Teoreticheskiye problemiy sotsialnoi lingvistiki*. Moscow: Nauka, 1981.

Dreifelds, Juris. *Latvia in Transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Farmer, Kenneth C. "Language and Linguistic Nationalism in the Ukraine." *Nationalities Papers*. 6, 2 (1978): 125-149.

Forgus, Silvia P. "Nationality Question in the Resolutions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." *Nationalities Papers*. 5, 2 (1977): 183-201.

Gorokhoff, Boris I. *Publishing in the USSR*. Washington: Council on Library Resources, 1959.

Gregorian, Sirian. "A Note on Soviet Policies Toward the Armenian Language." *Armenian Review*. 25, 3 (1972): 68-76.

Grenoble, Lenore A. *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003.

Guthier, Steven L. "The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897-1970 Part 2: 1939-70." *Soviet Studies*. 29, 2 (April 1977): 270-283.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*. London: Penguin, 2002.

Hovannisian, Richard G. (ed.). *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*. Volume II. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Isaev, M.I. *Sto tridtsat ravnopravnykh (o iazykov narodov SSSR)*. Moscow: Nauka, 1970.

Isaev, M.I. *National Languages in the USSR: Problems and Solutions*. Translated by Paul Medov. Moscow: Progress, 1977.

Isaev, M.I. and O.B. Gobeti. "Problemy razvitiia natsional'nikh iazykov v SSSR v osveshchenii burzhuaznykh avtorov." *Voprosy Istorii*. 1969, 10: 38-51.

Kaiser, Robert J. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Kirkwood, Michael (ed.). *Language Planning in the Soviet Union*. London: MacMillan, 1989.

Kozlov, Viktor. *The Peoples of the Soviet Union*. Translated by Pauline M. Tiffen. London: Hutchinson, 1988.

Kreindler, Isabelle T. "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy." *Slavic Review*. 36, 1 (March 1977): 86-100.

Kreindler, Isabelle T. (ed.). *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages: Their Past, Present and Future*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1985.

Lewis, E. Glyn. *Multilingualism in the Soviet Union: Aspects of Language Policy and its Implementation*. The Hague: Mouton, 1972.

Low, Alfred D. "Soviet Nationality Policy and the New Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." *Russian Review*. 22, 1 (January 1963): 3-29.

Ludanyi, Andrew. "Soviet Nationality Policy and East Central Europe." *Nationalities Papers*. 24, 3 (1996): 437-443.

Marples, David R. *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation.* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.

Marples, David R. *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe.* Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996.

Marples, David R. "National Awakening and National Consciousness in Belarus." *Nationalities Papers.* 27, 4 (1999): 565-578.

Matthews, W.K. *Languages of the U.S.S.R.* New York: Russell and Russell, 1968.

Rieber, Alfred J. "Struggle over the Borderlands." In *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia.* Edited by S. Frederick Starr. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994, chapter 4.

Silver, Brian D. "Bilingualism and Maintenance of the Mother Tongue in Soviet Central Asia." *Slavic Review.* 35, 3 (September 1976): 406-424.

Silver, Brian D. "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education: An Assessment of Recent Changes." *Soviet Studies.* 26, 1 (January 1974): 28-40.

Solchanyk, Roman. "Russian Language and Soviet Politics." *Soviet Studies.* 34, 1 (January 1982): 23-42.

Ster, M. "Soviet Russificatory Policy Over the Years." *Problems of the Peoples of the USSR.* 7 (1960): 13-18.

Subtelny, Orest. "American Sovietology's Great Blunder: the Marginalization of the Nationality Issue." *Nationalities Papers.* 22, 1 (1994): 141-155.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States.* New York: Oxford, 1998.

Szporluk, Roman. "Nationalities and the Russian Problem in the USSR: An Historical Outline." *Journal of International Affairs.* 27, 1 (1973): 22-40.

Szporluk, Roman. "The Press in Belorussia, 1955-65." *Soviet Studies.* 18, 4 (April 1967): 482-493.

Szporluk, Roman. "Soviet Domestic Foreign Policy: Universal Ideology and National Tradition." *Nationalities Papers.* 22, 1 (1994): 195-208.

Szporluk, Roman. "West Ukraine and West Belorussia." *Soviet Studies*. 31, 1 (January 1979): 76-98.

Velychenko, Stephen. "Restructuring and the Non-Russian Past." *Nationalities Papers*. 22, 2 (1994): 325-355.

Wheeler, Geoffrey. "The Problem of the Nationalities." *Studies on the Soviet Union*. 7, 4 (1968): 99-110.

Wright, Sue. *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

Zak, L.M. and M.I. Isaev. "Problemy pis'mennosti narodov SSSR v kulturnoi revoliutsii." *Voprosy Istorii*. 1966, 2: 3-20.