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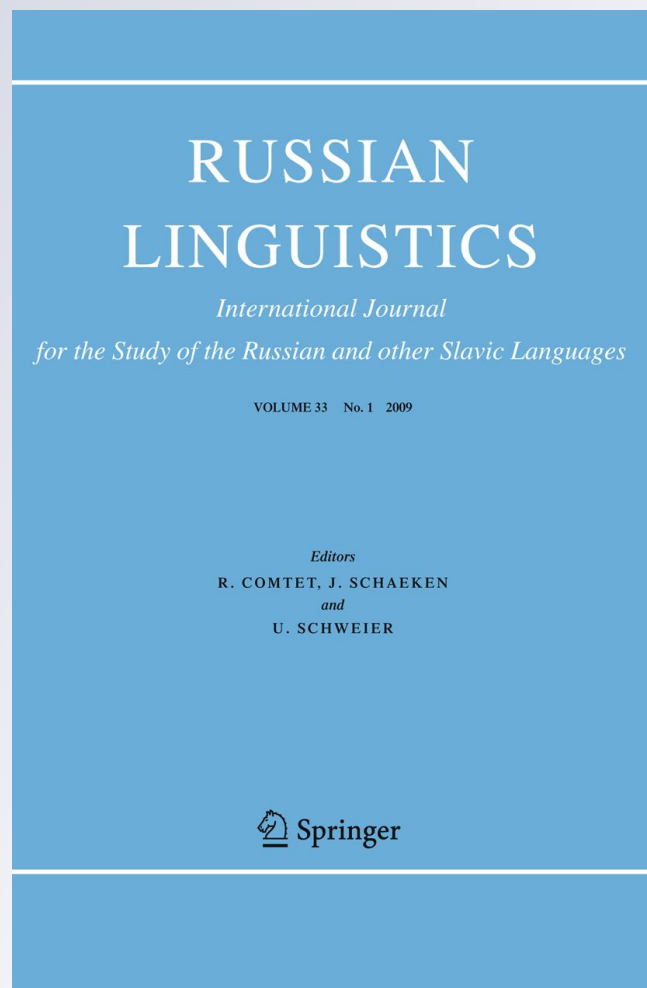
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## Linguistic russification in the Russian Empire: peasants into Russians?

Языковая руссификация в Российской империи:  
стали ли крестьяне русскими?

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**Abstract** The purpose of this paper is to question the traditional view of tsarist language management as a conscious, consistent and long-lasting policy of linguistic russification and denationalization and to consider the actual policies, their context, and impact. Drawing on recent historiographies, I will show that the Russian administration had no unified language policy: its strategies varied significantly across time periods and geographic regions and were mediated by political, ethnic, religious, and class concerns. When russification policies were adopted, the key aim was to establish the dominance of Russian as a high language over Polish, German, and Tatar. At the same time, the authorities never created a comprehensive primary education system and, as a result, failed to spread Russian to the majority of non-Russian peasants. Ethnic elites adopted Russian as an additional language, yet this adoption did not increase their loyalty to the empire: the key outcome of russification policies was the mobilization of emerging national movements.

**Аннотация** Главная задача данной статьи—поставить под вопрос традиционную трактовку имперской языковой политики как сознательной, последовательной, и долговременной политики языковой руссификации и денационализации и рассмотреть имперские языковые законы и их конечный результат в историческом контексте. Опираясь на современные исторические исследования, я покажу, что имперская администрация не имела единого подхода к языковым вопросам: курс ее политики менялся в зависимости от исторического периода и географического положения региона и находился под влиянием политических, этнических, религиозных, и социальных факторов. В ситуациях, где применялась политика руссификации, ее целью было установление доминанции русского языка как языка культуры над польским, немецким, и татарским языками. В то же время, имперская администрация не смогла распространить начальное обучение на всей территории империи и, в результате, не смогла донести русский язык до большинства нерусских крестьян. Члены национальных элит выучили русский как дополнительный язык, но это не

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усилило их лояльность по отношению к империи: главным результатом царской языковой политики была мобилизация национального народного движения.

## 1 Introduction

Discussions of post-Soviet language policies frequently make casual references to language management in the Russian empire, presenting it as a conscious, consistent, and long-lasting russification policy that aimed to forcibly make Russians out of non-Russians. This policy is often blamed for high levels of russification among Belorussians or Ukrainians. For instance, in a recent article on the sociolinguistics of Ukrainian, Taranenko (2007, 119) states: “during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian language was, to a considerable extent, forced out of usage”. Such statements are inspired by ideology, rather than history, but they usually pass unnoticed due to the utter familiarity of the russification trope. This familiarity may initially undermine any argument in favor of its critical re-examination, yet this is precisely the argument I intend to make, based on recent developments in historiography of Russian nationality policies. In his magisterial overview of Russia’s multi-ethnic history, Kappeler (2001, 273) states:

The notion that there was a consistent policy of russification designed to achieve complete administrative, social and cultural uniformity in the Russian Empire and to transform it into an ethnically uniform nation state is widespread in western research, and to some extent even projected back to the age of Catherine II. However, such sweeping generalizations fail to explain and do justice to the complexity of Russian policy, and they have increasingly been called into question in recent years.

Kappeler’s (2001) description refers to a new wave of research, both in the West and in Eastern Europe, by historians who took advantage of the opening of Soviet archives to create a more nuanced and complex portrayal of imperial nationality policies (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Dolbilov and Staljunas 2005; Dowler 1995, 2001; Miller 2000, 2008; Saunders 1995a, 1995b; Snyder 2003; Weeks 1996, 2001). These studies have challenged all three precepts of the russification thesis, showing that russification policies were only partially conscious (as far as denationalization was concerned), never consistent, and definitely not long-lasting. The reactive, rather than proactive, nature of these policies is well captured by Weeks (1996) who argued that “it would be more correct to say that in the Russian Empire no such thing as ‘nationality policy’ existed per se: one finds only some specific political, administrative, or local needs involving regions of mixed or [...] non-Russian population” (Weeks 1996, 70).

Miller (2002, 2008) and Suny (2001) pointed to the limitations of the English term ‘russification’, which functions as an evaluation, rather than a description of particular policies, and merges two distinct Russian terms, *obrusevanie* (‘imposed russification’) and *obrusenie* (‘voluntary assimilation’). Building on the earlier arguments by Thaden (1981a), they argue that there were many different types of russification in the Russian empire. Consequently, the study of *obrusevanie* should minimally distinguish between administrative, religious, economic, educational, and language policies, and the study of *obrusenie* between linguistic assimilation, change in ethnic self-identification, and conversion to Orthodoxy.

The purpose of the present paper is to re-examine linguistic russification in the Russian empire as a phenomenon critical for understanding Soviet and post-Soviet language policies. While the discussion below will draw on recent historiographies, it will also differ from them in two ways. To begin with, in historical research language and education

policies are commonly subsumed in the study of nationality policies; exceptions constitute case studies of particular policies (e.g., Dolbilov and Staljunas 2005) or of a specific region (e.g., Dowler 1995, 2001). As a result, until now there has not been a comprehensive overview of imperial language management—in what follows I aim to provide such an overview as a springboard for future research. Secondly, historians are commonly interested in the what, when, and why of imperial nationality policies. From the point of view of language policy three more questions need to be asked:

- (a) How were the policies implemented?
- (b) What effect did they have on the language repertoires of imperial subjects?
- (c) Can linguistic assimilation in the Russian empire be fully explained through top-down policies?

The opportunities for such inquiry are undoubtedly limited by the remote nature of the reforms and the scarcity of the data. Nevertheless, I will show that historiographies, in combination with demographic data, allow us to draw some conclusions regarding linguistic russification in the Russian empire. These conclusions will then be placed in the context of language management in other multi-national empires and nation-states.

But first, given that the subject is an often contested history, a word needs to be said about terminology. Throughout, I will attempt to use English-language terms in ways that reflect important distinctions made in Russian. The terms ‘russification’ and ‘linguistic integration’ will refer to *obrusevanie* or intentional spread of Russian as an official language of the empire (and thus a second language (L2) of its non-Russian subjects). To discuss *obrusevanie* or voluntary adoption of Russian, I will use the terms ‘linguistic assimilation’ and ‘language shift’ to Russian as a first language (L1). Furthermore, unlike English, Russian makes a clear distinction between the terms *nacia/narod* (‘nation’) and *gosudarstvo* (‘state’) and does not differentiate between ‘nationality’ and ‘ethnicity’ encoded in a single term *nacional'nost'*. To reflect these conceptual distinctions, the terms ‘national/nationality’ and ‘ethnic/ethnicity’ will be used as synonyms, while the terms ‘nation’ and ‘state’ will not (see Weeks 1996, for a justification of this approach).

Following the historiographical tradition, territory and city names will reflect the usage in the Russian Empire (e.g., Kiev and Vilna rather than Kyïv and Vilnius) or, in cases where no contested alternatives exist, common English usage (e.g., Warsaw) (Table 1 lists historic and contemporary names of individual territories). The biggest dilemma involves the use of ethnonyms. Projecting current names onto the past leads to anachronistic usage, which reifies fluid identity categories and interferes with analysis of policy-making. On the other hand, historical usage may also lead to confusion, because many ethnic groups have changed names and identities a number of times, willingly or unwillingly. Consequently, I will follow Kappeler (2001) in retaining ethnonyms used at the time (e.g., Romanians rather than Moldovans) with the exception of cases in which old ethnonyms may lead to misunderstanding (thus, Kazakhs will not be referred to as Kirgiz, Azerbaijanis will not be grouped with Tatars, and the discussion of Lithuanians will eschew the labels of Zhmud or Samogitians).

A particularly difficult case involves the terms for ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainians’, where any choice may be seen as politically loaded. To balance comprehensibility with historical accuracy, the territory of Left-bank Ukraine (‘Levoberezhie’) will be referred to as ‘Malorossia’ (‘Little Russia’, also known as the ‘Hetmanate’) and the territory of Right-bank Ukraine (‘Pravoberezhie’) will be discussed as part of the Western provinces. The inhabitants of the territories will be referred to as ‘Ruthenians’ (*rusyn* or *rus'ki* was a common self-identification term for East Slavs prior to the 20th century), as ‘Malorossy’

**Table 1** Russian Empire: chronology of territorial incorporation<sup>a</sup>

Dates of incorporation	Historic name <sup>b</sup>	Current country name
<b>16th century</b>		
1552 annexation	Khanate of Kazan	Tatarstan (Russia)
1556 annexation	Khanate of Astrakhan	Russia
1579–1689 annexation	Khanate of Siberia	Russia
1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk with China		
<b>17th century</b>		
1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav	Malorossia (Left-Bank Ukraine) and	Ukraine
1667 Treaty of Andrusovo	Smolensk	Russia
<b>18th century</b>		
1710 annexation, 1721 Treaty of Nystad	Estland, Livland (Baltic provinces), Old Finland	Estonia, Latvia Russia
1772–1795 partitions of Poland	Western provinces: Belorussia, Kurland, Latgale, Lithuania, Polish Livonia, Right-Bank Ukraine	Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine
1783 annexation	Khanate of Crimea	Ukraine
1783 Treaty of Georgievsk	Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti	Georgia
<b>19th century</b>		
1801 annexation	Kingdom of Imereti	Georgia
1809 Treaty of Frederikshamn	Grand Duchy of Finland	Finland
1809–1811 annexation	Abkhazia	Georgia
1812 Treaty of Bucharest	Bessarabia	Moldova
1815 Congress of Vienna	Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland)	Poland
1818 Treaty of Gulistan	Khanate of Nakhichevan Svaneti	Azerbaijan Georgia
1822–1824 annexation	Middle and Little Hordes	Kazakhstan
1828 Treaty of Turkmanchay	Khanate of Erivan Khanate of Talysh	Armenia Azerbaijan
1845–1848 annexation	Inner and Great Hordes	Kazakhstan
1857 annexation	Mingrelia	Georgia
1855–1863 annexation	Turkestan: Khanate of Kokand (part)	Kyrgyzstan
1865–1887 annexations	Turkestan: Khanate of Kokand (part)	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
1868 Treaty	Emirate of Bukhara	
1873 Treaty	Khanate of Khiva	

<sup>a</sup>This table, based on Kappeler (2001) and Thaden and Forster Thaden (1984), presents only some of the key events of a complicated history of conquest and diplomacy. For a detailed history of incorporation of the territories of Kazakhstan and Central Asia see Abašin et al. (2008), for Northern Caucasus see Arapov et al. (2007).

<sup>b</sup>In many cases there is no direct correspondence between the borders of the territory under the Russian Empire and the current country borders—over the three centuries, many borders had shifted repeatedly due to wars, partitions, and the efforts of Russian and Soviet administrators.

(‘Little Russians’) (19th century term for Ukrainians), and, in the final period of imperial history, as *Ukrainians*.<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian and Belorussian languages will be referred to as such, but it is important to remember that until the turn of the 20th century, these languages were commonly perceived as Russian dialects and Malorossy and Belorusy as dialect-speaking Russians—similar to Bavarians in Germany or Neapolitans in Italy—who had been forcibly separated from the Great Russians by the Poles (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Hosking 1997; Miller 2000, 2008; for discussions of the development of Ukrainian national consciousness, see Krawchenko 1985; Magocsi 1996; Miller 2000; Snyder 2003; Subtelny 1994).

## 2 Language management in the Russian Empire (1721–1917)

Historiographies of Russian nationality policies allow us to distinguish four periods in imperial language management:

- (1) linguistic autonomy (1721–1830),
- (2) selective russification (1830–1863),
- (3) expanding russification (1863–1905), and
- (4) retrenchment of russification (1905–1917).

In what follows, I will discuss each period in turn.

### 2.1 Linguistic autonomy: 1721–1830

The date of Russia’s official transformation into an empire, 1721, is selected here as a starting point because prior to the 18th century the Tsardom of Russia had no articulated language policy—the administration was content to rely on the cooperation of non-Russian, in particular Ukrainian and Tatar, elites and to use interpreters to communicate with its non-Russian populations. Russification attempts were limited to administration and enforced baptism, Russian-medium schooling was scarce (including for Russians), and linguistic assimilation was left to its natural progression (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Dowler 2001; Kappeler 2001). The incorporation of the Baltic provinces, Estland and Livland (for chronology see Table 1), whose socio-political organization, legal system, and economic and cultural development were superior to those of the metropolis, required an articulation of policy. Peter I (1682–1725) guaranteed the autonomy of German as the language of administration, courts, and education in the Baltic provinces. The same linguistic autonomy was later granted to Kurland (1795), the Grand Duchy of Finland (1809) and Congress Poland (1815) (Haltzel 1981; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984).

The decentralized system of national education established by Alexander I (1801–1825) in 1802–1803 allowed the new territories to maintain and expand their already well-developed system of primary, secondary and higher education and professional training. In the Dorpat (Tartu) educational district, Alexander I re-opened the German-medium Dorpat

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<sup>1</sup>The term *ukraina* was originally used in the meaning of an ‘undefined borderland’. In the 16th century it became a reference for the Kiev region; with the demise of the Polish rule, the term fell into disuse and was not revived until the 19th century. The term ‘Ukrainians’ originally functioned as a reference to the inhabitants of the Kiev region, in the mid-19th century members of the Ukrainian national movement began to use it as a general ethnonym to replace the term ‘Malorossy’, yet it was not widely accepted until the Soviet time (Magocsi 1996; Miller 2000; Smolij 2008; Weeks 1996).

University (1801). Both Finland and Baltic provinces also provided primary education in the native languages of the peasants—as a result, by 1800 the Finns, Estonians, and Latvians had higher literacy rates than other ethnic groups in the Russian empire (Kappeler 2001). Following the emancipation of Estonian and Latvian serfs in 1816–1819, the rural school system was further expanded, with the maintenance costs shared between Baltic German nobility and the newly organized peasant communities (Thaden 1981a; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984).

In Congress Poland Alexander I founded the University of Warsaw (1816), which was followed by the Institute of Music (1821) and the Polytechnical Institute (1828) (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). Western provinces, inhabited by Ruthenians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Jews, also continued to be run by Polish nobility, with Polish as the language of administration and education (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Kappeler 2001; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). In the Vilna educational district, headed by Alexander's personal friend Prince Adam Czartoryski, Alexander I reopened the Polish-medium University of Vilna (1803). Under Czartoryski, the number of Polish-medium primary schools in the Vilna district increased from 70 in 1803 to 430 in 1820 (Berežnaja et al. 2007). The use of Lithuanian was limited to primary schooling and Ruthenian to a few private schools that disappeared by the early 19th century, consequently, the expansion of Polish-medium education intensified the polonization of the population of Western provinces (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Kappeler 2001; Thaden 1981a).

The partitions of Poland also brought another major ethnic group into the Russian Empire—the Jews, who used Yiddish in everyday life, Hebrew in education, and Polish for communication with the wider world. Initially, they too enjoyed relative autonomy, but by the end of the 18th century Jewish rights were curtailed and the Pale of Jewish Settlement was set, outside of which they were not allowed to take up permanent residence. The Jewish statute of 1804 allowed Jews to maintain separate schools but required that the schools offer instruction in Russian, Polish, or German. Jewish officials were to display competence and merchants to keep accounts in one of these languages (Hosking 1997; Kappeler 2001; Miller 2008).

In the beginning, relative autonomy was also granted to Malorossia. Previously part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Malorossia was inhabited by polonized elites and Ruthenian peasants and had a relatively well-developed educational system: its primary school network was wider than the one in Russia and the Mohyla Academy in Kiev, together with collegia in Chernigov and Kharkov, offered classical education in Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic and Polish, to tens of thousands of East Slavs, some of whom eventually became civil servants, doctors, journalists and church leaders in Moscow (Kappeler 2001; Saunders 1985; Smolij 2008; Snyder 2003). The socio-political institutions of the Hetmanate, on the other hand, were less developed, and the administration was troubled by the frequent unrest and disorder in Ukraine and by the disloyalty of the Ukrainian hetmans (Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). Catherine II (1762–1796) put an end to the autonomy of the Hetmanate, making Malorossia a regular province of the Russian empire and Russian its official language.

The transition was relatively smooth because the government succeeded in co-opting local elites who enjoyed the benefits of integration into the Russian nobility (e.g. their peasants were turned into serfs over whom they had full rights) and the new career opportunities in the imperial service, and began to shift from Polish and Ukrainian to Russian. As a result, Ukraine never had an efficient political lobby in St. Petersburg that could protect its interests and argue for its autonomy (Hosking 1997; Kappeler 2001; Miller 2000; for analysis of diverging fates of Baltic and Ukrainian autonomy, see Thaden



and Forster Thaden 1984). Similar processes took place among polonized Belorussian elites inhabiting the area of Smolensk. The initial autonomy of Bessarabia, incorporated in 1812, was abolished in 1828, when Russian officials lost faith in the ability of Roman Boyars to manage their own affairs. The Romanian language was subsequently banned from administration and education and replaced with Russian (Kappeler 2001).

To sum up, between 1721 and 1830 Russian authorities applied a differentiated approach to the newly incorporated territories: in the west, seen as a model for the modernization of Russia, they aimed to preserve the status quo, while in the less-developed east, they began the russification of the administrative and the educational system. At the same time, the administration failed to provide public support for schooling: instead, schools were funded—and controlled—locally: by churches and urban societies (in cities), landlords (on proprietary lands), and parishioners (on state peasant lands) (Dowler 2001). In the west, the few poorly funded Russian-medium schools could not compete with the well-developed system of education in German (Baltic provinces), Swedish (Finland), and Polish (Congress Poland, Western provinces) (Kappeler 2001; Saunders 1992; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984).

The main tools of linguistic assimilation during this period were social incentives offered to upwardly mobile ethnic elites who, by adding Russian to their linguistic repertoires, could enjoy career opportunities in imperial civil, military, and diplomatic services. Baltic Germans in particular were favored by the regime: their participation in the imperial government was vastly disproportionate to their small number, they attained an almost dominant position in tsarist diplomatic service and were prominent in both military and civil services, making an important contribution to the development of Russian diplomacy, bureaucracy, the Russian legal system, medicine, science and engineering (Armstrong 1978; Henriksson 1993; Hosking 1997; Kappeler 2001; Thaden 1981a; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). Russian was also spread through the migration of Russian nobles (given estates in the newly incorporated territories), Russian officials, and Russian-speaking peasants colonizing new territories (Miller 2008). At the same time, the processes of polonization of Ruthenians and Lithuanians, germanization of Latvians and Estonians, and tatarization of Kazakhs continued unabated (Kappeler 2001).

## 2.2 Selective russification: 1830–1863

In the course of four partitions of Poland (between 1772 and 1815), Russia incorporated a territory of more than 590,000 square kilometers inhabited by 10.5 million people (Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). The addition of the Western provinces and Congress Poland strengthened its supremacy in Eastern Europe but it was also a destabilizing factor: Poland had been a political nation and many Polish nobles—despite their active participation in the imperial service—pursued the aim of restoration of the Polish state. The perpetual Polish unrest and desire for secession made the Polish question the dominant issue in Russian internal politics throughout the 19th century (Kappeler 2001), implicating it in two shifts in imperial language management.

The first such shift took place during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855). After the 1830–1831 Polish uprising, which spread to Lithuania and the Right-bank Ukraine, the government punished the disloyal Polish elite and began administrative russification of Congress Poland. While Polish continued to be used as the official language, a certification of Russian competence became obligatory for administrative service (in practice, this requirement changed little, for such certificates were easily purchased) (Bereznaja et al. 2007). By the mid-1840s, a number of secondary schools incorporated the teaching of the

Russian language and of Russian history, geography, and statistics in Russian (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). A much stricter approach was adopted in the Western provinces, where the authorities replaced Polish with Russian as the language of administration, the judiciary, and the language of instruction in state-supported schools (Thaden 1981a; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984; Weeks 1996). The greatest blow to Polish-medium education was dealt by the 1831–1832 closing of the Polish-language universities in Warsaw and Vilna. These closings led to a great influx of Polish-speaking students in the universities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Kharkov, and the newly opened Russian-language university in Kiev (1833–1834) whose explicit purpose, according to the Minister of Education Sergey Uvarov, was “to unite the Polish youth with the Russians” (cited in Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984, 126). At the same time, Russian authorities did not have sufficient resources to fully replace the Polish-medium education system: new Russian-medium schools experienced a major shortage of teachers, while private schools for women continued to function in Polish (Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984).

In the Baltic provinces, the authorities made attempts to improve and expand Russian-language instruction and made competency in Russian a pre-condition for obtaining an academic degree in the Dorpat University. These efforts were met with resistance, particularly effective because the educational system was locally funded and under local control. Baltic school administrators did not give Russian a high priority and did not offer a sufficient number of hours of Russian instruction to secure a level of proficiency required for university admission. Instead, pressure was put on Russian-language teachers to be lenient and in 1862 the passing grade for Russian in the Baltic provinces was reduced from an equivalent of an A to that of a B (Thaden 1981a; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). As a result, levels of Russian proficiency remained low: a survey taken in 1849 found that out of 343 officials in the Baltic provinces, only 80 knew enough Russian to carry on business (Haltzel 1981).

In the Caucasus, some schools offered primary instruction in the local languages switching to Russian in the third year, and others functioned in Russian with local languages taught as obligatory subjects; official publications appeared in Russian and in parallel in Georgian and Azerbaijani editions (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Hewitt 1985). A few Russian-medium schools for the local elites were also opened in the newly incorporated Kazakh territories and in the Northern Caucasus (Abašin et al. 2008; Arapov et al. 2007).

Overall, the reign of Nicholas I did not bring with it a major turn-around in language management—top priority was still accorded to political and social stability, linked to cultural and linguistic integration of Poles, yet the impossibility of turning Poles into Russians was widely acknowledged (Kappeler 2001; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). The key government official in Poland N.A. Miliutin, advised against these “artificial measures” not only because the government did not have “sufficient means” to implement them, but also because “experience has shown that an excellent knowledge of the Russian language—and even with full external Russification—often conceals an irreconcilable hatred for Russia” (cited in Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984, 164).

### 2.3 Expanding russification: 1863–1905

The fundamental change in Russian language management began after the ascension of Alexander II (1855–1881), best known as the liberator of the serfs. His Great Reforms were shaped by the pressing need to modernize, westernize, and unify Russia, whose sta-

bility and unity was threatened by the emerging revolutionary and national movements and Polish sedition. Following the 1863–1864 Polish rebellion, which spread to Lithuania and parts of Belorussia, in Congress Poland, the authorities replaced Polish with Russian in administration (1868), official press (1863–1872), court proceedings (1875), and secondary (mid-1860s), higher (1869), and primary education (1885); even the use of Polish during breaks in school buildings became a punishable offence (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006; Thaden 1981a; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984; Weeks 1996). The severity of the reforms was mediated by the lack of resources necessary for their full implementation and supervision: as a result, Polish-medium primary and secondary education continued semi-clandestinely, there was even an underground ‘flying university’ (Hosking 1997; Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006; Weeks 1996).

In the Western provinces, the administration undertook an even wider depolozation campaign: Polish was eliminated from official correspondence, civil registry records, the educational system, and the public space (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006; Weeks 1996). The reforms also banned the use of the ‘Polish alphabet’ (i.e. Latin) in primers for Russian language (including Ukrainian and Belorussian) (1859) and then in written Belorussian and Lithuanian (1864–1865): Belorussian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Latgalian books in the Latin alphabet were labeled ‘Polish literature’ and the only appropriate alphabet from then on was Cyrillic (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Dolbilov 2005; Dolbilov and Staljunas 2005; Spires 2001; Staljunas 2005; Tokt’ 2005; Weeks 1996, 2001). As in Congress Poland, the reforms were met with diminished school attendance and the establishment of underground Polish and Lithuanian schools. Many Lithuanians were dissatisfied with Lithuanian instruction in Cyrillic, which they perceived as ‘foreign’ and linked to Orthodoxy, and relied instead on Lithuanian books published in Prussia and smuggled in by a network of ‘book-carriers’ (Spires 2001). Clandestine Polish schools were also organized among Catholic Belorussians, who relied on Polish for religious purposes (Tukt’ 2005). After 1874 Polish crept back into curricula across Lithuania (Snyder 2003).

A great turn-around also took place in official policy toward Ukrainian. In the first half of the 19th century, literary and ethnographic explorations of Malorossia were met with great interest by the Russian public. The center of the Ukrainophilian activity was in St. Petersburg: there, Kotliarevsky published his play *Eneida* (1798), which marked the emergence of literary Ukrainian, Shevchenko his collection of poems *Kobzar* (1840) which sparked the rise of Ukrainophilia, and Kulish his scholarly treatment *Zapiski o Iuzhnoi Rusi* ‘Essays on Southern Rus’ (1856–1857), which became the basis for development of modern Ukrainian orthography. Kulish and Kamenets’kyi also founded there the first Ukrainian publishing house (1857) and produced a bilingual periodical *Osnova* ‘Basis’ (1861–1862), which engaged the Russian reading public in a lively debate about the existence of the Ukrainian language and the desirability of primary instruction in it; they also began the publication of Ukrainian-language primers and fund-raising for the introduction of Ukrainian as a medium of instruction in rural Sunday schools (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Miller 2000; Saunders 1995b).

Following the 1863–1864 Polish rebellion, the authorities became concerned about Ukrainophilia and its potential exploitation by the Polish national movement with its motto *gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus*. What followed was a series of bans that aimed to prevent Ukrainophiles from establishing and using a Ukrainian-language education system to transmit a specifically Ukrainian consciousness and separatist ideas to the peasants (Hosking 1997; Miller 2000; Saunders 1995a, 1995b; Weeks 1996). Valuev’s temporary edict of 1863 banned the publication of religious and instructional books in Ukrainian,

such as primers and readers (allowing poetry and belles-lettres) and was followed by the ban on state-sponsored primary education in Ukrainian (1864). The 1876 Ems edict banned the import of Ukrainian books from abroad without special permission, publication of all original works or translations (with the exception of historical documents and belles-lettres), and stage performances and public lectures in Ukrainian. Many government officials opposed these bans as needlessly oppressive and simply inefficient; as a result of these contradictions, the measures were eased in 1881 and tightened up again in 1884, 1892, and 1895, remaining in force until 1905 (Miller 2000; Saunders 1995a, 1995b).

The severity of the bans is commonly explained by the interplay of political and demographic concerns in the context of the emancipation of Russia's peasantry (1861) and reforms of local government and primary education (1864). The language of instruction and even orthography became political questions for imperial law-makers, concerned that, after the removal of legal constraints, Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants would gain access to primary education in their native languages and develop nationalist consciousness and separatist leanings, supported by the Poles (Dolbilov and Staljunas 2005; Kappeler 2001; Saunders 1995b; Weeks 1996). As seen in Table 2, with Ukrainians as part of the Russian nation, Russians constituted a majority of the empire's population. If, on the other hand, Ukrainians developed a distinct national identity and secessionist leanings, Russians would become a minority in Russia. The divergence between Russians, Ukrainians, and, for that matter, Belorussians could also cost the government its main rationale for anti-Polish and anti-Jewish policies: protection of the 'Russian' peasants in the Western territories. In the words of a public official who compared the linguistic situation in France and Russia and made an analogy between Little Russian and the French *patois*, 'to allow the separation,

**Table 2** Education, literacy and urbanization levels among selected ethnic groups, according to the 1897 Census

Ethnic group	Population with more than primary school education	Reading skills in Russian or another language in people over the age of 10	Degree of urbanization	Size of the group and percentage of the total population	
				1,000	%
Baltic Germans	19.10%	95.2%	N/A	N/A	
Germans (total)	6.37%	78.5%	23.4%	1,790,500	1.4%
Poles	2.77%	41.8%	18.4%	7,931,300	6.3%
Russians	2.28%	29.3%	15.9%	55,667,500	44.3%
Armenians	2.27%	18.3%	23.3%	1,173,100	0.9%
Georgians	1.45%	19.5%	9.4%	1,352,500	1.1%
Jews <sup>a</sup>	1.20%	50.1%	49.4%	5,063,200	4.0%
Latvians	0.63%	85.0%	16.1%	1,435,300	1.1%
Estonians	0.59%	94.1%	13.9%	1,002,700	0.8%
Belorussians	0.49%	20.3%	2.9%	5,885,600	4.7%
Romanians	0.43%	8.8%	5.7%	1,121,700	0.9%
Ukrainians	0.36%	18.9%	5.6%	22,380,600	17.8%
Lithuanians	0.27%	48.4%	3.2%	1,659,100	1.3%

<sup>a</sup>Kappeler (2001, 315) questions Census data on Jewish literacy levels and argues that the data on Jewish pupils in middle schools and higher education institutions and in the free professions suggest much higher levels of literacy and educational attainment, below those of Germans, on par with Poles, and above those of Russians.

through upgrading the Ukrainian dialect to a literary language, of thirteen million Little Russians would be the utmost political irresponsibility, especially in view of the unifying movement which is going on alongside us among the German tribe' (cf. Miller 2000, 222; Saunders 1995a, 187).

The unification of the German empire and the continuing germanization of Latvians and Estonians troubled the administration and the authorities made repeated efforts to expand Russian-language education in the Baltic provinces. These attempts, however, made little progress due to the scarcity of resources and local resistance: in 1880 less than a half of the township schools in Estland and Livland offered Russian as a subject (Haltzel 1981; Raun 1981). Only when Alexander III (1881–1894) came to power did the enforcement of Russian become systematic: Russian began replacing German as the main language of administration (1882–1889), court proceedings (1889–1992), secondary schools (1887–1892) and higher education, with Dorpat University transformed into a Russian-language Iur'ev University (1889–1895) (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Haltzel 1981; O'Connor 2003; Thaden 1974). These reforms, however, affected a minority of the population, consisting of Baltic Germans and affluent Latvians and Estonians (Thaden 1981b). Greater impact was made by the primary school reforms: in 1886 Lutheran primary schools and teachers' seminaries were placed under direct control of the Ministry of Education; in 1887 Russian was made the language of instruction during the third and final year of native-language primary schools, and in 1892 the use of Russian was extended to the lowest grades, with the exception of religion and church singing (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Haltzel 1981; Kappeler 2001; O'Connor 2003; Thaden 1974).

The implementation of these reforms was hampered by several factors, including a shortage of competent Russian teachers, local resistance, and insufficient school funding: dissatisfied with the reforms, Baltic Germans began to close teachers' seminaries and individual schools and to withdraw financial support from the local school system (Thaden 1981a). The authorities also had a shortage of school inspectors: in 1891, the three Baltic provinces had only 10 inspectors, some of them responsible for as many as 400 schools (Raun 1981). As a result, in some institutions, such as the Polytechnical Institute of Riga, some professors continued to lecture in German; while in rural schools many teachers were simply unable to use Russian as the language of instruction (Haltzel 1981; Plakans 1981; Raun 1981). The declining quality of instruction in some schools led to declining attendance, with parents opting for alternative modes of delivery: home instruction, private instructional circles, and, for wealthier families, German-language schools in St. Petersburg, Moscow, or Germany (Haltzel 1981; Henriksson 1993; Raun 1981).

The resistance to russification was greater among Baltic Germans than among Latvians and Estonians. As O'Connor (2003, 53) points out, "to some extent Russification came to the Latvian and Estonian lands by invitation": many saw Russians as an ally in their struggle against the Baltic German elite, and so first Estonian peasants (1862) and then Latvian ones (1882) petitioned the tsar to extend the Russian reforms to the Baltic region in order to curb the influence of the Germans (see also Plakans 1981; Raun 1981). The knowledge of the Russian language offered greater economic opportunities to the lower classes, a demonstration of competence in Russian also shortened military service (Raun 1981). It is not surprising then that Latvian newspapers initially welcomed the changes, while textbooks for self-instruction in Russian went through multiple printings (Plakans 1981). Between the 1890s and 1905 the administration also made attempts to russify the Great Duchy of Finland. These attempts were met with national resistance and, in some cases, outright violence, and did not get very far (Lundin 1981).

The government of Alexander II also adopted a number of measures to integrate the Jews. The 1864 education reform allowed secondary schools to admit students, regardless

of their religious background: as a result, between 1865 and 1880/1881 the proportion of Jewish students increased from 3.3% to 12% in secondary and from 3.2% to 8.8% in higher education (Miller 2008). Jews with higher education and members of the medical profession received the right to settle beyond the pale and to participate in administrative service and the justice system. The increased social mobility of the Jews did not go unnoticed by Russian nationalists for whom Jewish assimilation was a phenomenon to be feared and actively discouraged. The opportunity to change the tide came with the assassination of Alexander II. The participation of a female Jewish terrorist gave rise to a large-scale wave of Jewish pogroms in Malorossia and the Western provinces; these pogroms were then used as a rationale for discriminatory policies, including Jewish quotas in secondary and higher education (1887) (Kappeler 2001; Miller 2008; Weeks 2001).

A very different approach was adopted towards Christian and pagan *inorodcy* ('non-Russians') of the east. In the 1840s and 1850s, Tatar missionaries sparked a wave of apostasy from Orthodoxy among Turkic and Finnish peoples in the Volga region through the rapidly spreading Tatar-medium Islamic schools. Existing Russian schools were too few and too inadequate to meet the needs of the population, which for the most part did not speak any Russian. After a lengthy and heated debate,<sup>2</sup> a 1870 decree sanctioned transitional bilingual education for these learners that began in their native languages (often transcribed in Cyrillic) and then shifted to Russian, with the native language used as an aid and studied as a subject. This approach was developed by the turkologist N. Il'minskii who, together with his non-Russian co-workers, created alphabets for numerous oral languages, including Chuvash, Cheremis, and Kazakh, translated numerous Christian texts into these languages, and created dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks (Dowler 1995, 2001). First adopted in the 1860s, in Il'minskii's Kazan Central Christian Tatar School, after the 1870 decree the bilingual approach was widely implemented in missionary schools in the Volga region and in Siberia, where special schools also prepared local teachers and priests for their vocations (Alpatov 2000; Belikov and Krysin 2001; Dowler 1995, 2001; Kappeler 2001). Il'minskii's approach contributed to the preservation of several oral languages and reflected his deep belief that the aim of russification was not merely the spread of the Russian language but the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, true understanding of which could only be achieved through a native tongue (Dowler 1995).

Bilingual primary schools for *inorodcy* were also opened in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in the 1870s. In the Kazakh territories, by the end of the 19th century, 162 Russian-Kazakh schools offered instruction to 3,560 boys and 962 girls (Abašin et al. 2008; Dowler 2001; Olcott 1985; Sabol 2003). In Turkestan, the authorities first opened a few Russian-medium schools for the local populations and then a few bilingual schools (by 1888, 28 such schools catered to a total of 461 pupils)—they were located mainly in urban environments where locals had incentives to gain some Russian competence (Abašin et al. 2008; Dowler 2001). The overall impact of Russian schooling in Central Asia was negligible, due to low levels of schooling, in particular among nomadic and rural populations, and competition from Islamic schools which remained the main educational option in the region. With a few exceptions, even the bilingual elite envisioned by the authorities did not materialize: the graduates of bilingual schools often failed to acquire Russian skills and literacy, due to the low quality of the Russian textbooks that had been created for the local populations and

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<sup>2</sup>The *Journal of the Ministry of Education* opened its pages to the debate, opinions were also solicited from various school districts. The state even sent representatives to Algeria and India to report on French and British approaches to the language of instruction for the natives (Dowler 1995).

a shortage of competent teachers (Abašin et al. 2008; Alpatov 2000; Belikov and Krysin 2001; Olcott 1985; Sabol 2003).

Il'minskii's approach also found supporters in the Northern Caucasus and in the 1890s several bilingual primary schools were opened in the mountain villages. As in Central Asia, these schools were overshadowed by a rapidly expanding and privately supported network of Arabic-medium Islamic schools (Arapov et al. 2007). The Caucasus School District, on the other hand, refused to adopt the Il'minskii method: the study of Russian became obligatory from the first grade, first in the state-supported schools (1867) and then in the rest (1876), with Russian replacing Georgian as the language of instruction, including in the theological seminary in Tiflis (1872) (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Dowler 1995, 2001; Hewitt 1985; Kappeler 2001). These measures, once again, affected only the elite: the 7,850 pupils educated in 145 Georgian schools in 1860 constituted only 1% of the Georgian population (Hewitt 1985).

To sum up, between 1863 and 1905 the authorities began to systematically spread Russian in administration and education, first in Congress Poland and the Western provinces, and then in the east of the country and in the Baltic provinces. In the 1880s Russia also began expanding its network of rural primary schools—from 23,000 in 1880 to 108,280 in 1914—yet even this expansion was insufficient to bring about russification of the non-Russian peasantry (Hosking 1997). The impact of the reforms was further hampered by decentralization and the insufficient funding for schooling: in 1881, the administration allocated only 2.69% of the budget for educational needs, covering about 11.3% of all primary school expenses (Eklof 1986). As a result, the russification policies spread the knowledge of Russian only among ethnic elites. The clumsy policies also had an inverse effect—they heightened the sense of national identity and mobilized national movements (Kappeler 2001; Snyder 2003; Thaden 1981a).

#### 2.4 Retrenchment of russification: 1905–1917

The demands for national emancipation were prominently voiced during the 1905 revolution that began in St. Petersburg and spread to the Baltic and Western provinces, Congress Poland, and the Transcaucasia. The revolution precipitated the need to redefine Russia's political identity and between 1905 and 1914 the administration of Russia's last tsar Nicholai II (1894–1917) was pressured with contradictory demands: the right demanded a unitary state with a single language of instruction that would function as a Russian melting pot, while the left demanded federalism, full minority language rights, and universal elementary education in the native languages (Dowler 1995, 2001; Weeks 1996).

Following the revolution in 1905, the authorities were forced to make concessions to the national movements—they liberalized censorship and repealed language and alphabet restrictions, leading to an upsurge of periodicals in previously restricted languages (Alpatov 2000; Belikov and Krysin 2001; Solchanyk 1985; Plakans 1981; Tokt' 2005; Weeks 1996). In 1905, the Committee of Ministers also declared that instruction could take place in the native languages and permitted private schools with Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, German, and Polish as languages of instruction (Thaden 1981a). In 1906, native language instruction during the first two years was reinstated in Baltic elementary schools. In Lithuania, a 1905 decree allowed to teach Lithuanian in primary education and in secondary schools where the majority of the students were Lithuanians, while Poland reestablished the private Polish-language education system (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Kappeler 2001). No concessions, however, were made regarding the use of Ukrainian and

Belorussian in education: the Committee of Ministers stated that “the little Russian and Belorussian dialects are so close to the Russian language that the teaching of both together is not necessary. Furthermore regarding the Belorussian language, since it lacks its own literature, it can hardly even be taught on its own” (cited in Weeks 1996, 64). As a result, while several private and specialized gymnasia were permitted to teach in Ukrainian, Russian remained the language of state-sponsored instruction for Ukrainians and Belorussians (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Vulpius 2005).

A 1905 conference on the problems of education of eastern non-Russians also resurrected Il'minskii's bilingual approach, finding that it “accelerated the intellectual and moral development of non-Russians and facilitated their acquisition of Russian language” (Dowler 1995, 526). The conference then prescribed the use of Il'minskii's method in non-Russian schools for baptized and mixed populations in the Caucasus, Siberia, New Russia, and the Volga region, and, for the first time, presented it as an option for all non-Russian schools. The conference also emphasized the importance of enforcing the existing law on compulsory Russian instruction in confessional schools for Moslems and Buddhists—this recommendation elicited heated objections, which included the lack of resources for the hiring of Russian teachers.

The last period of imperial language management was marked by increased linguistic tolerance and increased attention to educational issues. Between the years of 1904 and 1914 the authorities quadrupled the education budget to 7.21% of the total budget and increased the percentage allocated to primary schools, allowing for significant growth and improvement of primary education, yet they failed to streamline education for non-Russians and to legislate universal primary education (Dowler 2001; Eklof and Peterson 2010; Miller 2000). Debates about the language of instruction for non-Russians continued until 1914 when they were pushed off center-stage by the beginning of the first World War. In 1917, the empire, weakened by the war and the social upheaval, disintegrated: Poland, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania became independent nation-states, while other parts of the empire were eventually reintegrated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

### 3 Russian language policies and their impact in a comparative context

#### 3.1 *Obrusevanie* in the Russian empire: the impact of russification reforms

The overview above outlines the what, when, why, and how of imperial language management and reveals that the policies of *obrusevanie* promoting the spread of Russian as an official language in administration and education were not widely adopted until the second half of the 19th century. Their duration varied from two hundred years (Malorossia) to four decades (Western provinces), to a period of one or two decades (Baltic provinces), and their scope varied from the replacement of Polish and German as high languages with Russian to the non-recognition of Ukrainian and Belorussian as independent languages. In the sociolinguistic literature these policies are often cited as evidence—and explanation—of russification of imperial subjects (e.g., Solchanyk 1985; Taranenko 2007). This approach, however, is predicated on the faulty assumption, often termed ‘the illusion of politics’, “that change comes from the pens of legislators” (Eklof and Peterson 2010, 9). In reality, the implementation of the reforms was significantly hampered by the vast geography of Russia, the inadequacies of its bureaucratic machine, the scarcity of competent officials, including school inspectors, the decentralized education system, the dearth of qualified Russian-speaking teachers, and insufficient funding (Belikov and Krysin 2001; Dowler 2001; Laitin 1998;



Weeks 1996). Nevertheless, the reforms undoubtedly did affect the non-Russian populations: what were their actual effects?

Historiographic studies, together with the data from the Russian Census of 1897, reveal that the main impact of russification of education had been a limited spread of Russian in Congress Poland, in the Western and Baltic provinces, and in Transcaucasia. According to the Census of 1897, most literate Jews, Germans, Armenians, and Greeks, and almost half of the literate Poles could also read Russian. Russian literacy skills were also displayed by almost a half of Latvians, and almost a third of Lithuanians, Estonians, and Georgians (Kappeler 2001). At the same time, as seen in Table 2, by the end of the 19th century only four ethnic groups—Germans, Estonians, Latvians, and Jews—had literacy levels that exceeded 50% of the population, and, with the exception of highly-educated Baltic Germans, only a negligible proportion of other ethnic groups proceeded beyond primary education. This means that by the end of the 19th century, Russian had primarily reached, and had been adopted by the elites and the educated middle-classes.

Importantly, most ethnic elites adopted Russian as an additional language, without shifting to Russian as an L1. Thus, Congress Poland remained an essentially Polish-speaking world and Polish remained the L1 of Poles there and in the Western provinces. Thaden and Forster Thaden (1984) show that between 1832 and 1855 tens of thousands of Polish nobles attended Russian-medium education establishments in the Western provinces and may have learned Russian well. These nobles, however, represented an insignificant proportion of a million Poles living in this region. Epszstein's (1998) study of education of Polish nobility in Ukrainian territories reveals a number of ways in which families avoided depolonization: children were kept at home for primary education, sent to secondary schools not known for their anti-Polish tendencies, in Riga or Odessa, or, in the case of wealthier families, sent abroad. Their language loyalty and maintenance were facilitated by the high level of standardization of Polish, by a literary tradition dating back to the 16th century, and by the 19th century communication systems, whereby Polish-language periodicals, poems, novels, plays, and works of scholarship travelled across borders and reached the reading public wherever they lived (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). The knowledge of Polish as an additional language, on the other hand, was reduced, in particular among Ukrainian and Belorussian elites and middle-class (Tokt' 2005).

In the Baltic provinces, by the time the russification of schools began, the level of standardization and development of German was similarly high and even the cultural and social development of Estonians and Latvians was already far too advanced to be reversed: more than a century of native-language instruction resulted in high levels of literacy (see Table 2) and high awareness of national identity, further bolstered by recently established periodicals, cultural institutions and national organizations (Plakans 1981; Raun 1981; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). Unwilling to either germanize or russify, Estonians and Latvians displayed remarkable levels of language loyalty and social mobilization (Kappeler 2001; Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984). The authorities also failed in their 1860s campaign to counteract Polish influences in Lithuania by replacing the Latin alphabet with Cyrillic—Catholic Lithuanians viewed their alphabet as intrinsically linked with religion and rejected books published in Cyrillic just as they rejected Orthodox Christianity (Dolbilov 2005; Dolbilov and Staljunas 2005; Staljunas 2005).

Ukrainian and Belorussian, on the other hand, were less developed than Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian, and restrictions on writing had undoubtedly slowed down the standardization of these languages and the development of national consciousness and popular schooling. Neither language, however, was 'forced out of usage': the overwhelming

majority of Ukrainians and Belorussians lived in the countryside and continued to speak their native languages on a daily basis unaware of the restrictions on their written use.

Two further points need to be made about the restrictions on Ukrainian. First of all, at no point in imperial history did they represent a complete ban on the Ukrainian language. Publishing did continue and by 1876, 302 editions of *Eneida* alone had been published in the Russian Empire (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Remy 2005). Between 1876 and 1880 censors allowed the publication of 37 out of 53 submitted Ukrainian-language manuscripts (Miller 2000), while Kiev-based publishers managed to start two new Ukrainian-language periodicals, *Luna* (1881) and *Rada* (1883) (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Pančenko 2004). The 1881 Loris-Melikov decree allowed publication of Ukrainian songs and the staging of Ukrainian-language plays (as long as they appeared alongside Russian-language plays of similar length) and in 1882 Kropivnyts'kyi founded the first professional Ukrainian theater (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Pančenko 2004).

Most importantly, Russian authorities failed to follow up with the actual russification measures and did not provide the majority of Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants with Russian-medium schooling. As seen in Table 2, in 1897 only 18.9% of Ukrainians and 20.3% of Belorussians above the age of 10 had literacy skills, and less than 1% proceeded beyond primary education (Trojnickij 1905; see also Saunders 1995a; Snyder 2003). The lack of exposure to Russian-medium schooling combined with compact settlement patterns in the native language environment (more than 94% of Ukrainians and 98% of Belorussians lived in the countryside) facilitated native language maintenance. Saunders (1995a) argues that the impact of tsarist russification on Ukrainians was, in fact, less powerful than that of polonization in Galicia, where the proportion of self-identified Ukrainians declined from 78.6% in 1800 to 58.8% in 1931.

Lastly, in several of the empire's territories, from Finland in the west, to Central Asia in the east, russification—and its impact—had been minimal and their populations, with the exception of the elites who worked directly with the imperial authorities, had no knowledge of Russian. In Finland, only Swedish and Finnish were used internally and even those who prepared themselves for careers in the Finnish state service knew that they would most likely never need Russian—consequently, even among educated Finns there was neither pressure nor motivation to learn Russian (Thaden and Forster Thaden 1984).

### 3.2 *Obrusenie* or linguistic assimilation in the Russian empire

To fully understand the process of *obrusenie* we need to turn from top-down policies to bottom-up processes. Social incentives were far more effective than russification reforms and promotion in the imperial service served as an assimilation inducement for many upwardly mobile ethnic elites, in particular Baltic Germans, Poles, and Ukrainians (Armstrong 1978; Belikov and Krysin 2001; Berežnaja et al. 2007; Miller 2008; Saunders 1995a; Snyder 2003; Thaden 1981a; Weeks 1996). In 1906, a St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Rigasche Rundschau* bitterly observed: “A man who as a collegiate assessor remained content speaking German often completely loses his knowledge of the language upon promotion to actual state councillor” (cited after Henriksson 1993, 348). Germans who lived in the Russian-speaking milieu experienced particularly powerful assimilative pressures, so that even children who went to German-medium schools grew up speaking fluent Russian and poor German (Henriksson 1993).

Linguistic assimilation was also facilitated by migration flows linked to industrialization, urbanization, and colonization. The industrial revolution brought in an influx of Russian workers to Ukraine, Belorussia, and Bessarabia: factory owners found it more efficient

to 'import' skilled Russian workers than to rely on unskilled local labor, while local peasants avoided cities and towns (Hosking 1997; Magocsi 1996; Subtelný 1994). As a result, rapidly growing, industrialized cities were dominated by Russian speakers: in Ukraine, in 1897, Poltava was the only city with over 50,000 inhabitants where Ukrainian-speakers constituted a majority (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Kappeler 2001; Saunders 1995a; Snyder 2003; Trojnickij 1905). Linguistic assimilation in the cities was quite rapid: in St. Petersburg, for instance, the proportion of Jews with L1 Yiddish decreased from 97% in 1869 to 42% in 1910, despite the government's opposition to assimilation of the Jews (Berežnaja et al. 2007). In the case of Ukrainian and Belorussian, russification was further facilitated by the view of Ukrainians and Belorussians as Russians, by genetic closeness between the three languages, and by ideologies that reflected the urban/rural divide and presented Russian as the language of urbanity, progress, and modernity, and Ukrainian and Belorussian as languages of the backward rural past.

Another factor assisting linguistic assimilation was colonization, which brought Russian, Ukrainian, Cossack, and German settlers to territories inhabited by indigenous populations, creating multi-ethnic environments and necessitating the use of Russian a lingua franca (Miller 2008). To give but one example, after the 1861 emancipation, Ukrainian peasants migrated in significant numbers to the Northern Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Siberia, and the Far East in the search of land (Berežnaja et al. 2007; Subtelný 1994). As a result, by 1897, Ukrainians constituted 9.4% of the population of Siberia, 33.6% of the population of the Northern Caucasus, and 47.4% of the population of Kuban' (Saunders 1992). By 1917, 2,500,000 Ukrainians lived outside of traditionally Ukrainian territories (Berežnaja et al. 2007). These migrations eventually led to a language shift: in the 1926 Census, for instance, half of the Ukrainians in the Far East declared Russian as their native language (Berežnaja et al. 2007). Russification was particularly pronounced among small ethnic groups that did not have standardized languages and native language education (Kappeler 2001).

### 3.3 Russian Empire in a comparative context

Now that we have considered the role of top-down policies and bottom-up processes in the russification of imperial subjects, the last question to tackle is whether these measures and processes were in any way unique. The Russian Empire was far from unique in granting linguistic autonomy to many of its newly incorporated territories—similar reliance on native elites had been traditionally adopted in Oriental empires and in the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Russian administration was also not unique in adopting and eventually imposing Russian, the language of the center, as an official language of the state—its policies were similar to the assimilation of Wales by the English or Languedoc by the French (Laitin 1998; Weber 1976). Yet, by the end of the 19th century, the Welsh and the Languedocians were linguistically assimilated, while most of the peoples of the Russian Empire continued to rely on their native languages. So why did the French succeed, in Weber's (1976) terms, in turning their peasants into Frenchmen, while Russians failed to turn their ethnic peasantry into Russians?

To begin with, state consolidation and adoption of language legislation in Russia did not begin until the mid- and sometimes late 19th century. In contrast, in England, France, and Spain, state rationalization of language approaches and the pressure to assimilate had developed between the 16th and 18th centuries, pre-empting the emergence of regional nationalist movements. By the time Russia began the integration process, national movements

among many ethnic groups were too advanced for russification policies to make any lasting impact, other than to intensify political mobilization (Hosking 1997; Kappeler 2001; Laitin 1998; Miller 2008).

Secondly, the French turned their peasants into Frenchmen by spreading primary education and literacy in the national language, disseminating urban customs and organizations, and building roads and railways (Weber 1976). In Russia these efforts were hampered by its vast geography, limited resources, poor roads, and dispersed settlements—it simply did not possess a web of economic, legal, and cultural links similar to those of early modern France (Suny 2001).

Thirdly, the French had explicitly set out to turn their peasants into Frenchmen. In contrast, Russia focused on the integration of the elites and did not allocate sufficient resources to implement universal primary education among its peasants: as seen in Table 2, by the turn of the 20th century, the majority of Russia's peasants were illiterate. This approach deepened the rift between the cosmopolitan multi-ethnic elites, oriented towards the European culture, and the masses of all ethnic groups. Russian peasants did not receive any privileges in this system and continued to lag behind many ethnic groups in terms of educational attainment, economic level, and the standard of living (Hosking 1997; Kappeler 2001). Among non-Russian peasants, the lack of Russian-medium schooling contributed to the maintenance of the native languages.

Most importantly, turning everyone into Russians was never a goal of Russian nationality and language policies, nor was language the main criterion for Russianness: it was habitually trumpeted by social class and religion. The full-fledged membership in the Great Russian nation was offered to Christian elites of all ethnic backgrounds and to all Orthodox Eastern Slavs. Ukrainians and Belorussians were the only ones never referred to as *inorodcy*; Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Belorussians were treated as Russians and had access to the same social opportunities (Kappeler 2001; Miller 2000). Honorary membership was also offered to Orthodox non-Russians: Armenians, Georgians, Ossetians, Romanians of Bessarabia, Greek and Bulgarian colonists, and baptized pagans and Muslims. Oppressive measures were adopted against Catholic Poles, yet their russification was considered impossible: historians view these measures as a means of punishment and an attempt at subjugation, rather than as an attempt to convert Poles into Russians (Kappeler 2001; O'Connor 2003; Weeks 1996). In the case of the Lutherans—Baltic German and Swedish elites, and Estonians and Finns—for most of imperial history the authorities neither envisioned nor encouraged total russification. The assimilation of *inorodcy* (a category which by the second half of the 19th century, included nomads, hunters, gatherers, Jews, and Muslims) was considered undesirable and was discouraged through policies of segregation, discrimination, and exclusion; as a result, however, several of these groups were allowed to have primary education in their native languages (Alpatov 2000; Belikov and Krysin 2001; Dowler 1995, 2001; Kappeler 2001; Suny 2001).

#### 4 Conclusions

This overview aimed to show that for most of its history Russian language management was a *laissez-faire* affaire: “the prerevolutionary Russian government had neither the means nor even the desire to extirpate all non-Russian languages” (Weeks 2001, 96). Consistent russification began only in the second half of the 19th century. This period eventually became emblematic of imperial language management and came to be seen as a denationalization attempt. In reality, however, russification reforms lasted for a short

period of time, were implemented inconsistently, and did not consciously aim to turn all non-Russians into Russians—the empire had neither the means nor the desire for such an outcome. The reevaluation of the reforms and their impact undertaken in recent historiographies suggests that these measures were carried out as an attempt to subjugate Polish and later Baltic German elites, to preserve the unity of the state, and to replace Polish, German, and Tatar with Russian as a high language (Kappeler 2001; Weeks 1996). These measures failed to turn peasants into Russians, because they commonly “stopped with the elites” (Suny 2001, 41). Most importantly, by imposing the russification measures late in the 19th century, the Russian empire created the pre-conditions for the consolidation of nations which would eventually turn against it.

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