Research and Engineering at Academic Institutions as LPP Factor: Russia Case Study

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Abstract. Language policy and planning (LPP) is an increasingly broad field today dealing with a number of complicated issues of utmost importance for the sustainable development of society in general and local communities in particular. In this view, it is necessary to create an efficient network and structure of actors all working towards the same goals. The paper seeks to explore the role of academic institutions as LPP actors with a focus on international cooperation in research and engineering as a major factor that impacts academic LPP at micro-level and shapes foreign language acquisition agenda at the macro-level. The paper presents a case study focused on Russian LPP and considers its current concerns and solutions.

1. Introduction
Language policy and language planning are the two concepts that have existed in sociolinguistics for nearly a century so far. The scope of issues LPP has to deal with has dramatically broadened, making the structure of its branches ever more complicated. With increased diversity of LPP topics, the number of actors has risen too. That is why questions of agency and interaction between the actors need to be considered. Among multiple factors that have an impact on LPP, research and engineering internationalization stands out as the one setting LPP agenda in terms of foreign language acquisition at all levels, from the local to the international one. Russia has always attached great importance to LPP and is currently considering the feasibility of developing a law to set the guidelines of the national language policy and planning. That is why an overview of the current LPP agenda and investigating the Russian LPP model may contribute to exploring the topic of LPP agency.

2. Literature Review
The original idea of language planning as “activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers in non-homogeneous speech communities” is attributed to Einar Haugen, introduced in 1959 [1]. However the idea of language policy can be found in even earlier works of E. Polivanov, a well-known Russian linguist, who claimed, back in 1931, that a true linguist was supposed to be a specialist in 1) a constructing contemporary language cultures; 2) language policy (capable of forecasting the future development of the language); 3) general linguistics, being aware of the previous language development and 4) particular languages with their history including the national and ethnic culture [2]. The two concepts – language policy and language planning - in various interpretations have been extensively used by sociolinguists. The two being
inseparably connected have come to be blended in a unified notion of language policy and planning [3].

In order to specify the extremely broad array of measures covered, a number of constituent parts were introduced. The traditional framework of LPP includes corpus planning, status planning (Kloss) and acquisition planning (Cooper). These issues are generally treated as internal policy issues. Today however language spread has come to be treated as a separate part or type of LPP which through setting objectives relevant to the government’s goals can directly or indirectly influence status and acquisition planning.

In 1997 Ammon defined language spread policy as “a policy which has as its objective the spread of a specific language, or sometimes a set of languages, either to new speakers or to new domains” [4]. Thus, depending on the target domain, he distinguished between internal and external language spread policy types, the former being focused on language spread within a country, while the latter aims to expand the language into new domains, outside a country. The external language spread is a very special type of LPP, since it has to deal with issues in “societies controlled by other governments” (ibid.) which means a very limited array of tools [5]. Hence the governments have to develop and implement their policies via intermediaries in the target polities. Moreover, the success of this LPP depends to a considerable extent on the LPP reception rather than production [6]. This receptive function represents what Haarman calls prestige planning which in turn is affected by the nation’s soft power.

Given the existing diversity of LPP types, comprehensive efforts towards the goals set by governments may be fruitful only if they develop an effective network of actors. The issue of agency in LPP has been a major concern for specialists in modern LPP theory seeking to explore “interaction between macro-level LPP decisions and the range of agentive responses and actions at the micro-level” [7]. “Agency in LPP has traditionally been depicted in terms of localized implementers of macro-level policies” (ibid) without any regard to local actors’ role in setting LPP agenda and introducing bottom-up initiatives arising out of local language-related needs and concerns. Thus universities and other academic institutions facing similar challenges given the current demands of research and engineering have become powerful actors of LPP. In order to understand the nature of this power in various contexts, multiple research has been carried out across the world with results being presented in “Language Policy and Planning in Universities: Teaching, research and administration” edited by Anthony J. Liddicoat.

Besides the view limiting the role of LPP actors simple implementation of macro-level policies lacks attention to certain issues relevant for understanding LPP. Liddicoat argues that a direct causational link relationship “between decisions made by those who are with power to execute them and the actual results of language planning” appears to be weak since it does not admit of the impact of contextual factors that may bring about unplanned results [8]. Besides this approach “oversimplifies the nature of power as it applies in speech communities”, as the coercive and normative power of institutions may appear too straightforward, while changes in the behavior towards language use may be obtained through “subtle operations on the choices of others” (ibid). This statement again brings us close to Nye’s idea of soft power, defined as “the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce” or “the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction” (Nye). Although soft power is traditionally seen as a tool of international policy, this approach might as well be applicable to lower-level actors. Thus it seems feasible to focus on local contexts and micro-level LPP agents.

Let us look at the bottom-up structure of LPP actors. At the very basic level are individual linguists or groups of linguists and related specialists who undertake to reserve or revive and promote languages. They are either “enthusiasts motivated by a range of different concerns” [9] working on their own or supported by local community groups engaged in promoting the language through informal education. Another type of LPP actors are institutions, involved in language, literature, culture or other related fields. Bigger scale agency is performed by government or non-government bodies which have a direct or indirect impact on decision making.
The interaction between actors of different levels may be bidirectional. The top-down policy accepted positively at the local level may be successfully implemented. However, in case these decisions fail to address urgent problems or infringe on local communities’ or minorities’ language rights, the implementation of these policies is likely to be hampered at the micro-level. This may produce reverse bottom-up initiatives with regard to local contexts.

In this view, the actors implementing LPP at the local level have a special role of being mediators and undertake to maintain the balance between decision-makers and communities. Academic institutions appear to face these special tasks being an important link in LPP agency.

One of the recent challenges academic institutions have to face is the need for comprehensive cooperation in the field of research and engineering. Knowledge sharing and exchange of ideas at the international level have become an essential part of academic life which demands high proficiency in English being lingua franca of science and engineering. This brings forth issues of foreign language acquisition to become part of LPP at all levels.

3. Methods
In order to explore the LPP agency as exemplified by academic institutions as well as research and engineering cooperation as a major factor of LPP, we need to describe the framework of guidelines for our study.

First, we will dwell on the basics of the Russian system of higher education which is essential to understand the nature of the relationship between LPP actors of different levels. Second, we will analyze the contribution of various academic institutions to LPP with regard to all the above-mentioned types, namely:

- corpus planning;
- acquisition planning;
- status planning;
- prestige planning;
- language spread policy (both internal and external).

When doing so, we will point out the challenges Russian universities face today in the context of increased demand for cooperation and exchange in the field of research and engineering. In conclusion, we will come up with a characteristic of the Russian LPP model with regard to the role of academic institutions and offer micro-level LPP measures to address the concerns of internationalization arising out of demand relevant for research and engineering.

4. Results and discussion
The system of education in Russia is based on government-funded institutions that have to meet a number of requirements to the conditions of learning, their curricula and education outcomes. Likewise, the work of the Academy of Sciences is funded by the state, making the implementation of LPP a top-down process. Bottom-up initiatives may be supported through grants and scholarships. Besides representatives of major academic institutions are involved in the work of the recently formed Council of the Russian Language which brings together linguists, academics in closely related fields and statesmen to develop recommendations and advice on LPP issues.

The major part of work in the field of corpus planning is done by Vinogradov Institute of the Russian Language which is a unit of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Researchers from the Institute launched and have been maintaining the National Corpus of the Russian Language that includes besides the core corpus, that of newspapers, poetry, dialects, multimedia, and parallel corpora, as well as the old Russian corpus and that of ancient Russian manuscripts. The National Corpus has become the basis for a number of dictionaries and studies in descriptive linguistics: Dictionary of Idioms, Grammar Dictionary of New words, Frequency Dictionary of the Russian Word Stock, etc. The Institute also undertakes corpus planning by operating in the field of prescriptive lexicography via introducing and setting language norms and compiling dictionaries and grammar reference books. Another part of its activities is linked with the dissemination of linguistic knowledge, making it
interesting and appealing, especially for young people. This is done on a regular basis via a series of language and linguistic nationwide contests, clubs, linguistic student societies and summer camps for school children thus contributing to prestige planning.

Another big institution that contributes to corpus planning is the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. They are mostly engaged in research on languages other than Russian within the country including minority and endangered languages. The main research domains listed on the official web site, are the following: 1) language theory, linguistic typology, comparative linguistics; 2) Romance, Germanic, Celtic, African, Turkic, Mongolian, Iranian, Caucasian, Finno-Ugric and Asian languages; 3) grammars of endangered languages; 4) areal linguistics and ethnolinguistics; 5) sociolinguistics; 6) psycholinguistics; 7) computational linguistics; 8) lexicography; 9) logical analysis of language; 10) experimental phonetics and semantics; 11) translation theory (https://iling-ran.ru/web/en/about). A great deal of the Institute’s work involves standardization, description and revitalization of languages. By maintaining and developing minority and endangered languages, the Institute has been a major actor of status planning as well as prestige planning balancing between the policies aimed at the spread of Russian and preserving linguistic diversity and, through it, the cultural heritage of the country.

Issues related to the Russian language spread policy have been high on the agenda in the recent decade. While internal spread LPP deals with problems of status and acquisition of Russian in the republics, where their national languages are recognized as official republics’ languages alongside Russian as a national language, the problems of the level of Russian proficiency among immigrants from Central Asia and former USSR republics is also an area of great concern. Another sensitive issue of internal language spread policy is the perceived deterioration of the Russian language in use, involving neglecting language norms even in public domains which are supposed to be examples of literary Russian. To address these concerns, at the recent meeting with the President, held on November 5, 2019, the Council on the Russian Language suggested adopting a comprehensive law on language policy and planning in Russia, which is expected to set the guidelines for subsequent joint work of all actors involved. The areas to be covered besides internal policy issues include the problems and challenges of external LPP.

External Russian language spread policy became a focus of LPP last decade. Initiated first as a way to support compatriots living abroad, it has now come to be seen as an essential tool and asset of soft power which is capable to introduce the image of the country different from the one people abroad perceive from mass media. In order to provide a structured plan of activities in this field the government initiated Federal Special Purpose Program “The Russian Language” which presented targets and tasks for a four-year period of 2011-15 subsequently followed by a similar programme for 2016-2020, both undertaking to lay the basis of reference sources, books, software and on-line resources for teaching and learning Russian abroad.

A major actor here is the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute which “specializes in teaching Russian to international students and in training teachers to teach Russian as a foreign language” (http://www.pushkin.institute/en/). Besides providing support and resources for teaching and learning Russian, the Pushkin Institute has introduced a number of initiatives for language spread. Among them is a volunteer program for students and young people “Russian Language Ambassadors” which travel within Russia and neighboring countries to introduce young people to the diversity of Russian multinational culture and the beauty of the Russian language thus contributing to both external and internal language spread policy and promoting acquisition.

Acquisition planning in Russia is directed by the government. For all levels of education from preschool through secondary and high school up to higher education, the government develops standards that specify the target outcomes of education at each level in the form of skill sets to be obtained in the course of study mandatory for all education establishments including academic institutions. Thus the latter serve as intermediaries between decision-makers and communities.

On the other hand, universities have to face some specific challenges, the major being internationalization, which makes a big impact on all spheres of academic work including teaching,
learning, and research. The trend perfectly described by Liddicoat appears very true for Russian universities. Although the shift to English as language of knowledge within the country is less noticeable than in Europe, there is an increasing trend of the national research evaluation processes “to rank publications as a way of measuring research quality and such rankings have tended to privilege research developed in English” [9].

The scope of issues researchers have to investigate alongside the increasing rate of innovations introduced throughout the world has made international cooperation and joint scientific and engineering projects an essential and inseparable part of academic life. In order to develop and produce cutting-edge technology, one has to follow international trends in the field and be aware of the newest discoveries made. It requires a high English proficiency level on the part of universities’ staff. Participation in Erasmus+ projects emphasizes the need for a transition to lingua franca in the academic environment. Thus academics have to be immersed in the universe of shared English language knowledge and be able to introduce their ideas or share research results by communicating in the international academic environment. Likewise, students who get enrolled, especially those in Master programs, should be well prepared to work with English language information and resources.

These concerns make foreign language acquisition an issue of Russian LLP at the macro-level.

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2011, Russia featured low English proficiency level ranking 32 with the EF EPI score 45.79. This could in part be accounted for by a relatively late start of English acquisition, beginning from the 5th grade of secondary school (10-11 years old). In 2011 foreign language was introduced in the primary school curriculum in Russia. Other LLP steps related to foreign language acquisition are introducing a second foreign language in the secondary school curriculum and a nation-wide compulsory examination in foreign languages which is due in 2022. The general focus on foreign languages in LLP has to a large extent been caused by the demand for internationalization of research, engineering, and business. The results are yet to be seen when 2011 schoolchildren will enter the student body and the labour market. However today we can observe Russia gradually improving foreign language proficiency with the reported EF EPI average score being 52.96 as of 2018, although being still behind a number of countries ranking 42nd in the list (https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/).

With the current level of English proficiency, it appears feasible for academic institutions to develop micro-level LLPs tailored to their needs. Academic LLP may be defined as a set of guidelines for teaching and learning languages related to the universities’ objectives in the context of internationalization in line with the state LLP demands. The major concern academic LLP should address is significantly varying levels of English proficiency on the part of both students and staff. Hence the model of academic LLP should be bidirectional and aimed at academics and students respectively. The steps involved may include English language support provided by the departments of foreign languages available at all universities, introducing English courses for academics with low proficiency level, increasing opportunities for academic mobility and exchanges in research and engineering as well as learning and teaching, strengthening cooperation with partner universities and companies abroad and extending the network of partners [10]. All these steps will inevitably lead to the need of introducing courses in English in the Russian universities’ curriculum.

Another priority in the context of research and engineering internationalization is promoting Russian education abroad to welcome foreign students. Until recently the prevailing approach was to offer a preparatory one-year Russian language course followed by learning with instruction in Russian [11]. This traditional approach, although serves the aim of language spread, hampers the process of internalization, which Today some universities can offer courses and degree programs (mostly Master programs) in English while others are still making their first steps towards internationalization.

5. Conclusion
To sum up the above we can conclude that Russia features a direct overt top-down model of LLP. Being government-funded, academic institutions mostly implement the language policy and planning initiated by the government. The opportunities for bottom-up initiatives are few but existent. One of
them is to act through representatives in the Council of the Russian language Russia. To make this option efficient there should be constant two-way communication between the Academy of Sciences and local universities. The latter being well aware of local contexts can influence decision making by bringing forth problems relevant for the communities, thus acting as intermediaries between the government and the society.

One of the currently pressing concerns in Russian LPP arising out of research and engineering internationalization has brought forth the issue of foreign language acquisition in the nation-wide system education. Although important decisions for encouraging learning English have been made, the results are to be seen in the coming decade. Meanwhile, universities have to develop academic LPP tailored to their specific needs and priorities.

Academic institutions as representatives of local as well as research and engineering communities may be said to have a special place in the structure of LPP agency, being both intermediaries and implementers of top-down policies and agenda-setting force putting forward LPP concerns that require major steps at all LPP levels.

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