

# External Language Policy and Planning as Part of Soft Power Policy

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**Abstract** — Today language policy and planning (LPP) issues have gone beyond the state borders entering the international arena. Governments seek to expand the sphere of their influence abroad, with language promotion being one of the exceedingly popular tools. The paper describes external language policy and planning as a new component of traditional LPP framework. The authors explore various types of external LPP by investigating the experience of the United Kingdom, the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Russian Federation. The background and the current priorities of external language policy and planning are described with regard to soft power concept and the countries' foreign policies.

**Keywords:** *language policy, language planning, language policy and planning, soft power, external policy, foreign affairs*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language policy and planning (LPP) has always been an effective tool of domestic policy with its scope extending from preserving linguistic diversity, with regard to sustainable development of the country, to strengthening the position of the official language, as well as standardization of languages and educational policy. Balance of support to minority languages and promotion of a national language throughout the country has always been a vital issue of national policy and interethnic harmony.

Today governments have to deal with new challenges in the realm of LPP including those related to international relations and foreign policy. The increasingly popular concept of soft power appears to have a direct bearing upon language policy and planning. However, the relationship between LPP and soft power agenda is an issue that has not been under study yet, although it has some valuable potential both for exploring theoretical basics of LPP and its practical application in external policy.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional framework of LPP includes three types of planning [1, p 28-29]: corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning. The original concept 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" belongs

to Einar Haugen [2, p 8]. This field of activity was termed as corpus planning by Heinz Kloss to distinguish it from status planning. "There exists, however, another dimension of planning where one busies oneself not with the structure and form of language but with its standing alongside other languages or vis-a-vis a national government. They are primarily interested in the status of the language ... Here we can speak of language status planning" [3, p. 81]. Acquisition planning was introduced by Cooper to denote "organized efforts to promote the learning of a language" [4, p. 157].

In the mid-20th century language acquisition policy and planning crossed the national borders and became an area of concern for foreign policy makers. The idea of LPP at the international level is not new. Back in 1977 an outstanding Russian linguist Yury Desheriev in his book "Social linguistics. Theoretical basics" mentioned that "there are some language issues in international relations that can be solved only with the help of language policy" [5, p. 266]. Another Russian linguist Alexander Schweitzer argued "under certain conditions language policy can be not only part of domestic policy in a country, ... but may also be involved in foreign policy aimed at other countries" [6, p. 130]. A comprehensive overview of LPP at the macrolevel is given in "The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy". Imposing the country's dominant language in other countries and communities is linked to colonization and colonial policy in the view of R. Phillipson [7, p. 203]. The impact of transnational companies and their language policies on languages distribution across the globe is explored by Fernand de Varennes [ibid, 149].

When providing examples of his acquisition planning theory Cooper places efforts to help immigrants to Israel learn Hebrew on a par with facilitating "the acquisition of Russian by non-Russian nationalities" or promoting the study of languages abroad. The latter is described as follows: "To promote the study of English, the British Council maintains English language libraries abroad and sends experts to organize workshops and to advise local personnel about methods of teaching. The Alliance Française and the Goethe Institute engage in comparable activities for the promotion of French and German respectively" [4, p. 157]. Today, however, the scope of issues involved in external language policy and planning, as

well as methods employed, goes far beyond that of language acquisition planning.

Current external LPP efforts can hardly be viewed without regard to the theory of soft power. The term soft power was introduced by Joseph Nye, a professor of Harvard University, in his book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”. To contrast it to hard power, he argued, “The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions. This dimension can be thought of as soft power in contrast to the hard command power usually associated with tangible resources like military and economic strength” [8, p. 49]. Nye further developed his soft power concept in 2004 in his book “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics” by defining soft power as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want” [9]. Later, Nye extended his definition to “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye, 2011: 20), thus focusing now on “affecting others” and “obtaining preferred outcomes”. In his view this kind of power employs resources which include culture, political values and foreign policies [10].

Although language is not in the list of soft power resources, language promotion may be a powerful tool of increasing the country’s appeal in the eyes of language learners both through preparing and selection of teaching materials and providing a comprehensive insight into the culture and values of the country and its people. Language as soft power asset is regarded in the papers by G. Pashaeva, who suggests considering the level of English proficiency as a tool for a preliminary evaluation of the “soft power” potential of non-English speaking countries [11].

The idea of using culture and language learning to get closer to people overseas and influence their preferences in favour of high politics was in the air long before Joseph Nye coined the term soft power and highlighted the idea of co-optive power in foreign policy. Thus back in the early 1930s the UK government established the British Council with a view “to create in a country overseas a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy” (<https://www.britishcouncil.org>). In 1940 its mission was stated in the Royal Charter as follows: “promoting a wider knowledge of the UK and the English language abroad and developing closer cultural relations between the UK and other countries”. This example provides clear evidence of the strong bond between promoting language learning and increasing appeal and understanding as basics of “sympathetic appreciation” and influence which are integral to soft power.

Given the above, we strongly believe that external language policy should be distinguished from acquisition planning and regarded as a separate type of LPP with its own structure. In this paper we explore the experience of the UK, the USA, China and Russia in this field with a view to describe types and structure of external language policy and planning in the countries under study.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

In order to describe external LPP as a separate type of LPP we need first to create a framework which could provide guidelines for our investigation. Second, we will use the framework to explore the policies and activities to promote language learning in the UK, the USA, the PRC, and the RF. When doing so, we would like to focus on each country’s priorities and background which affect its external LPP. Thus we will have to use both methods of diachronic and synchronic research with regard to the international political situation and soft power issues. These comprehensive methods are expected to lead us to distinguishing between different types of external LPP as an attempt to offer classification of existing external LPP approaches. We will conclude by stating the correlation between soft power and LPP in language promotion issues.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Today English is a truly global language with non-native speakers population largely outnumbering that of native speakers. Reasons behind the worldwide spread of English have always been a disputable issue. On the opposite ends of the debate are Robert Phillipson, who argues that “the Americans and British have invested heavily in promoting the language globally since the mid 1950s” [12, p.19] and David Crystal who assumes that “a language becomes a world language for one reason only – the power of people who speak it” [13, p. 10], and continues with an overview of political, technological, economic, and cultural power of anglophone countries. The types of power mentioned, as well as the idea of “the power of people”, bring us close to the concept of soft power. In other words, language spread can result from both language policy and soft power. In this view it is important to distinguish between external LPP of the UK and the USA.

To describe the nature of British LPP different researchers and analysts use terms such as westernization and linguistic imperialism. Regardless of the term used, they mean the same policy which rests on three basic levels of expansion: cultural expansion, language expansion and promoting ideas and values.

The starting point of British cultural expansion can be traced back to the 1920s when Empire Marketing Board was founded to encourage intra-Empire marketing and research to persuade people to buy Empire. Together with marketing it projected its culture abroad. By setting up BBC the government started its discursive and information expansion aimed at promoting its ideas and values. Language expansion has been exercised since the British Council opened in 1934 to promote English abroad. It was focused on the following fields of activity:

- promoting the language as a key for the world of research and technology which opens up a variety of possibilities for its speakers;
- increasing the number of EFL learners as well as their proficiency level;
- encouraging transition from the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) to ESL (ESL – English as the

Second Language) status in areas where English is spoken alongside local and indigenous languages.

Thus, in the early 20th century the UK's three-level expansion policy laid the foundations of soft power which the country has been using to the full since. Moreover it was made a focal point of the Foreign Ministry projected activity in 2015-2020, soft power being designated as a key element of projecting the global influence. In the British Academy report 2014, language is seen as an "important British soft power asset as it makes it easy for 'Brand Britain' to project itself successfully" [14, p.: 25]. However, the language issue is not that straightforward when it comes to soft power assets since it also includes a foreign language command. Hence, language spread is a two-edged sword which carries soft power abroad but makes domestic soft power vulnerable. Many Britons "forego learning a foreign language, relying on the rest of the world to speak ... English" which leads to statistics saying that two-thirds of the UK respondents speak only their mother tongue [14, p. 42]. In this view, cultivation of foreign language competence amongst its population has been chosen as one of the key priorities.

Another major key soft power asset of the UK is higher education which is attractive for international students. The international student body itself is seen as an important benefit for both soft power assets and soft power influence. On the one hand international students "form a lasting attachment with Britain" when studying for a degree, on the other hand, they "bring specific skills (e.g. language and cultural knowledge) that British businesses need to develop in order to break into new markets" [13, p. 27].

To sum up the above, we would like to focus on the following issues.

1. The external LPP of the UK is interwoven with soft power policy, the latter being represented by two levels: soft power assets, making up the country's attraction abroad, and soft power influence, providing the pursuit of its foreign policy goals.

2. There are two topics high on the agenda for LPP of the UK. The first one is setting the global benchmark for English language learning and teaching in order to support and promote the British variant of English. The second topic is encouraging foreign languages learning in the UK. Although both are soft power assets they refer to different levels of LPP, the latter being an issue of a domestic LPP.

3. The external LPP of the UK can be described as overt (it has clearly stated aims), direct (language is promoted largely through direct language support provided by the British Council programmes) and top-down (initiated by the government and implemented through government-related organizations).

Another country deeply interested in promoting English is the USA. When describing the U.S. LPP, James Crawford writes that their policy is "not to have a policy" [15, p. 10]. It means that, given the democratic principles the country is proud of, questions of language choice are a matter of personal preferences. However, the importance of languages distribution in society can hardly be underestimated and definitely requires top-down regulation, which would contradict the concepts of freedom and equality. Hence the

LPP of the USA has always been covert and indirect. The aims of the government are not clearly stated but can be deduced from the decisions made in the spheres of immigration and education.

The same policy "not to have a policy" is characteristic of the U.S. external LPP. The USA has been little involved in direct support or promotion of learning and teaching English abroad; its external LPP has always been largely grounded in its soft power policy. Analysing the reasons for the global spread of English David Crystal mentions political, technological, economic and cultural ones. In politics English has been an important medium of communication, since "there are 12,500 international organizations in the world. ...85 per cent made official use of English" [13, p. 11]. In economics the status of the world's leading industrial and trading nation which Britain got following the Industrial revolution passed over to the USA in the 20th century, with "London and New York becoming the world's investment capitals". The resulting 'economic imperialism' brought a fresh dimension to the balance of linguistic power" [13, p. 13]. Advertising, broadcasting and communication considerably flourished in the U.S. due to the advent of technologies in corresponding fields thus setting the benchmark for the whole world. Likewise, popular American culture possesses an immense appeal and has long been dominating globally. Although David Crystal does not use this term, all the above are nothing but soft power assets. All these assets would be nothing however if they were not 'exported' abroad. A major 'exporter' was the United States Information Agency (USIA), a full-service public relations organization set up in 1953 with a view "to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interests" [16, p. 5]. The Agency was in charge of educational and cultural exchanges (seen as "an effective tool of public diplomacy"), information activities "to articulate U.S. government policies and actions", international broadcasting "to reach a global audience" as well as research and analysis of "overseas press opinion on the U.S. foreign policy" [16, p. 32].

Substantial contribution to promoting English and American soft power has been made by religious missionaries and the Peace Corps, a government run volunteer organization set up in 1961 with a view to act as "missionaries of democracy" in developing countries. Officially stated are the following goals: 1) to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women; 2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; 3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. Although English language assistance is not mentioned in the global initiatives list on the official website, it has always been one of its priorities with increased emphasis on language support following the end of the Cold War. Thus, in 1986 "39 per cent of all volunteers are assigned to classroom teaching, and English remains a common subject" [17].

Today English language office at the U.S. Embassy in Russia is in charge of English teaching and learning assistance. However, its activity is rather support than actual promotion.

With regard to the above mentioned, we can describe the U.S. LPP as follows:

- external LPP is indirect and covert with actual language service being supportive rather than expansionistic;
- the U.S. contribution to the current spread of English is rooted in its soft power and promotion of its values and culture, which then build up motivation for English language learning abroad;
- particular emphasis is made on providing opportunities for selected individuals through participation in educational, academic and cultural exchange programs, where English proficiency is both a required skill and an expected outcome.

Unlike the USA with its external LPP based on soft power, China aims at projecting its soft power based on its external LPP. The basic assets of China's soft power are its culture (particularly traditional culture including literature and philosophy) and its economic model. "Among its various other resources... China accords great importance to culture"; "the most prominent element of China's cultural diplomacy, however, is the promotion of the Chinese language" [18].

The official website of the Ministry of Education of the PRC opens its International Cooperation section with the following statement "To promote TCFL is of strategic significance to popularize the Chinese language and culture throughout the world, to enhance the friendship and mutual understanding as well as the economic and cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries around the world, and to elevate China's influence in the international community" (<http://old.moe.gov.cn>). Thus the PRC declares its overt and direct external LPP as well as its view of language as an important soft power asset to promote its influence abroad.

The Chinese external LPP is based on top-down initiatives inspired by Hanban, being the agent of its external LPP. Hanban is "a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide" ([http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7719.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm)) with Confucius Institutes being its actors.

The PRC major tools of language promotion can be listed as follows: 1) offering educational opportunities for international students; 2) comprehensive assistance and cooperation with compatriots; 3) direct Chinese language teaching through Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classes; 4) encouraging integration of Chinese courses into national education systems. Today Confucius Institutes can be found in 126 countries, Confucius Classrooms – in 80 countries. Besides, radio-based and online Confucius Institutes are in operation, with TV-based Confucius Institute being under development [18].

The result of China's external LPP has been a considerable increase in the number of people learning Chinese as a foreign language as well as those interested in the country and its culture. A number of countries report the immense growth of Chinese language learners with its

popularity challenging that of English. "According to the estimates of some scholars there may now be as many as 100 million [18]. It should also be noted that Hanban funding considerably lower than that of other language and culture promotion organizations, such as the British Council or the Goethe Institute.

The efficiency of Chinese external LPP is partly attributed to the 'high degree of localization'. The basic aspects of localization are training talented local teachers and integration with the actual local needs by offering flexible solutions to the current educational needs and local education systems (<http://english.hanban.org>).

Noteworthy is that the Chinese 'going global' policy is carried out with heavily funded media support boosting its international image. "In a world on the brink of chaos, China has decided that what people everywhere need is more good news – as long as it's about China" [19]. Although its effectiveness is a rather disputable issue (Yip argues that "people have become more averse to clumsy state-run propaganda than ever"), it definitely contributes to increased interest in China from people abroad.

Besides 'going global' initiatives China employs a 'please come in' approach by hosting big events and welcoming people from abroad thus both creating and meeting the demand for personal experience in the PRC.

All the above suggests the following features of China's external LPP:

- The PRC efforts to increase its soft power are largely based on promoting its traditional culture and language as its biggest assets together with its economic growth. The soft power policy has considerable media support projecting the country's image abroad.
- The combination of 'going global' and 'please come in' approach to soft power and external LPP provides a comprehensive policy contributing to the country's international appeal.
- The PRC external LPP is expansionistic, overt and direct, featuring flexible solutions to meet local needs in different regions.

The concept of soft power has recently gained popularity in Russia. It is spoken about by high-profile politicians, including the prime-minister and the president who defined soft power as "a complex of tools and methods to achieve foreign-policy goals without the use of force, through information and other means of influence". In 2013 soft power policy was integrated into the RF Foreign Policy Concept. In 2012 at a meeting with ambassadors and permanent representatives Vladimir Putin encouraged diplomats and other related officials to take soft power approach and to consider the Russian language as a prospective soft power asset (<https://ria.ru/politics/20120709/695256662.html>). Thus external, as well as internal LPP in Russia is overt, with its aims being officially declared in legislative acts and official speeches by top-level politicians. An overview of the legal background of the Russian LPP has been given by Yudina [20].

The beginning of Russian external LPP activities can be traced back to 1966 when Moscow State University set up the Centre of Russian Language Teaching Methods engaged in the research and development of teaching methods for Russian as a foreign language both at home and abroad. By 1973 the Centre has grown into the State Institute of the Russian Language named after Alexander Pushkin. The first meaningful language promotion efforts were undertaken by the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature set up in 1967.

Under the RF Government Resolution the Russian external policy today is designed to “attract attention of people abroad to the Russian language, offer more opportunities of studying Russian with a view to expand the country’s influence and project a positive image of the country abroad, to enhance its international standing to protect its geopolitical interests” (<http://government.ru/media/files/1EiDSUiCWXw.pdf>). The above-stated goals are expected to be achieved through a network of actors coordinated by the Russian Language Council affiliated to the RF Government.

The major actors of external LPP are Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo (the Federal Agency for the CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation). Although they have different fields of activity, they work towards the same above mentioned goal.

Thus Russkiy Mir Foundation being “a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science” [21] supports educational programmes for learning and teaching Russian through grants and establishing Russian centres worldwide.

Pushkin State Russian Language Institute offers a wide range of Russian language courses, both in Russia and abroad, including online courses and mobile language schools. One of its recent projects “Ambassadors of the Russian Language in the World” has united creative and truly cosmopolitan young people who travel to different countries and show glimpses of Russian culture through Russian language teaching.

Rossotrudnichestvo supports the implementation of external LPP with a view “to create a positive image of Russia abroad as well as protecting the linguistic and cultural needs of ethnic Russians living abroad” [21].

Thus the RF external LPP is inseparably connected with its soft power policy.

1. The comprehensive work is performed in the following ways: 1) creating better and easily available education opportunities for learning and teaching Russian abroad; 2) involving compatriots worldwide in its sphere of influence with a view of cooperation; 3) providing opportunities for education in Russia.

2. Russian external LPP is overt and employs both direct and indirect methods, with the former considerably prevailing.

3. In terms of external LPP actors, it represents a shared sphere of responsibility which sometimes hinders its implementation due to the necessity of numerous approvals.

## V. CONCLUSION

The presented research shows the deep connection between language promotion efforts abroad and the countries’ soft power policy. So, external LPP can hardly be described without regard to soft power. However, the relationship between the two may be different. On the one hand, soft power can be a good basis of language spread. On the other, language promotion facilitates soft power through a closer study of the country’s culture, mentality and values.

Although external LPP is mostly based on top-down policy, its aims may be either explicit (clearly stated), or implicit, which accounts for two types of LPP: overt and covert.

Ways to achieve the goals of external LPP may be direct (when actual language promotion efforts are made to support language learning and teaching) and indirect (in case the prevailing way is creating attractive opportunities which may be used only on condition of good language proficiency).

In terms of actors external LPP may be one-divisional (when only one government body is in charge of it) or multidivisional (when political bodies have to share responsibilities).

The above-mentioned types and characteristics by no means represent a complete list of options. Further study of external LPP of different countries, with regard to their soft power policies (using both synchronistic and diachronistic approaches), may provide a far more diverse array of methods and tools. The latter, together with analysis of their outcomes, might present a valuable source of data to be used for prospective external LPP.

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