

## REVIEWS

Ksenia Maksimovtsova, *Language Conflicts in Contemporary Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine. A Comparative Exploration of Discourses in Post-Soviet Russian-Language Digital Media*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2019. 508 pp.

Language policy has been a quite ambiguous issue in all post-Soviet communities for the past thirty years. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nation-building actors in the former Soviet republics were faced with the challenge of grappling not only with issues of economic and political development, but also with the task of elaborating their cultural and social spheres. Dominated by the Russian language that operated in all areas of public life in Soviet times, the post-Soviet independent countries now confronted the task of planning and implementing language policy aimed at promoting and protecting their national languages. However, there were significant Russian-speaking minorities whose rights also needed to be protected and taken into account while designing new language policies in the independent states. There were significant Russian-speaking groups in the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere. In this book, Ksenia Maksimovtsova presents a rather extended comparative analysis of language policies in Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine. She demonstrates that there have been significant differences across these three countries in the construction of language policies and in the approaches taken to evaluating language-related issues as social and political problems.

Consisting of seven chapters, the book seeks to examine how and why the issue of language policy became problematized within the public discourses of Russian-language blogs and news websites in the three countries under discussion. Operating with information gathered from these digital platforms, Maksimovtsova approaches the analysis of the social and political context of language-policy-related problems through the prism of understanding social reality as a constructed phenomenon. She applies SKAD (Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse) methods for analyzing her empirical data.

The author brings together social constructionist approaches to nation-building processes and the role of language policy in the post-Soviet countries, and theories about moral panics and securitization. The author demonstrates a rather detailed and rigorous approach, unpacking and applying to her topic the theoretical framework devised by John I. Kitsuse and Peter Ibarra for the study of social problems. Kitsuse and Ibarra emphasise the importance of claim-making styles for analyzing how problems are socially constructed (p. 52). Following this approach, Maksimovtsova aims at “understanding the mechanisms behind the creation and labelling of language policy as a social problem” (p. 52).

At the same time, the author also considers the methodological implication of discourse analysis as a key chapter in her volume. This builds the ground for later chapters where she analyzes in detail specific cases for each of the researched countries and demonstrates the applicability, full or partial, of different theoretical frameworks. For some readers the methodological part may seem over-extended, but I would defend this aspect of the book’s design, since it appears to be crucial for understanding the specific language processes in the countries in question. I also find convincing Maksimovtsova’s justification for her sample selection of blogs and news websites; as she points out, these platforms “offer almost unlimited possibilities for ordinary Internet users to participate in discussions on urgent social and political problems and are a source of empirical materials for the investigation of how languages issues are debated in Russian-language online media, and of which argumentation patterns are used by social actors in order to legitimise their positions” (p. 95).

In order to introduce the reader to the contemporary background of the language policy development in each of the three countries discussed, the author presents some similarities of the post-USSR language transformation in the researched countries. The process of language transformation in post-Soviet space has coincided with processes of reform in all areas of political, economic, and social life. In the case of Ukraine, the background of the regional polarization, language legislation, and politicization processes are placed at the center of the discussion in this study.

Latvia, by contrast, is presented through its legislative practices and educational reforms implemented within policy on the place and role of the Russian language. The Estonian experience is also examined from the perspective of legislation and educational reforms, however, the discussion here also addresses the ethnic composition of the population.

One strong point of the volume is the detailed analysis of the public debates on language policy in each of the three countries, through a discourse analysis of Russian-language blogs and news websites. Separate chapters on the individual countries introduce the different online media landscapes, providing extended and detailed descriptions for each of them. Analysis of the public debates guides the reader through the perspectives and visions of various social actors and stakeholders influencing both public opinion and the legislative level.

Concluding the chapter on debates in the Ukrainian media, and utilizing the constructionist approach developed by John Kitsuse and Malcolm Spector (2009), Maksimovtsova argues that Ukrainian media is full of “contradictory claims where either Russian- or Ukrainian-speakers are constructed as the ‘victims’ of nation-building” (p. 305). Simultaneously she finds that Latvian media space contains quite contradictory discourses about Latvian identity—Russian-speaking communities cherish a vision of Latvia as “a more inclusive” nation, whereas their Latvian opponents see their country in terms of a rather “exclusive model” (p. 383). A similar situation can be found in Estonia, where one of the interest poles operates with the notion of “a more inclusive view of the Estonian nation,” while the opposing side challenges this vision, stressing that “Estonians have the legitimate right to establish the language regime” (p. 425).

The volume presents a sound base for researchers of the Russian-speaking communities in post-Soviet countries. It provides a valuable discussion of the methodological implications of and opportunities for gathering empirical materials in online space, and helpfully proposes using different methods for content analysis and social discourse applications. Ksenia Maksimovtsova’s analysis also

usefully directs our attention to both similarities and differences in the language conflicts in Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine. At the same time, her study highlights the need for further research on language policies in the post-Soviet countries and other world regions, tackling the ambiguity of the tool of language policy as a crucial dimension in nation-building processes everywhere.

OLGA KHABIBULINA

Center for Citizenship Education, Warsaw

Mariëlle Wijermars and Katja Lehtisaari (eds.), *Freedom of Expression in Russia's New Mediasphere*. Routledge, 2019.

This edited volume is a comprehensive collection that approaches the issue of freedom of expression in the new media in Russia, as well as attempts to curb it, from multiple angles. Such an approach illuminates the multifaceted nature of the Russian media regime, which cannot be reduced to simple state-controlled censorship. Different parts of the volume complement each other to fully flesh out the issue. The first part maps out the regulations that have been adopted in the last decade, following the protests of 2011-2012, including the black-listing mechanisms and the “Iarovaya law” (2016), which signify the tightening of the state control over the media. The second part focuses on how traditional and new media outlets adapt and act in the new regulation environment, sometimes even subverting it (as in the case of trans-local urban lifestyle magazines). The third part provides a window into the audience reception of media content, both inside Russia and in the “near abroad.” The final part focuses on hybrid tactics and mechanisms employed by the state actors to limit citizens’ activity online—from existing laws against extremism, to “troll factories,” to the Russian Orthodox Church’s efforts to shape the discourse on freedom and security. No optimistic forecast for freedom of speech in Russia is given, but the authors present a more nuanced understanding of the complicated interplay between state, local and translocal actors,