

# To what extent is the current state of the Belarusian language a reflection of post-Soviet language planning?

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# Belarusian: an endangered language

- ▶ 40% of the world's languages are endangered
- ▶ A consequence of language contact
- ▶ Belarusian is an endangered language
- ▶ IISEPS (2007):
  - ▶ Russian use: 57% of the population
  - ▶ BRMS use: 19%
  - ▶ Belarusian use: 7%
- ▶ Congress of Democratic Forces of Belarus (1999): Belarusians' rights for the free development of their culture and native language are being "grossly violated" (Zaprudski, 2002: 42)



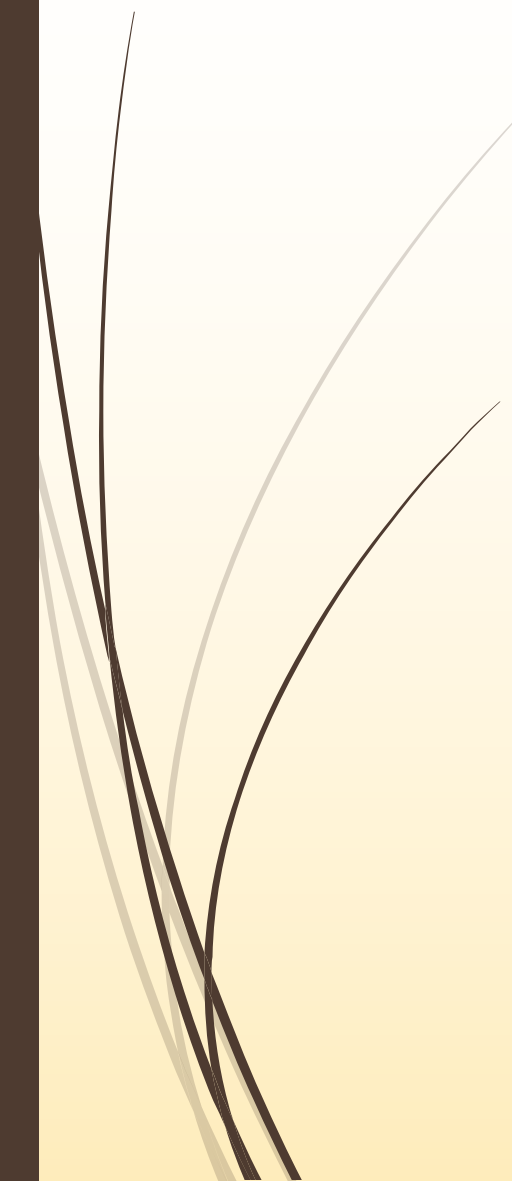
## Tollefson (2006: 42)

- ▶ Language planning is a political process in which “policies often create and sustain various forms of social inequality”.





Hence, my research question:

- 
- To what extent is the current state of the Belarusian language a reflection of post-Soviet language planning?





# Belarusian-Russian Mixed Speech

- ▶ Used for intergenerational communication within the family and informal communication between friends
- ▶ Menzel's (2015) study on comparative forms:
  - ▶ 94.6% of attested forms do not align with the Belarusian system
  - ▶ Attrition of Belarusian linguistic forms, transfer to Russian ones
  - ▶ Therefore, ongoing language shift from Belarusian to Russian
- ▶ Hentschel and Zeller (2014):
  - ▶ Analysed 9 phonic variables: phonological and/or phonetic differences between two standard languages
  - ▶ Hierarchy of susceptibility to influence
- ▶ Through BRMS, speakers are turning away from Belarusian to Russian

# The Hierarchy

1. Tsekanje/Dzekanje – Belarusian [tsʹ/dzʹ] vs. Russian [tʹ/dʹ]
2. Fricative G – Belarusian [ɣ] vs. Russian [g]
3. Hard Sibilants – Belarusian non-palatal [tʃ] or [ʃtʃ] vs. Russian palatal [tʃʲ], [ʃtʃʲ] or [ʃʲ]
4. Hard R – Belarusian hard [r] vs. Russian soft [rʲ]
5. U-not-V – Belarusian non-syllabic semi-vowel [ɯ] or full vowel [u] vs. Russian [v]
6. Jakanje, Ekanje, Ikanje – Belarusian [a] vs. Russian [i] or common [e]
7. Non-syllabic ʉ-not-U – Belarusian non-syllabic semi-vowel [ʉ] vs. Russian [u]
8. Non-syllabic ʉ-not-L – Belarusian non-syllabic semi-vowel [ʉ] vs. Russian [ʎ]
9. Prothetic-V – Belarusian inclusion of [v] vs. Russian exclusion of it

# Brief history of 'Belarusian': Pre-Soviet

- Difficult to pinpoint its origins
- Official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania
- Under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16<sup>th</sup> century its written language fell out of use
- After 1795, under the Russian Empire, preaching, printing books and education were prohibited in Belarusian
- New term "Belarus" acquired in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Policy of non-recognition of it as its own standard
- Russian was the 'language of bread'
- 1921 Treaty of Riga divided Belarus between Poland and Soviet Russia







# Brief history of 'Belarus':

## BSSR Years

- ▶ USSR's 1927 constitution gave Belarusian official and preferential status on the territory of the BSSR
- ▶ One of four official languages of the USSR
- ▶ Literary language and culture flourished
- ▶ New standard's orthography and lexicon coded
- ▶ Number of Belarusian schools in BSSR rose from 28.4% in 1924 to 93.8% in 1929
- ▶ A return to 'peasant' Belarusian in the 1930s
- ▶ Compulsory teaching of Russian, and Russian named second official language of the BSSR
- ▶ Leading official positions held by Russian speakers
- ▶ Industrialisation of the 1960s-70s increased BSSR's urban population and brought in native Russian speakers
- ▶ Russian became the language of interethnic communication

# Post Soviet:

Early 90s

- Democracy and Belarusification
- Sole official language of the Republic
- 1990 Law on Languages
- Belarusian was to become the language of science, culture and media within 3 years; of congresses, state decrees and business within 3-5 years; and of legal matters within 10.
- 2/3 of schools in the Republic began teaching in Belarusian
- Receptiveness especially from the sphere of education



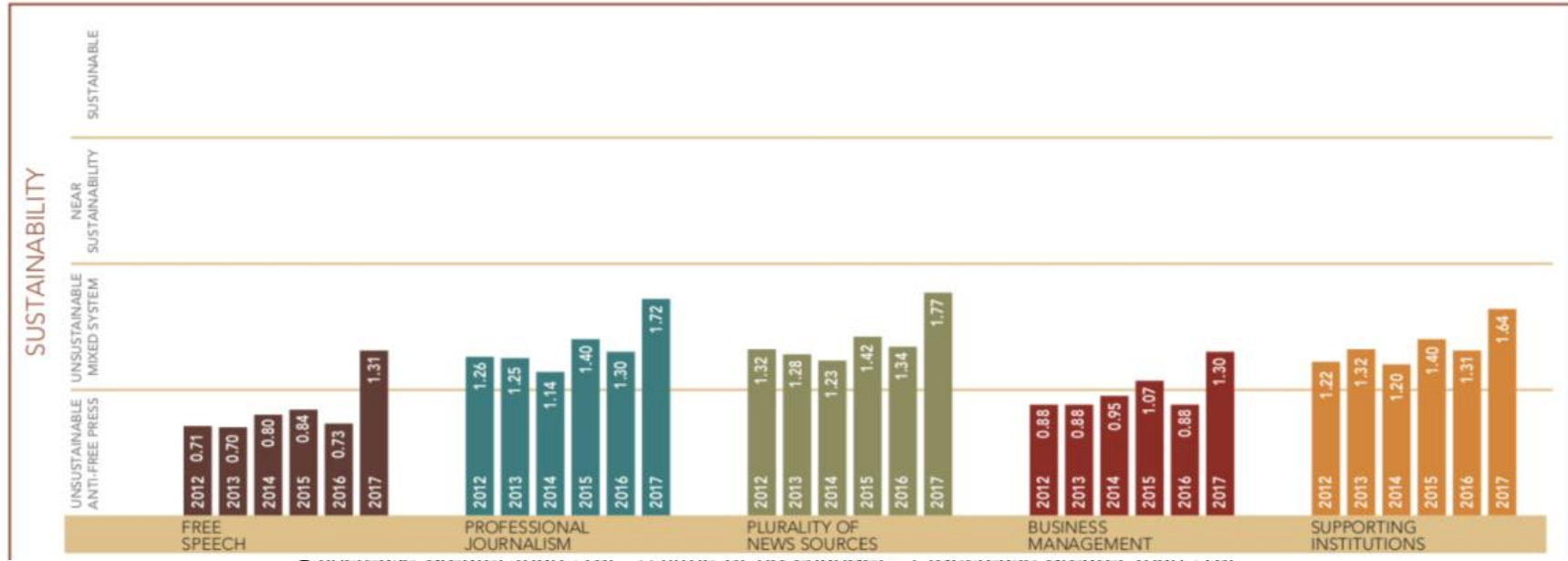


# Post-Soviet: One-Man Rule

- ▶ The 'discriminatory' language legislation
- ▶ 1994 Constitution allowed Russian to be used freely for international communication
- ▶ A language cannot possibly be the sole medium if another is to be used for communication between those ethnic groups populating the country (Zaprudski, 2002)
- ▶ 1994 Presidential Campaign to 'heal' the social situation
- ▶ Forceful removal of striking MPs from the Parliamentary Hall
- ▶ Control of media
  - ▶ Newspapers suspended for 'technical reasons'
  - ▶ Direct broadcasting of MP Antonchyk who attempted to oust Lukashenka's corruption was cut off under order of Lukashenka
  - ▶ Belarusian proponents were denied appearance on State TV and Radio Company
  - ▶ The bank account of the outspoken newspaper 'Svaboda' ('Freedom') was frozen
- ▶ Referendum in May 1995 named Russian the second official language
- ▶ Rule by decree for 7 months
- ▶ 1998 revision of the Law of Languages: 'and/or'
- ▶ 'Parents' choice'

# Media Sustainability Index (2017)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BELARUS



**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0–1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1–2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2–3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3–4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

# A Divided People

- ▶ Extent of successful actuation of language planning often depends on the view and actions of the general populace (Hentschel *et al*, 2015)
- ▶ A fragmented identity for centuries
- ▶ Under the Russian Empire, a largely illiterate and rural population: the *tutashni*, 'locals'
- ▶ 1918 freedom short-lived; no 'one people' to fuse into a singular nationally minded force
  - ▶ Many saw such attempts as 'an artificial creation'
- ▶ Division under Poland and Russia in 1921 formed two distinct identities
- ▶ Post-war BSSR, with Belarusian lands once more united, received a large influx of Russian speakers, while urbanising Belarusians also switched to Russian.
  - ▶ Russian was the 'language of bread'



# A Right to Self-Determination

- ▶ Early 90s' Belarusification policies left Russian Belarusians alienated in their own home
- ▶ A language legislation which went against a citizen's right to self-determination
- ▶ Aligned with Lukashenka's campaign to 'heal' the social situation
- ▶ Appeal of going back to the Soviet times of economic stability



Census	1999 (Belstat)	2009 (Belstat)	Tendency
Population total	10.0452 millions	9.5038 millions	∨
Eth. Belarusians	81.2%	83.7%	∧
Eth. Russians	11.4%	8.3%	∨
Eth. Polish	3.9%	3.1%	∨
Eth. Ukrainian	2.4%	1.7%	∨
Belarusian as native	73.7%	53.2%	∨
Belarusian as domestic	36.7%	23.4%	∨
Russian as native	24.1%	41.5%	∧
Russian as domestic	62.8%	70.2%	∧

## des and Use

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (2015).

- ▶ Today, a smaller part of Belarusians continues to argue for an identification with the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – difficult for the population at large to feel a connection after decades of divisions and life under the USSR
- ▶ More importantly, don't see language as a national identifier
- ▶ Native language versus mother tongue
- ▶ Both are declining
- ▶ Dorian (1999: 39): “a point of no return”

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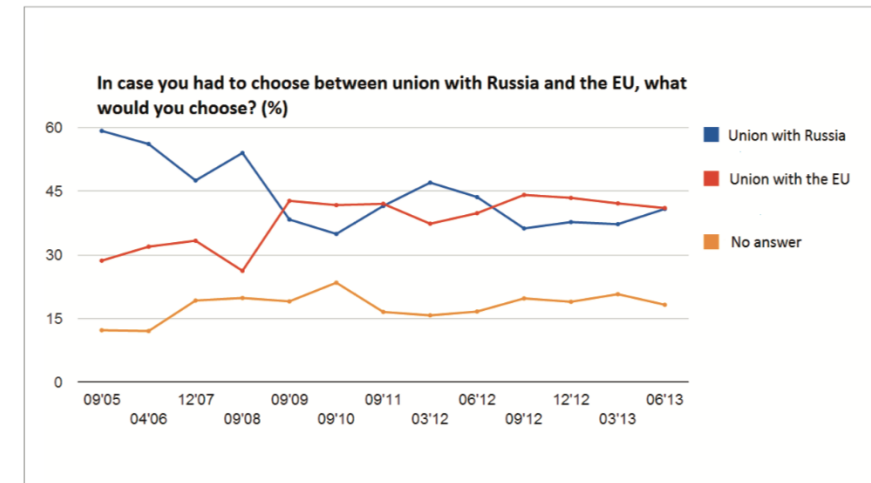
# Today's Attitudes and Use

- ▶ In 2005-2006, 2/3 of children at the pre-school level studied in Russian-medium schools
- ▶ In Universities, only 2% study in Belarusian
- ▶ The difficulty arises in requesting Belarusian-medium classes as have to outvote those wishing Russian-medium teaching
- ▶ Hentschel *et al* (2015):
  - ▶ Young Belarusians for Belarusian to be strengthened in various fields, starting from places of work to shops to middle schools
  - ▶ The further the field is away from the respondent, the more they want for Belarusian to be strengthened in it
  - ▶ Would be victims of this strengthening
  - ▶ See Russian as a language of opportunity and future success
- ▶ Children growing up with a mixed monolingual language (BRMS), confusing Belarusian and Russian
  - ▶ Pre-school programmes stress differences between the two, but harder to implement later on in study
- ▶ Even if strong protest for Belarusian, under Lukashenka's one-man rule, no group can achieve its effective function
- ▶ Small victories: Minsk transport system in Belarusian, effort of non-government organisations



# The Economic Factor

- ▶ Belarus slowest out of all post-Soviet states to implement economic reform
- ▶ Heavy reliance on Russia as a producer and a consumer
- ▶ No backing organisation for the 1990 Law on Languages
- ▶ Lacking educational resources and no willingness by the government to change this
- ▶ Supported creation of Russian textbooks for teaching of Belarusian geography and history in 2006
- ▶ Supported push for teaching of Mandarin to improve relations with China
- ▶ Desire to build stronger ties with economically advantageous neighbours, such as Russia and China
- ▶ Youth non-preferentially desires relations with the EU or Russia; not to do with language; rather, oriented on future economic benefit to the self



Source: Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. *Dynamics of Belarusian public opinion*, <<http://www.iiseps.org/trends/11>>, accessed 07 August 2013.

# Conclusion

- Responsibility of the post-Soviet language planning?
- A summation of factors:
  - A history of divisions and repressions
  - A fragmented identity
  - Ethnic composition of the country
  - Weak economy of the 90s
  - Lukashenka's powerful promise and one-man rule
  - Media censorship
  - A strive of the government and population for an economically advantageous future, which Belarusian does not offer

