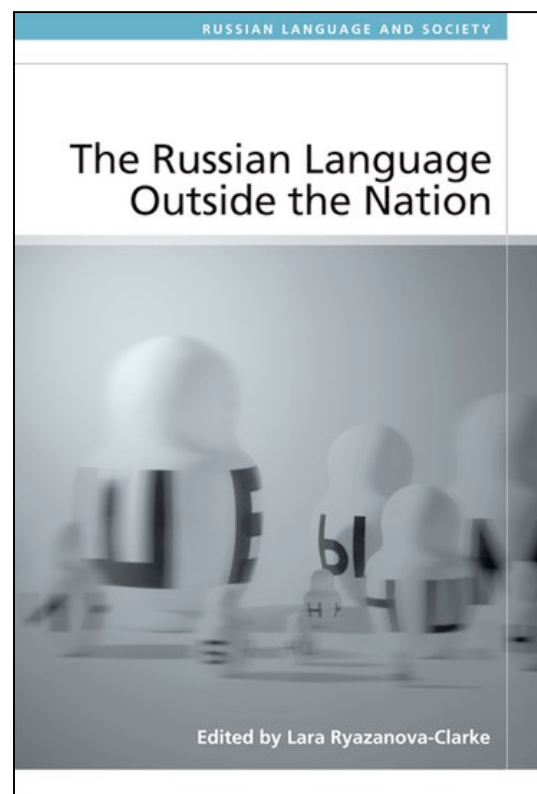




## Reviews

**The Russian Language Outside the Nation**, by Lara Ryazanova-Clarke. Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp 292, £75; ISBN 9780748668458. Language: English

*The Russian Language Outside of the Nation*, edited by Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (University of Edinburgh), contains ten chapters that discuss Russian as a minority language in Ukraine, Belarus, Israel, Italy, Estonia, Latvia, and the United States. As Ryazanova-Clarke observes in the carefully and thoughtfully written introduction, “[w]hile normally in a situation of migration, people move across the borders, in the new post-Soviet environment, it was borders that moved across people” (p. 2). The resulting “diasporisation” (p. 2) has contributed to issues of language change, policy, and identity with regard to “global Russian” (p. 3). Ryazanova-Clarke traces “global Russian” back to Old Russian, convincingly arguing that “East Slavic dialects close to Old Russian were either spoken or understood by multiple ethnic groups trading with and bordering Rus” (p. 3), and that the trends of multilingualism and russification



continued relatively consistently from the reign of Ivan IV through the end of the Soviet period owing to conquest, expansion, social stratification, and widespread standardization (pp. 3-5). Thus the volume seeks to understand Russian as a transnational language in the post-Soviet period, beginning in 1992, considering many complex influences and trends including Russian as an important *lingua franca* for broadcasting in the former Soviet sphere of influence and on the internet, where Russian is the second most common language after English (pp. 14-15). The introduction masterfully anticipates the volume’s chapters, establishing an unflinchingly persuasive premise for the contents, which do not disappoint.

The book’s ten chapters are subdivided into five parts. Part I, “Russian and Its Legal Status”, contains two chapters. The first by Michael Newcity (Duke University) considers

international law and minority languages in many of the former Newly Independent States (NIS) with added emphasis on Armenia and Latvia. The second by Bill Bowring (Professor of Law, Birkbeck College, University of London) discusses language policies in the Ukrainian constitution, national law, and social and educational policy. These two articles are valuable collectively for the perspectives they provide on the legal status of Russian among ethnic languages. Newcity's discussion of language policy within Armenia's borders is intriguing. However, there seems to be no mention of the large Armenian diaspora in this discussion, perhaps this is appropriate given the legal focus of the chapter, but addressing only speakers of Armenian and Yezidi Kurdish overlooks several other minority languages spoken in Armenia's borders, including Azerbaijani and Greek. The Yezidi, like Armenians, are also part of a diaspora that extends beyond Armenia's borders. Bowring's points are very persuasively argued and supported by legal evidence, but occasionally venture into claims that are not entirely supported. For example, in the conclusion he states "I remain an optimist for Ukraine", which is not so much a conclusion as an emotionally-charged opinion. The conclusion also lightly touches on bilingual education, a topic not discussed elsewhere in the article, citing one source concerned only with the "cognitive and pedagogical benefits" of bilingual education. Yet throughout the main discussion of this chapter, education has not been a topic that has been significantly addressed. Such a conclusion, at least, in this reviewer's opinion, seems a bit out of place. An entire article, in fact, could be written on this topic. This, however, in no way detracts from the overall value added by these two chapters in this section that address language legislation.

Part II, "Linguistic Perceptions and Symbolic Values" also has two chapters, one by Curt Woolhiser (Brandeis University) on language use and identity in Belarus, and the volume's fourth chapter, by Volodymyr Kulyk (Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences) discusses the socially-determined usages of Russian and Ukrainian in Ukraine, and popular opinion surrounding the usage of both. Woolhiser's chapter is possibly the longest in the entire volume, discussing at great length Belarusians' perspectives on Russian and Belarusian. One of the more interesting finds of this chapter is the idea that Russian serves as a language of Belarusian nationalism and patriotism more than Belarusian does (p. 89). Relying primarily on census and survey data, Woolhiser provides a well-rounded and exceptionally comprehensive point of view on complex issues of the status of the Belarusian language, particularly with regard to standardization and social stigmatization. As the chapter delves more deeply into sociolinguistics at the end, some changes in terminology might have been advisable (e.g., the word *литературный* (Russ.), or *літературны* (Bel.) is better translated as *standard*, rather than *literary* in sociolinguistic context). Woolhiser's compelling discussion of *trasiianka*, a socially stigmatized dialect (or sociolect?) of Belarusian, emphasizes that Russian is perceived as the language of the educated elite, whereas Belarusian is reduced by many speakers to *trasiianka*, the language of the peasant class or uneducated (i.e., *socially stigmatized*). Kulyk's chapter on Ukraine is a timely and very well researched study in perceptual linguistics using data acquired in interviews with Ukrainians. The interviewees in general are supportive of Ukrainian as a national language, with seemingly no ill will towards Russian. A particularly interesting point is made by one respondent who asks: "Why don't they make Ukrainian [official] in Russia?" (p. 134).

Part III, “Russian-Speaking Communities and Identity Negotiations” has three chapters. Monica Perotto (University of Bologna) presents a sociolinguistic investigation of Italy’s Russian-speaking diaspora, Claudia Zbenovich (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) discusses Russian language usage in the raising of Russian-Israeli children, and Martin Ehala (University of Tartu) and Anastassia Zabrodskaja (Tallinn University) discuss Russian speakers in Estonia. This entire section, as opposed to earlier ones, deals exclusively with diaspora. Perotto’s chapter summarizes five years of research about Russian speakers living in Italy. The findings provide examples of code-switching and code-mixing, a discussion of challenges for Russian-speaking schoolchildren in Italian schools, social integration, and identity. Ehala and Zabrodskaja’s chapter on Russian in Estonia reports results of a study of nearly 500 Russian speakers from five different sociolinguistic regions of Estonia. The goal of the study was to further define the types of sociolinguistic variation among Russian speakers in Estonia and the attitudes of speakers with regard to beliefs and values about language and identity. Zbenovich’s chapter on Russian-speakers in Israel considers many questions of pragmatics, bilingualism, and the functions of code-switching.

Part IV, “Language Contact and the Globalisation of Russian” has two chapters. David R. Andrews (Georgetown University) presents a comparison of Russian among émigrés in the United States with that of post-Soviet speakers of Russian in the Russian Federation. Andrews presents a well-informed analysis that is enjoyable to read and points out important distinctions in the borrowing and usage of English words in these two separate speech environments. This article could even be discussed with beginning through advanced-level students of Russian at the undergraduate level. Aleksandrs Berdicevskis (University of Tromsø) compares the lexicon of Latvian Russian with that of Russian in Russia, for another very compelling and interesting read on how the same language can differ significantly depending on the speech environment.

The volume concludes with a final fifth part containing one chapter by the volume’s editor on Russian and globalisation. This last chapter, “Russian with an Accent: Globalisation and the Post-Soviet Imaginary”, masterfully addresses the central issue of the volume, discussing Russian in the post-Soviet space, considering in particular the influence on the language of the broadcasting conglomerate *Mir*. Ryazanova-Clarke identifies three frames of knowledge perpetuated by *Mir*: historical, imagined, and borrowed (pp. 273-4). This leads to the conclusion that these frames “compete, intertwine and superimpose” while unexpectedly, a resulting homogeneity of Russian speakers is nevertheless “disrupted” (p. 274). In short, this last chapter suggests that entities like *Mir*, despite their efforts, may not be as effective as we might suspect in homogenising and even hegemonising Russian-speaking speech communities in the post-Soviet space.

In general, *The Russian Language Outside the Nation* has some excellent and much-needed insights into language change in the post-Soviet space, challenging ideas about the status of Russian as *lingua franca*, and also emphasizing ways that Russian is undergoing change from within fully native speech communities in and adjacent to the Russian Federation. This is quite a different volume from Ryazanova-Clarke’s *The Russian Language Today*, co-authored with Terence Wade, in that the content is far more sociologically-driven, rather than largely linguistically descriptive. It also addresses sociolinguistic changes to post-

Soviet Russian since *The Russian Language Today* was published in 1999. This book is far more ambitious, examining the Russian language beyond its borders and understanding the life it lives in speech communities all over the world, with special attention to the post-Soviet space.

DR. RACHEL STAUFFER works as Assistant Professor of Russian and Associate Director of International Programs at Ferrum College in rural southwestern Virginia, where she oversees the Russian major and minor and the minor in Contemporary Russian Studies. Her research interests include Russian phonology, pragmatics, markedness and distinctive feature theory, Russian cultural history, non-European Russian literature, culture, film and post-Soviet literature. [rachelstauffer@gmail.com]