

**The Centre for the History of Science**  
cordially invites you to a guest lecture

**Vladimir Putin, Normative Isomorphism, and the Language/Dialect Dichotomy**  
by Professor Alexander MAXWELL,  
Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand

When: January 15, 2026, 2.30 p.m.  
Where: Gewi-Sitzungszimmer.

Maxwell analyzes Vladimir Putin's 2021 essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" as an example of political rhetoric invoking the language/dialect dichotomy. Curiously, Putin argued both that Ukrainian is a "dialect" of a greater Russian language and that Ukrainian is a distinct "language" different from Russian. As a form of political rhetoric, the language/dialect dichotomy draws its power from normative isomorphism, the idea that languages, nations, and states ought to coincide. According to the logic of normative isomorphism, claiming that Russian and Ukrainian are separate "languages" gives the Russian Federation a claim to annex the Russian-speaking south-east of Ukraine, while claiming that Ukrainian is a "dialect" of Russian would justify the Russian Federation's annexation of Ukraine in its entirety. By endorsing both positions, Putin's speech provided pre-emptively justifications for different policies. Neither the language/dialect dichotomy nor normative isomorphism offer a solid basis for political legitimacy.



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