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Marina Sokolova,
Open University of Lisbon, Portugal

*CORRESPONDENCE

Vladislava Warditz
✉ vwarditz@uni-koeln.de

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Back to Russian monolingualism? Discursive reflections on the 2017 educational reform in Russian- and Tatar-language media

Alfinaz Gimadieva¹ and Vladislava Warditz^{1,2*}

¹Slavic Studies, University of Potsdam, Universität Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany, ²Slavic Studies, Universität zu Köln, Cologne, Germany

Aims: This paper examines recent developments in Russian-language policy through a case study of the Republic of Tatarstan, with a focus on the abolition of compulsory Tatar-language instruction in 2017. Previous studies predominantly analyzed Russian-language media; our study aims to explore how this policy shift has been discursively framed and contested in both Russian- and Tatar-language media. Positioned within broader discussions of language ideologies in multilingual and post-imperial contexts, the study examines how such reforms reflect enduring tensions between centralizing state narratives and regional demands for linguistic and cultural recognition. Drawing on theoretical insights from Critical Discourse Studies and language ideology research, the paper examines how media discourses shape and reflect the ideological landscape of bilingualism and minority language rights in the Russian Federation.

Methods: Using a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis approach, we analyse a corpus of 42 articles—20 from Russian-language and 22 from Tatar-language online media outlets—published in response to the 2017 educational reform. These sources were selected to represent the most prominent discursive reactions to the abolition of mandatory Tatar-language instruction in schools. The analysis focused on identifying evaluative language, argumentation strategies, and thematic framing of the policy change. Articles were coded for stance (positive, negative, neutral) and categorized by themes such as cultural identity, legal arguments, educational rights, and national unity. The study draws on CDA frameworks (Fairclough, van Dijk, Blommaert). It applies the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse to uncover how underlying ideologies and power relations inform media representations of language policy. The comparative analysis enables an examination of divergent narratives between linguistic communities.

Results: The findings reveal a stark contrast in the discursive framing between Russian- and Tatar-language media. Tatar-language outlets predominantly emphasize the symbolic and cultural significance of Tatar instruction, framing the reform as a threat to ethnic identity and linguistic heritage. In contrast, Russian-language media tend to highlight legal compliance, civic unity, and educational pragmatism, positioning the reform as a step toward reinforcing national cohesion and equality. These divergent perspectives illustrate how language policies are deeply embedded in ideological struggles over identity, power, and statehood. The study demonstrates that public debates in Tatarstan are not merely about language instruction but about competing visions of federalism, minority rights, and the role of regional languages in the post-Soviet space. This case study underscores the tense and fluctuating nature of language relations

in post-imperial contexts like Russia, where historical legacies of both linguistic empowerment and suppression continue to shape contemporary policy debates. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how language ideologies are constructed and contested in multilingual states, highlighting the need for more balanced research that incorporates both dominant and minority language perspectives.

KEYWORDS

critical discourse studies, language ideology, critical discourse analysis, post-imperial multilingualism, language policies in the Post-Soviet space, Tatar-Russian bilingualism in Tatarstan, post-colonial language studies

1 Introduction

The recent shift in Russia's language policy can be seen as part of a broader pattern observable in multilingual states, where language use is often unbalanced and far from harmonious—as seen in Belgium, South Africa, Canada, Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Belarus, or Ukraine. In this context, Russia, with its app. 150 languages (Alpatov, 2005), offers particularly fertile ground for examining language ideologies and policies. Russian-language policy has long oscillated between idealistic support for linguistic diversity and imperial strategies of suppression: from the establishment of national schools and the development of grammars for unwritten languages in the 19th century and again after the October Revolution to the banning of publications in Belarusian and Lithuanian after 1863, and the systematic Russification efforts following 1938 (Belikov and Krysin, 2001; Grenoble, 2003). These shifts reflect broader ideological turns in state policy—between phases of liberalization and periods of imperial ambition. Within this framework, our paper examines the debates sparked by the most recent changes in Russia's language policy, using a critical-discursive approach and focusing on Russian- and Tatar-language media in Tatarstan. The shift was ostensibly triggered by Vladimir Putin's statement at the Council for Interethnic Relations in Yoshkar-Ola in July 2017, in which he asserted that forcing someone to learn a language that is not their mother tongue is as unacceptable as reducing instruction in Russian. This declaration marks the starting point for our case study of Tatarstan, a republic with two official languages: Tatar and Russian. Putin's declaration ignited widespread debate over the abolition of compulsory Tatar instruction and the broader implications of the new policy. These discussions appeared prominently in federal and regional online media, both in Tatar and Russian, forming the corpus for our analysis. By examining these sources, we compare the arguments and reactions of the republic's two largest linguistic communities.

The status of titular languages in Russia's national and autonomous republics has historically been precarious, fluctuating between symbolic recognition and functional marginalization (Alpatov, 2005; Belikov and Krysin, 2001; Neroznak, 1995). While Soviet language policy institutionalized titular languages alongside Russian, the latter remained dominant as the language of interethnic communication and social mobility. In the post-Soviet era, autonomous republics such as Tatarstan sought greater linguistic sovereignty by granting co-official status to their titular languages and introducing compulsory instruction in schools. However, these

efforts have been increasingly curtailed by federal policies aimed at reinforcing Russian linguistic dominance and limiting regional autonomy. Russia's language policy has shifted over time, alternating between promoting and suppressing minority languages. In this context, Tatarstan presents a particularly illustrative case. It is often seen as “atypical within Russia because of the high proportion of non-Russians in a region that lies geographically, economically and politically within the heart of the federation” (Veinguer and Davis, 2007, p. 188).

Historically, the interaction between Tatar and Russian cultures intensified after the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan the Terrible in 1552 and the subsequent Christianisation of the region (cf. Faller, 2011, p. 6). For Russia, this conquest symbolized “the earliest triumph of a nascent imperial power,” while for Tatars, it marked “the source of all lost hopes and all future woes” (Graney, 2009, p. 5). The Tatars are the oldest and largest minority in the history of Russia—spanning the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the current Russian Federation—with a population of ~4.7 million according to the 2021 Russian Census (Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), 2021). The Tatar elite was integrated into the ruling structures of the Russian state early on, following the Mongol-Tatar period, particularly during the era of the Golden Horde. Prominent noble families of Tatar origin, such as the Yusupovs, Mansurovs, and even the ancestors of composer Sergei Rachmaninov, became part of the imperial Russian aristocracy. Tatars are widely dispersed across the former Soviet Union, including significant populations in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine, as well as throughout the Russian Federation (Minority Rights Group International, n.d.). Moscow hosts one of the largest Tatar diasporas, with an estimated number of 500,000 people (Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), 2021). Interestingly, while Tatars are generally well integrated into Russian society outside of Tatarstan—occupying visible roles as actors, entrepreneurs, journalists, politicians, and public intellectuals—a substantial portion still regards themselves as part of a distinct ethnocultural group. This dual identification reflects both successful social integration and the persistence of a strong cultural and diasporic identity within the broader framework of the Russian Federation.

Despite this fraught history, Tatarstan developed into a multiethnic republic where Tatar-Russian bilingualism and interculturality became normalized (cf. Bayramova, 2001, p. 12). Bilingualism was actively promoted around the time of the Soviet collapse and was legally affirmed in 1990 when Tatar was

granted co-official status (Deklaracija, 1990). Further measures were introduced to move beyond the Soviet model of de jure bilingualism and de facto Russian dominance (Wingsender, 2016, p. 11). Education policy became central to this effort: in 1993, Tatar was made a compulsory subject in schools for all pupils, regardless of ethnicity (Guzelbaeva and Fatkhullova, 2012, p. 35). While this bolstered the institutional presence of Tatar, it also triggered resistance among parts of the population, who questioned the relevance and fairness of mandatory Tatar instruction. These tensions escalated in July 2017 after President Putin, during a session of the Council for Interethnic Relations in Yoshkar-Ola, criticized the compulsory teaching of minority languages. This prompted federal inspections of schools across national republics, including Tatarstan, and led to amendments to the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” (Federal Law No. 317, 2018). The reforms abolished the compulsory study of regional languages and replaced it with an optional “mother tongue” subject to be selected by parents. Following the policy change, Tatar lost its status as a mandatory school subject, deepening the already uneven balance between Russian and Tatar language use. This policy shift required a recalibration of language policy in Tatarstan and sparked widespread debate, especially around the removal of mandatory Tatar-language education.

Our study examines how these debates have played out in Tatarstan’s media landscape since 2017, focusing specifically on the abolition of compulsory Tatar-language instruction. While existing research has analyzed the Russian-language media discourse on this issue, no comprehensive study has yet compared both Tatar- and Russian-language perspectives (detailed review in Warditz, 2022). To address this gap, our study conducts a comparative discourse analysis of Tatar- and Russian-language media coverage, exploring how narratives of advantage and disadvantage are constructed and whether framing differs across linguistic communities. Employing the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (hereafter—SKAD) as our analytical framework, we aim to uncover how language, ideology, and power intersect in the representation of language policy reform within Tatarstan’s bilingual media. Furthermore, when discussing our results, we aim to situate the main insights within a broader historical and areal-linguistic context of (post)imperial language policies.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical context and state of research; Section 3 outlines the research questions and hypotheses; Section 4 details the methodology; Section 5 describes the data collection; Section 6 provides the data analysis; Section 7 offers the discussion; and Section 8 concludes with the conclusion and outlook.

2 Theoretical context and state of research

The study of language policies in *postcolonial*¹ contexts has gained significant scholarly attention, particularly in regions that

have undergone drastic political transformations, such as the former Soviet Union (for an overview, see Alpatov, 2005). In these contexts, language policies often function as instruments of power, identity, and resistance (Pujolar and González, 2012). Postimperial language policies are particularly complex, as they are shaped by historical colonial legacies and the need to balance national unity with the preservation of minority languages. Language revival efforts in these settings are often framed within a larger sociopolitical agenda, where languages, once suppressed or marginalized, are revitalized to assert cultural identity and national sovereignty (Huss et al., 2003).

Examples of this can be seen in diverse postcolonial settings. In the post-apartheid context of South Africa, efforts to elevate indigenous African languages to official status have encountered challenges due to entrenched inequalities and the dominance of English (Alexander, 2003). Similarly, in postcolonial Ireland and Wales, the revival of Irish and Welsh has been linked to broader cultural reassertion, though outcomes have varied based on policy implementation and societal attitudes (Moriarty, 2011). These cases demonstrate how language revival is not only about linguistic survival but also about reclaiming historical agency and redefining collective identities in the aftermath of imperial domination.

The post-Soviet space presents a unique case for language policy studies. With the dissolution of the USSR, many former Soviet republics, including Russia, were faced with the challenge of reasserting the status of their indigenous languages, often alongside Russian, which had been entrenched as the dominant language throughout the Soviet era. In these countries, language revival is not only about linguistic restoration but also about the re-establishment of a distinct national identity (Warditz and Goritskaya, 2021; Tsimpli and Kambyl, 2013; Bayramova, 2011). Studies within the post-Soviet space have also pointed out a specific challenge: the coexistence of multiple languages within a single territory often leads to language shift or attrition of indigenous languages, especially in regions where the titular language of a republic is in competition with Russian. While there is a strong desire to revive and maintain these languages, political, educational, and social factors complicate their status (Arutyunova and Zamyatin, 2020). This phenomenon is also observed in Tatarstan, where Tatar and Russian coexist as state languages, and the tension between preserving Tatar and maintaining the political and social dominance of Russian is a central issue (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016).

In the case of Tatarstan, this tension became especially pronounced after the Russian Federation introduced changes to its education policy in 2017. The law abolishing compulsory Tatar language instruction in schools was a significant shift, raising questions about the future of linguistic diversity in the republic. Studies by Wingsender (2016) and Sagitova (2016) have examined the state of the Tatar language before 2017, noting a steady erosion of its usage in the public sphere, particularly in urban areas. However, the 2017 policy change sparked new debates and a new wave of research on how such shifts in language policy affect the broader socio-political landscape. Guboglo (2019) and Fatcher (2020) argue that these policy changes signify a growing nationalistic trend that places minority languages like Tatar at risk, while others have

¹ We employ the terms *postcolonial* and *postimperial* heuristically to highlight power relations between the dominant language (Russian) and subordinated or minoritized languages, without engaging the broader historical and political debate (cf. Chari and Verdery, 2009). The Russian vs. (post)-Soviet case exhibits features common to other (post)colonial and

(post)imperial contexts—such as the deployment of a dominant language to consolidate authority—while also displaying distinct historical, political, and linguistic trajectories that differentiate it from classical colonial examples.

suggested that these moves may be part of a broader strategy to integrate Tatarstan more fully into the Russian Federation's federal framework.

In sum, research on language policy in Tatarstan since 2017 has primarily focused on the responses of various social actors, including educators, politicians, and the public (Maximova et al., 2017; Mordvinova et al., 2021; Musina, 2020). However, these studies have not examined Russian-language and Tatar-language media comparatively. We aim to address this gap by analyzing how these media represent language policy, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic landscape in Tatarstan and inscribing it within the broader context of other comparable situations. Our study on post-2017 language policies in Tatarstan thus raises important questions about the future of bilingualism in Russia's national republics; the case of Tatarstan serves as a valuable model for understanding the complexities of language policy in postimperial contexts, particularly in regions where the legacies of empire and the quest for cultural revitalisation remain in tension.

3 Research questions and hypotheses

Drawing from the broader theoretical context of postimperial language policies, discourse analysis, and the dynamics of bilingualism in post-Soviet contexts, our study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How is the abolition of compulsory Tatar language instruction at schools framed in Tatar- and Russian-language media?

RQ2: What role do language ideologies play in the construction of narratives surrounding the language policy shift?

RQ 3: Do Tatar- and Russian-language media construct different narratives of advantage and disadvantage regarding the Tatar language policy reform, and if so, how?

RQ 4: What is the impact of political power dynamics on language policy framing in Tatarstan's bilingual media environment?

Thereby, our work hypotheses run as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *Russian-language media will predominantly present the abolition of Tatar language instruction as a positive development, emphasizing the unification of the Russian Federation and the practical benefits of Russian-language dominance.*

This hypothesis suggests that Russian-language media will likely frame the policy change in alignment with broader federal ideologies, portraying it as a step toward national cohesion and modernization. Previous research has shown that Russian-language media often valorise linguistic homogeneity, equating it with state unity, administrative efficiency, and civilisational superiority (Zamyatin, 2012). Such framings reflect a recurring narrative in Russian federal discourse, where the promotion of Russian is seen not only as pragmatic but also as a tool of soft power and integration (Laruelle, 2015). Similar patterns can be found in other post-Soviet contexts where Russian media discourses reinforce centralist values while downplaying local linguistic identities (Korth, 2005). As Zamyatin (2012) argues, the removal of regional language

instruction is frequently justified as a means of eliminating inefficiencies and aligning with “universal” educational standards.

Hypothesis 2: *Tatar-language media will present the abolition of compulsory Tatar language instruction as a negative development, framing it as a threat to cultural identity and a loss of linguistic rights.*

In contrast, Tatar-language media are likely to frame the policy shift as a blow to cultural autonomy and linguistic survival. Numerous scholars have emphasized how minority language communities in Russia experience federal language reforms as efforts to marginalize their identities (Graney, 2009; Fallor, 2011). Tatar intellectuals and media outlets have long positioned the Tatar language as central to the republic's national identity, interpreting reductions in its institutional support as violations of cultural rights (Wertheim, 2003). Research by Zamyatin (2016) confirms that local responses to federal education reforms are often deeply politicized in national republics, where the loss of linguistic status is equated with political disenfranchisement and historical erasure.

Hypothesis 3: *The discourse in Russian-language media will emphasize the necessity of modernizing education and making the curriculum more practical, while Tatar-language media will focus on the preservation of linguistic diversity and the right of Tatar speakers to maintain their language.*

This hypothesis assumes that the two language communities operate under different sets of priorities and ideological frameworks. Russian-language media often emphasize the utilitarian value of the Russian-language, portraying it as essential for upward mobility, national progress, and global competitiveness (Gorenburg, 2003). In contrast, Tatar-language media typically underscore the symbolic and cultural importance of preserving linguistic heritage through institutional measures such as education (Wingsender, 2016). Kymlicka (2001) argues that education in the mother tongue is a cornerstone of minority rights, while Hogan-Brun and Wolff (2003) highlight how educational reforms in multilingual societies often reveal competing visions of citizenship and national identity.

Hypothesis 4: *The narratives in both Tatar and Russian-language media will reveal a significant ideological divide regarding the role of the Tatar language, with Tatar-language media framing the policy change in terms of language rights and identity politics and Russian-language media framing it in terms of state unity and pragmatism.*

This hypothesis anticipates a stark discursive cleavage between the two linguistic communities. Tatar-language media are likely to articulate the policy shift through the lens of minority rights and cultural preservation, drawing on discourses of historical injustice and ongoing marginalization (Graney, 2009; Wertheim, 2003). Conversely, Russian-language media will likely frame the same shift as a necessary realignment with national priorities, rationalizing it through themes of practicality, standardization, and unity (Laruelle, 2015). As Blommaert (1999) notes, language ideological debates often reflect deeper struggles over authority and legitimacy. This divergence in framing mirrors broader ideological tensions in Russia's federal structure, where discourses of sovereignty clash with centralizing state narratives (Shnirelman, 2003; Foucault, 1972).

By addressing these research questions and testing the above hypotheses, the study will provide insights into the complex relationships between language, ideology, and power in postimperial contexts, specifically within the unique sociolinguistic setting of Tatarstan. The comparative analysis

of Tatar- and Russian-language media will contribute to the broader understanding of language policy debates in bilingual republics, particularly in the post-Soviet space, where questions of language, identity, and national unity remain highly contested.

4 Methodology

For the methodological approach of the current study, qualitative critical discourse analysis (hereafter—CDA) was employed. A corpus of 20 articles from Russian-language and 22 articles from Tatar-language online media was selected, all addressing the events of 2017, namely the abolishment of mandatory Tatar language instruction in schools and the immediate consequences of this educational reform for the language policy of the republic. Particular attention was paid to how the advantages and disadvantages of the new language policy were presented in these media sources. All identified arguments and evaluations were categorized within each language group by thematic topics in order to uncover general trends in discourse across Tatar- and Russian-language media. In the final stage, the analysis explored whether significant differences emerged in the framing and treatment of the topics between the two language groups.

In order to explore what advantages and disadvantages of the abolishment of compulsory Tatar language instruction and of the subsequent language policy in the republic are represented in Russian- and Tatar-language online media, and whether there are significant differences in how the topic is treated in both languages, the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Keller, 2011) was adopted as the analytical framework. SKAD, like discourse analysis more broadly, focuses not only on the use of language but on how language use shapes social reality and is, in turn, influenced by social, political, and cultural contexts. It seeks to uncover the underlying ideologies and power relations embedded within spoken or written texts, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between language and the structures governing societal interactions. This method was also chosen for its capacity to examine the situational conditions and the role of collective actors within which discourse occurs, in addition to analyzing texts themselves (Keller, 2011, p. 61).

Critical discourse analysis provides a complementary lens for analyzing how language ideologies, power relations, and social inequalities are constructed, legitimized, and contested through discourse (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998; Blommaert, 2005). CDA emphasizes not only the content of texts but also their socio-political contexts and the power structures they (re)produce. In the context of language policy, CDA has been widely used to investigate how media, political actors, and institutions discursively negotiate issues of linguistic rights, national identity, and minority language maintenance (Johnson, 2011; Shohamy, 2006; Blackledge, 2005).

In this study, the analysis was conducted in several stages following established CDA and SKAD procedures. At the first stage, the collected materials were filtered by keywords, with an additional selection based on the date of publication and the geographical location of the outlet or its target audience.

The next step involved an initial close reading of the texts to identify and analyse their semantic fields. The main thematic keywords included teaching methods, education, the future of

the language, the connection between language and politics, and language as an element of national identity and its perceived threats.

Subsequently, the texts were examined for evaluative language with a negative connotation. This was done using a set of indicator words in both languages, such as *limited, not enough, difficult, negative, refuse, terrible, tragedy, afraid, lose, decline, decrease, die, relegated, no longer, reduction, mistrust, doubts, restrict, battle, second-class, mockery, not consider the necessity, risk, impossible to teach, will not know, last generation*.

The remaining articles were then analyzed for evaluative language with positive or neutral connotations. Here, the set of indicator words included *improving, interested, increase, rethink, happy, very good, various, many ways, available options, try, easier, does no any harm, success of preserving, satisfaction, need the Tatar language*.

Special attention was given to rhetorical and stylistic devices capable of altering the tone and meaning of statements: irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, euphemisms, as well as the use of contrasts and metaphors. This allowed for a more precise interpretation of the author's evaluative stance, particularly when it was expressed implicitly.

The subsequent stage focused on argumentation strategies—the ways in which authors constructed their reasoning. The analysis examined the values and beliefs they appealed to, such as the appropriateness of teaching methods, threats to the future of the language or to national identity, and the framing of language as a tool of political struggle. The guiding analytical principle was the identification of narrative patterns such as “it was bad—it became better”, “it was bad—it became worse”, and “it was good—it became worse”.

Finally, the articles and examples were categorized into two overarching groups—advantages and disadvantages. Within each group, thematic subcategories were further identified. For example, in the “education rights” domain, subcategories included “ineffective teaching methods”, “lack of instructional hours”, and “excess of Tatar language teachers”, among others, enabling the visualization and systematic organization of the data. These codes were grouped into broader discursive frames and linked to ideological positions, allowing for a comparison of how the Russian- and Tatar-language media constructed and evaluated the policy change. This approach draws on methods used in similar CDA and SKAD studies of media discourse and language policy (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998; Keller, 2011; Blackledge, 2005; Duchêne and Heller, 2012). Following this tradition, our study aimed to uncover not only explicit arguments but also the underlying ideologies, actor positions, and power relations shaping media representations of the Tatar language's status in the republic's educational and sociopolitical landscape.

5 Data collecting

Our paper examines 42 articles—22 in Tatar and 20 in Russian—on the topic of the advantages and disadvantages of language policy in the Republic of Tatarstan since 2017 as presented in online media. The articles were selected from a range of online media sources, representing diverse narratives and targeting different audience demographics to ensure a comprehensive analysis

of varying discursive practices. The data collection was carried out in four steps: (1) identification of the research sources, (2) definition of keywords related to the discourse topic, (3) specification of inclusion criteria, and (4) coding of relevant discourse samples.

The initial collection of articles was substantially larger, with more Russian-language materials than Tatar-language ones. This numerical difference may be attributed both to the actual predominance of Russian-language publications and to the fact that Google's search algorithm is more effectively optimized for finding Russian-language content. Articles were selected according to the primary criterion of either the media outlet's location in Tatarstan or its coverage of events in the republic. Materials that addressed the 2017 reform but did not contain evaluative statements or argumentation regarding its advantages and disadvantages were excluded from the sample.

The primary data source was online media, specifically the digital versions of newspapers and magazines in Tatar and Russian, with open access via the Google search engine. This source enabled the capture of contemporary discourse practices in both languages within their social, political, and cultural contexts. The next step in data collection involved defining the keywords for the search. The following keywords and phrases were established for use in Russian and Tatar:

- “Tatar language and Tatar literature at school” (*rus.* татарский язык и татарская литература в школе; *tat.* татар теле һәм әдәбияты мәктәптә)
- “Abolishment of Tatar at school” (*rus.* отмена татарского языка в школе; *tat.* мәктәпләрдә татар телен гамәлдән чыгару)
- “Learning of the official language at school” (*rus.* изучение государственного языка в школе; *tat.* мәктәптә дәүләт теле өйрәнү)
- “Mother tongue lessons” (*rus.* предмет родной язык; *tat.* туган тел предметы)
- “The future of the Tatar language” (*rus.* будущее татарского языка; *tat.* татар теленң киләчәге).²

The selection of keywords was informed by the core concepts and debates surrounding the 2017 language policy reform and was designed to capture a broad spectrum of discourse addressing both policy implementation and ideological evaluations of language education. Keyword-based sampling has been widely employed in discourse studies on language policy and media representation to identify relevant data while maintaining transparency and replicability (Johnson, 2011; Baker, 2006). Similar approaches have been used in studies such as Baker et al. (2008), which analyzed media discourse on multiculturalism through keyword searches, and in Krzyżanowski (2010), who used keyword-based corpora to investigate the discursive construction of European identity in press coverage. This method allows for systematic retrieval of thematically relevant texts while grounding the analysis in discursive patterns that emerge from the actual linguistic and thematic framing in the media (Baker, 2006; Krzyżanowski, 2010; Johnson, 2011).

The inclusion criteria for selecting relevant data were, first and foremost, the publication period. Articles had to be published shortly after the changes in educational law and up until the completion of this research paper. Therefore, articles published from September 2017 to November 2023 were considered for analysis. Another important criterion was that the media outlets originate in the Republic of Tatarstan, report from or about the republic, and include both state-affiliated and non-state media. This study focused exclusively on media outlets based in the Republic of Tatarstan, as their communication is directly oriented toward the republic's residents, who were in a position to experience the impact of changes in language policy firsthand. The abolition of compulsory Tatar language instruction in schools was of limited relevance to residents of regions such as Moscow, and the corresponding media discourse in those areas was likely to differ substantially. Furthermore, Tatarstan-based media tended to concentrate specifically on issues related to the Tatar language, whereas media outlets from other regions, while also covering the 2017 reform, typically addressed it in a broader context that encompassed other national republics, such as Yakutia, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Mordovia, among others.

One exception was included in the sample: although this outlet was neither based in Tatarstan nor reported exclusively about the republic, it met the other criteria (publication period and relevance of content). Furthermore, this outlet covers events across Russia rather than focusing on one or several specific regions. The article selected from this outlet was an interview with a representative of Tatarstan's education sector and contained explicit evaluative statements and was therefore incorporated into the analysis.

All selected articles were analyzed for their treatment of the positive and negative consequences of the 2017 language policy. According to the sampling criteria, articles were drawn from six Tatar-language online media outlets (*Kazan utlary* [“Kazan Lights”], *Intertat*, *Shakhri Kazan* [“Urban Kazan”], *Vatanyim Tatarstan* [“My Homeland Tatarstan”], *Madani Zhomga* [“Cultural Friday”], and *Azatliq Radiosi* [“Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty”]) and ten Russian-language online media outlets (*Business Online*, *Radio Svoboda* [“Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty”], *Kazan First*, *Večernjaja Kazan* [“Evening Kazan”], *Kommersant (Volga-Ural)* [“Merchant (Volga-Ural)”], *Idel.Realii* [“Volga. Realities”], *Milliard Tatar* [“A Billion Tatars”], *Tatar-inform*, *Perito*). Of the six Tatar-language outlets, five were categorized as state-affiliated, while one was classified as non-state. In contrast, eight of the 10 Russian-language outlets were identified as non-state and two as state-affiliated.

Tatar-language media in the Republic of Tatarstan have a smaller reach compared to their Russian-language counterparts. Available data indicate that the *Kazan utlary* website receives app. 8–9 thousand daily visits, *Vatanyim Tatarstan* around 15 thousand, and *Intertat* attracted about 1.37 million unique visitors in 2024. In terms of thematic focus, *Kazan utlary* and *Madani Zhomga* are literary and cultural outlets covering events in the spheres of culture, education, and public life. *Vatanyim Tatarstan* positions itself as a socio-political newspaper, while *Shakhri Kazan* combines current news and analytical materials with coverage of cultural events. *Azatliq Radiosi*, part of an international media structure, aims to promote democratic values and institutions, addressing audiences in countries where authorities restrict press freedom or have not yet established it as a social norm. The age of the readership of these

² All translations from Russian and Tatar into English in this paper were made by authors.

outlets generally ranges from 35 to 65+, with the core audience residing within Tatarstan.

Available data on the audience reach of Russian-language media indicate that *Business Online* attracts app. 24 million monthly visits, *Radio Svoboda* 3.7 million, *Kazan First* over 1 million, *Idel.Realii* around 2 million (2020), and *Tatar-inform* app. 654 thousand monthly visits. Most of these outlets focus primarily on socio-political events and issues, with *Idel.Realii* additionally publishing materials on human rights and ethnic minority concerns, and *Perito* is positioning itself as a popular science media outlet. Analysis of the available demographic data suggests that the age of the readership ranges from 24 to 65+, with an overall younger audience compared to Tatar-language media. This difference can be partly explained by the fact that younger generations are generally less proficient in Tatar at a level sufficient for reading newspapers.

The identified discourse patterns were coded by language and by evaluative stance (“positive” or “negative”) based on contextual units, enabling systematic analysis and categorization of relevant themes and patterns in the discourse.

6 Data analysis

One of the central discourses identified in both the Russian- and Tatar-language media concerned the methodology of teaching the Tatar language in schools and the broader role of the Tatar language within the educational system. Although Tatar had been a compulsory subject in the school curriculum for nearly three decades, existing data indicated limited success in achieving widespread language competence among students. For example, a study by *Khodzhaeva, 2011* showed that by 2001–10 years after the introduction of mandatory Tatar instruction—only one-third of the Russian population in the republic reported competence in the Tatar language. By 2010, this figure had increased to nearly half of the Russian population, yet only 8 per cent of young adults aged 16 to 24 reported fluency. Against this backdrop, debates around the effectiveness of teaching methods and the outcomes of language policy became a prominent feature of media discourse, particularly in the period surrounding the 2017 reform.

In analyzing the corpus of media texts, four overarching discursive domains (cultural identity, legal arguments, educational rights, and national unity) were identified. Within each of these domains, recurrent themes emerged that reflected how different actors framed the policy change, its motivations, and its consequences. These thematic categories were developed through an iterative coding process grounded in the principles of critical discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse. Close attention was paid to evaluative language, argumentation strategies, and the positioning of social actors, allowing for the identification of patterns across texts and the linking of these patterns to broader ideological positions. The identified domains are shared across both Tatar- and Russian-language media; however, not all of these domains were detected in the analysis of texts in both languages. Specifically, in the examples of advantages of the new language policy presented in Tatar-language media, only two domains (educational rights and national unity) were observed. In the topic of disadvantages emerged three domains (educational rights, legal arguments, and cultural

identity). By contrast, the analysis of positive evaluations in Russian-language media revealed only one domain (educational rights), while the analysis of negative evaluations yielded three domains (cultural identity, legal arguments, educational rights). The absence of certain domains in the analysis is explained by the lack of textual examples that could be categorized within the generalized domains formulated in our study.

In the Tatar-language media, the advantages were primarily framed around the potential for reforming language teaching methods, the introduction of the subject “state language” into the curriculum, and the perceived necessity of cooperation among stakeholders. Conversely, the disadvantages emphasized concerns about the balance between quantity and quality in language instruction, the marginalization of the Tatar language, the limited scope of its use, and perceptions of imperialism and second-class status attributed to Tatar speakers. In the Russian-language media, advantages were similarly associated with discourses on methodological improvements, the implementation of additional educational initiatives, and critical reflections on the outcomes of earlier language policies. Disadvantages in this context were framed in terms of the education system’s unpreparedness to accommodate the policy change, the instrumentalisation of language as a tool in political struggles, anxieties about cultural imperialism, the devaluation of the Tatar language, and fears of losing literary heritage and national education traditions.

By mapping these thematic categories, the analysis aims to uncover not only the explicit arguments articulated in the media but also the underlying ideological positions, actor relationships, and power structures embedded in the discourse. This approach seeks to illuminate the discursive dynamics shaping public representations of the Tatar language’s status in the republic’s educational and sociopolitical landscape.

6.1 Tatar-language media: advantages

A prominent theme identified in the Tatar-language media was the discourse surrounding methodological reforms in teaching the Tatar language. This discourse, on the one hand, addressed longstanding challenges in teaching Tatar and, on the other, highlighted newly implemented solutions. Notably, the discussion consistently foregrounded the perspectives of actors within the educational system, such as teachers, school principals, and textbook developers, while largely excluding parental viewpoints. Across the corpus, these educational professionals were positioned as advocates for maintaining and improving Tatar-language instruction despite the legislative changes of 2017 and the broader constraints on the language’s status in the educational system.

A recurring discursive strategy was the emphasis on the persistence of the Tatar language’s positive standing despite institutional shifts, accompanied by calls for pedagogical renewal. One school principal underscored the limited number of requests to opt out of Tatar classes, framing this as evidence of sustained interest: “We have received 5–6 applications requesting to exclude Tatar as a school subject. I don’t think this is a significant number for one gymnasium. People tend to follow trends, which is normal. [...] We need to address the issues raised by parents. Most of

them are concerned about the teaching methods. Their children find it difficult to learn, struggle with their homework, and the parents themselves are unable to help. [...] We need to work on improving that!” (orig. “Татар телен укытуга каршы булган биш эти-энидән гариза керде. Бер гимназия өчен бик күп түгел дип уйлыйм. Кеше күп жирдә шаукымга иярүчеләр булмый калмый. Бу – табигый күренеш. [...] Э менә эти-эниләр күтәргән проблемаларны, чыннан да, хәл итәргә кирәк. Күбесе татар телен укыту методикасы белән килешми. Балаларга авыр бирелә, өй эшен эшли алмыйлар, безнең ярдәм итәр мөмкинлегебез юк, дип зарланалар. [...] Менә безгә бүген, кулга-кул тотынышып, нәрсә өстендә эшләргә кирәк!”) ([Kazan Utлары, 10.10.2017](#)). Another teacher similarly linked pedagogical shortcomings to declining prestige, suggesting that curricular renewal was essential to reversing negative perceptions: “The pupils are interested in Tatar, but we need to further increase this interest [...] as the current time demands. I can see the lack of audio and video resources in our lessons. It occurred to me that we should rethink the methodological structure of the textbooks. We must now work on closing the gaps in the teaching of Tatar; otherwise, there’s no need to look for ‘culprits’ for the decline in the prestige of Tatar—it will be our own fault” (orig. “Укучылар арасында татар теленә карата кызыксыну бар. Бары тик укытучыга шул кызыксынуны көчәйтәргә генә кирәк. [...] Заман талабе буенча, дәрескә аудио- һәм видео эсбаплар житешмәвенә дә төшендем кебек. Шул ук вакытта дәреслекләрнең методик төзелешен кабат карап чыкмаска микән дигән уй да туды миндә. Хәзер безгә, жиң сызганып, татар теле укытудагы кимчелекләрне бетерү өстендә эшләргә кирәк, чөнки бу очракта татар теленә дәрежәсә төшүдә гаеплене эзләргә кирәк түгел, без үзебез гаепле.”) ([Shakhri Kazan, 21.10.2018](#)).

Several texts expressed cautious optimism about the future of Tatar-language instruction despite earlier anxieties, emphasizing signs of recovery and new interest. A school representative reflected: “This year, several first graders chose Tatar as a subject, and I am happy about that. Both Russian children and children of other nationalities are showing an interest in Tatar. In 2017, we were succumbing to despair, but now the anxiety is slowly fading away” (orig. “Быел 1 нче сыйныфка керүче балалар арасында татар телен сайлаучылар күп. Менә шуңа сөенәм. Рус яки башка милләт балалары да татар теле белән кызыксына. 2017 елда төшенкелеккә бирешкән идек, эмма ыгы-зыгы үтте инде. Барыбыз да тынычландык.”) ([Vatanyim Tatarstan, 22.09.2020](#)). Similarly, another commentator highlighted the relative privilege of Tatar compared to other minority languages, calling for pragmatic adaptation: “The situation of Tatar is very good [...]. There isn’t even an ABC book for teaching the Abasinian or Nogai languages. It’s printed on a printer and distributed to the students. But we can choose from various textbooks and learning programs. [...] There are many ways to teach Tatar. We don’t need to diminish ourselves. We must use the available options, adapt to the new reality, and keep working” (orig. “Татар теле бик югары урында. Абазин, ногой телләрен өйрәтергә аларның хәтта әлифбалары да юк. Аны принтердан кәгазьгә чыгарып, укучыларга өлешәләр. Э бездә дәреслекләрне, укыту программаларын сайлап алырга мөмкин. [...] Татар телен укытырга бөтен шартлар да бар. Монда мескенләнеп утырырга кирәкми. Булган мөмкинлекләрдән

файдаланып, шартларга яраклашып, эшләргә генә кирәк.”) ([Shakhri Kazan, 10.10.2023](#)).

A further discursive strand in the Tatar-language media concerned the recognition that for many students, Tatar functions as a foreign language. This insight prompted calls for a shift toward language teaching methods typically reserved for foreign languages such as English, with an emphasis on communicative competence and playful, interactive pedagogies. One teacher explained: “We must not forget that Tatar is a foreign language for them [...] We now follow the English teaching method. I don’t think we considered that in the first few years. We were focused on teaching the rules. The new textbook, *Sälām*, is very interesting. We play different characters—the students take on roles like a doctor or a salesman. This is how they learn to speak in Tatar” (orig. “Татар теле аларга чит теле булуын онытмаска кирәк [...] Инглиз теле укыту методикасына таянып эшлибез. Баштагы елларда аның методикасын белеп бетермәгәнбез. Кагыйдә өйрәтү белән шөгыйльләнәнгәнбез дип уйлыйм. «Сәләм» дәреслегә бик кызык. Төрле уеннар уйныйбыз. Укучылар табиб, кибетче дә була. Сөйләшергә шулай өйрәнәләр.”) ([Vatanyim Tatarstan, 23.11.2021](#)). Another added: “The children do not need to learn the rules in elementary school. The lessons are organized in a play-based format. In fifth and sixth grade, the learning program becomes more difficult, [...] That’s why I try to offer a mix of rules and games in these classes” (orig. “Башлангыч сыйныфта кагыйдә ятлатырга ярамый. Дәресләрне уен формасында уздырабыз. 5–6 сыйныфта инде программа катлаулана. [...] Шуңа күрә дәресләрдә кагыйдә белән уен формасы бергә кушылган ысулларны кулланарга тырышам.”) ([Vatanyim Tatarstan, 22.09.2020](#)).

These examples of the domain educational rights demonstrate that although concerns about the effectiveness of Tatar-language instruction had long existed, the issue only gained prominent visibility in media discourse after the reforms of 2017. The reform thus acted as a catalyst for intensified reflection on teaching methods and for articulating pedagogical strategies aimed at maintaining the language’s presence in the educational system.

A second, though more limited, theme in the Tatar-language media concerned the introduction of the new subject “state language.” While discussions about this initiative had circulated since 2017, it was only piloted in 2022 for first and fifth graders. The course was introduced as an optional subject alongside “mother tongue” instruction, allowing parents to choose between “Russian as mother tongue,” “Tatar as mother tongue,” “Tatar as state language,” or another minority language offered by the school. In contrast to the predominantly educator-centered discourse on teaching methods, the discourse around the “state language” subject prominently featured parents and representatives of the executive branch, framing the initiative as a positive outcome of the new language policy.

One article reported parental satisfaction with this option, particularly among non-Tatar families: “The parents of non-Tatar nationalities said, ‘We would like to learn the Tatar language, but since it is not our mother tongue, we cannot choose it. However, we would like to take the subject as a state language.’ There were many such families, and now they are very happy to be learning Tatar as a state language” (orig. “Татар телен белми

торган башка милләт балаларының эти-әниләре: «Татар телен өйрәнәсе килә, тик ул безнең туган тел түгел, шуңа күрә аны туган тел буларак сайлый алмыйбыз, ә менә дәүләт теле буларак өйрәнәр идек», – диделәр. Андыйлар күп иде, хәзер алар татар телен рәхәтләнеп дәүләт теле буларак сайлый алалар.» (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 26.08.2022). A government representative similarly argued: “If children of non-Tatar nationality choose this subject, it will be easier for them to learn the language” (orig. “Башка милләт балалары дәүләт теле буларак сайлап ала икән, аларга уку җиңелрәк булчак”) (ibid.). A Russian parent emphasized the broader cultural and civic benefits of enrolling her son in the course: “Every resident of Tatarstan should know Tatar, or at least understand what is said in this language. My husband and I believe that knowing the language does no one any harm. [...] Bogdan [the son] can speak Tatar. This year he took part in a festival where he learned a lot about the history of the Turkic peoples. When he came back, he started to study the history intensively” (orig. “Татарстанда яшәгән һәр кеше татар телен белергә тиеш. Һич югында, татарча әйткәнне аңларга. Без ирем белән шулай уйлыйбыз. Телләр белү бер нәрсәгә дә комачауламый. [...] Богдан татарча сөйләшә. Быел фестивальдә катнашкан иде, шунда төрки халыкларның тарихы турында ишеткән. Аннан кайткач, тарих белән кызыксына башлады.”) (ibid.).

Although this topic was represented in only one article in the corpus, the discourse reflected a framing of the new subject as an inclusive mechanism enabling access to Tatar for non-Tatar families, while also serving broader goals of social integration and cultural knowledge.

A final advantage of the new language policy, actively discussed in the media, was the emphasis on the necessity of cooperation among all social institutions, including the government, legislative bodies, media, education system, and family, with the shared objective of supporting the use of the Tatar language (domain national unity). The discourse emphasized that the preservation of Tatar could not be achieved through legal mandates alone but must be fostered through collective, communal efforts. This theme was raised by various representatives from the educational, cultural, and parental spheres. One commentator stressed: “The Tatar language cannot be preserved by law alone. [...] The language must be preserved through unwritten laws that are upheld within the family. These unwritten laws include national traditions, national pedagogy, and ethics. The mother tongue must be respected within the family itself” (orig. “Татар телен закон белән генә саклап булмый. [...] Тел гаиләдә язылмаган законнар ярдәмендә сакланьрга тиеш. Язылмаган законнар – милли традицияләребез, халык педагогикасы, әхлагыбыз. Гаиләдә туган телнең ихтирам булырга тиеш.”) (Kazan Utlary, 16.09.2017).

Echoing this sentiment, another voice from the educational sector underscored the shared responsibility of all sectors: “Preserving the language is not only the task of the teacher of Tatar. The school cannot bear the blame alone. Everyone should be involved: kindergartens, schools, the media, television, singers, and the government. Where was the television channel ‘Shajan TV’ [a Tatar-language channel for children with shows and cartoons in Tatar – A.G.] before 2017? Tatar, along with Russian, should be used everywhere. The success of preserving the language will be evident when everyone works on it together” (orig. “Телне саклау бер татар теле укытучының гына бурычы түгел. Алайса,

барысын да мәктәпкә аударып калдыралар. Балалар бакчасы, мәктәп, телевидение, җырчылар, житәкчеләр дә үз өлешен кертергә тиеш. 2017 елга кадәр «Шаян» ТВ каналы кайда булган? Игълан такталарында рус теле янәшәсенә татарчасын да язып куйсыннар. Туган телне бергә саклаганда гына үсеш булчак.”) (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 22.09.2020).

Other contributors reflected on the role of state support, asserting that without institutional involvement, Tatar would not survive: “If the state does not pay any attention to the Tatar language and it exists only within the family, the language will not ‘survive’” (orig. “Дәүләт тарафыннан туган телгә игътибар бирелмәгәндә, ул гаилә теле булып кына кала икән, тел сакланмый.”) (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 23.08.2021). One piece of media discourse encapsulated the collaborative vision: “The prestige of Tatar language must be increased. [...] The school, family, and state must work together. If everyone pulls in three different directions, there will be seen no results” (orig. “Телнең ролен арттырырга кирәк. [...] Мәктәп, гаилә, дәүләтнең бергә эшләве кирәк. Аккош, чуртан, кысла кебек өч якка тартканда, нәтижә булмый.”) (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 12.04.2023).

6.2 Tatar-language media: disadvantages

While the Tatar-language media highlighted certain advantages of the new language policy, a prominent thread of discourse emphasized its disadvantages. One of the most widely discussed concerns centered on the reduction of instructional hours and its detrimental impact on both the quality and quantity of Tatar-language education (domain educational rights). Prior to the 2017 reforms, students received 4 to 5 h of Tatar language and literature instruction per week; however, the legislative changes reduced this to just 2 h, a shift that many considered grossly inadequate. This critique was articulated almost exclusively by Tatar language teachers, with no examples from other societal groups. Across eight articles, educators underscored that the curtailed timetable undermined meaningful language acquisition. One teacher lamented, “The hours are already very limited. For example, we teach Tatar language and literature for only 1 h a week, which is not enough. If we spend this time dancingsinging during these lessons, there will be no progress” (orig. “ММәктәптә сәгәтьләр саны болай да аз. Мәсәлән, бездә татар теле һәм әдәбияты берәр сәгәт керә. Бу гына житми. Әгәр шушы дәресләрне дә җыр-биюгә калдырсак, бернинди алга китеш булмачак.”) (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 22.09.2020). Beyond the reduction in Tatar-specific lessons, some educators also pointed to the elimination of broader curricular content that could nurture Tatar identity or impart knowledge about the republic. As one school principal concluded, “In accordance with federal educational standards, it is difficult to support Tatar nationality” (orig. “Яна федераль белем бирү стандартлары нигезендә миллилекне булдыру кыен.”) (Vatanyim Tatarstan, 24.09.2023).

Closely linked to the question of instructional time was a broader concern about the diminishing prestige of the Tatar language. Teachers and commentators noted that the language’s marginal status in the educational system—exemplified by the inability to take final exams or receive a university degree in

Tatar—rendered it less competitive and desirable. The conditional nature of Tatar's inclusion as an optional subject further heightened anxieties about its declining relevance. This discourse, reflected in seven articles, foregrounded educators' worries that even ethnic Tatars increasingly failed to see the necessity of learning their own language, while non-Tatar parents remained largely indifferent or dismissive. One teacher captured this ambivalence: "The children are interested in Tatar. We just need to encourage this interest. The point is, that the parents still have a negative attitude toward Tatar language" (orig. "Укучылар арасында татар теленә карата кызыксыну бар. Бары тик укытучыга шул кызыксынуны көчәйтергә генә кирәк. Ә менә ата-аналар арасында телебезгә карата тискәре караш яшәвен дәвам итә.") (Shakhri Kazan, 21.10.2018). Another commentator warned of the longterm implications: "30% of parents said, 'my child doesn't need Tatar' and refused to learn it because they didn't see the point of learning this language. This is a terrible tragedy for scientists" (orig. "балама татар теле кирәкми" дип татар теленнән баш тартып кул куйды. Безгә - шушы өлкәдә гомер буе эшлөп килгән кешеләргә - моны күзәтү бик кызганыч.") (Kazan Utlary, 29.05.2018). The precariousness of Tatar's position was further illustrated by institutional practices, with one article noting: "Now we are afraid of any changes to the language situation. [...] If parents request it, the language is taught; if not, it isn't. Sometimes, parents enroll their children, who are fluent in Tatar, in the Russian group" (orig. "Тел мәсьәләсендә һәр үзгәрешкә куркып карыйбыз инде хәзер. [...] Өти-энилар гариза язса – укытыла, язмаса – юк. Кайвакыт алар саф татарча сөйләшкән балаларын да рус төркеменә яздыралар.") (Vatanym Tatarstan, 26.08.2022).

Beyond educational contexts, the Tatar-language media also reflected on the broader restriction of Tatar's functional domains, particularly in relation to state institutions and public life (domain legal arguments). While concerns about the narrowing scope of Tatar-language use predated 2017, the legislative changes reignited debates about the erosion of the language's role beyond school settings. This theme, articulated by scholars and journalists in three articles, pointed to systemic challenges facing Tatar in higher education, scientific discourse, and professional contexts. A scholar lamented: "Of course, it would be a great success to preserve Tatar as a subject. There have been significant losses in this area. Decades ago, it was possible to write a dissertation in Tatar, but now it is not. All academics and teachers understand that the language must not only be retained in school textbooks but also serve as a working tool. [...] It is basically about the decline of the language usage" (orig. "Сүз дә юк, телне фән буларак та саклап калу зур казаныш булып иде. Бу өлкәдә дә югалтулар күп. Моннан дистә еллар элек татар телендә диссертацияләр язып булса, бүген ул мөмкин эш түгел. Татар теле фән булып эшләсә өчен югары уку йортларында һәм урта мәктәпләрдә дәреслек булып кына түгел, эш коралы булып та хезмәт итәргә тиеш икәнлеген бөтен галим-голәма, укытучылар да яхшы аңлый. [...] Хикмәт – телнең кулланылышы кимүдә.") (Shakhri Kazan, 21.02.2020). Another article warned of the broader cultural consequences: "It should also be noted that each passing year sees a decrease in the number of books, newspapers, and magazines published in Tatar, as well as a decline in the number of users of Tatar radio and the language itself. If the language is no longer used, it is doomed to die" (orig. "Шунын өстенә, татар телендәге

китапларның, газета-журналларның тиражы елдан-ел кимүен, туган телдәге радио-телевидение тапшыруларын тыңлаучы һәм караучыларның сафлары сирәгәя баруын исәпкә алсаң, татар теленнән файдаланучыларның саны коточкыч рәвештә кими. Ә тел кулланыштан туктаса, ул бетүгә, үлемгә дучар була.") (Madani Zhomga, 28.08.2020).

Finally, the Tatar-language media situated the linguistic challenges within a broader political critique of center–periphery relations in the Russian Federation. This discourse framed the language reforms as part of a wider process of disempowerment and marginalization of the national republics, emphasizing both the diminished autonomy over linguistic policy and the symbolic relegation of minority languages to a second-class status (domain cultural identity). One commentator articulated this inequity starkly: "Think about that: there are 170 ethnic groups in Russia, and only one of them has full rights. School curricula are divided into two parts, meaning that 169 languages are relegated to the optional section" (orig. "Сез уйлап карагыз, Россиядә 170 милләт, шуларның берсе генә тулы хокуклы. Мәктәп планнары ике өлештән тора. 169 тел факультатив өлешкә кергән булып чыга.") (Kazan Utlary, 10.10.2017). Others pointed to institutional mechanisms undermining republican control over educational content: "Incidentally, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan no longer plays a role in the teaching of Tatar language and literature. Previously, decisions regarding the selection of Tatar textbooks were made by the republican ministry. Now, however, textbook licenses can only be issued by Moscow. To obtain these licenses, textbooks must first be translated into Russian and then sent to Moscow, along with a considerable sum of money" (orig. "Хәер, Татарстан Мәгариф министрлыгында татар телен һәм әдәбиятын укыту өлкәсендә үз сүзен әйтердәй роле калмады да инде. Элек татар теле һәм әдәбияты дәреслекләрен бастыруны Татарстан Мәгариф министрлыгы үзе генә хәл итә иде, хәзер моңа лицензияне Мәскәү генә бирә. Аны алу өчен, дәреслекләренң кулъязмаларын анда русчага тәржемә итеп алып барырга һәм Мәскәүгә шактый зур суммада акча күчерергә кирәк.") (Madani Zhomga, 28.08.2020). The broader injustice was encapsulated by a journalist's observation: "The republic, which contributes 800 billion roubles to the country each year, should presumably have the right to enable its people to learn their native language" (orig. "Россиягә һәр елны 800 миллиард сумлык табыш китереп торган республиканың төп милләт балаларын үз телләрендә абруйлы мәктәпләрдә укытырга хаки һәм мөмкинлекләре бардыр.") (Madani Zhomga, 28.08.2020).

In sum, the Tatar-language media painted a complex picture of the disadvantages accompanying the new language policy, foregrounding concerns about reduced instructional time, declining prestige, the narrowing of functional domains, and the broader political dynamics of linguistic marginalization. This discourse articulated both the structural challenges facing the Tatar language and the sociopolitical forces constraining its future vitality.

6.3 Russian-language media: advantages

In contrast to the predominantly critical tone in the Tatar-language media, the Russian-language media highlighted certain

advantages of the new language policy, particularly in relation to improving the teaching and learning of the Tatar language. All identified examples of discourse on the advantages of the new language policy in Russian-language media were categorized in the only domain of educational rights. One key discourse focused on the methodological challenges of Tatar-language instruction, which, according to commentators, had long been neglected prior to the events of 2017. The media conveyed the perspectives of various stakeholders, including politicians, educators, and textbook developers, who collectively framed the reforms as an opportunity to address longstanding pedagogical shortcomings. This discourse, emerging only after 2017, was thus interpreted as a positive outcome of the new language policy.

A politician observed, “Tatar was taught to both native and non-native speakers to the same extent. This meant that the children understood less, which ultimately discouraged Russian children and their parents from learning. Many expressed satisfaction with learning the language of the republic, but difficulties with Tatar grammar, phonetics, and the final exam became significant obstacles” (orig. “Татарский для носителей и неносителей языка преподавался в одном объеме. Конечно, это вызывало непонимание, отбивало интерес к изучению у русскоязычных детей и их родителей. Хотя многие говорили, что были бы рады учить язык республики, в которой живут. Но грамматика, фонетика и другие сложности, а также ЕГЭ стали препятствиями.”) (*Kazan First*, 11.11.2017). Another commentator reflected, “[...] for a long time, the topics of improving the teaching methods and techniques for Tatar were neglected. [...] The debates surrounding the language situation should serve as a stern lesson for our education system” (orig. “[...] длительное время не решались вопросы совершенствования методик и технологий обучения татарскому языку».[...] Обсуждение языкового вопроса должно стать серьезным уроком для нашей системы образования” (*Kommersant*, 24.09.2018).

The reflections of textbook developers offered additional insights into the evolution of teaching materials: “In 1992, Tatar became a state language. We were the first who wrote the first learning programs and books, with no prior experience. The textbooks were probably complicated. However, the learning program was revised every 5 years. [...] The textbooks cannot be bad as they were written by scientists and include grammar and vocabulary but may be insufficient attention was paid to communicative skills in the past” (orig. “В 1992 году татарский язык был признан государственным. Мы те люди, которые составляли первые программы, учебники. У нас не было опыта. Возможно, учебники были сложными. Но каждые пять лет программа обновлялась. [...] Учебник не может быть плохим, его составляют ученые. Там есть и грамматика, и лексика. Может быть, раньше коммуникации внимание не уделялось.”) (*Tatar-inform*, 21.11.2022). A teacher recounted the challenges faced by students under the old system: “The grammar of the Tatar language was very difficult for the children. [...] In the fourth grade, the children had to learn adverbial participles, while in Russian lessons, this topic is introduced only in the seventh grade. The fourth graders couldn’t pass the tests; they just cried [...] When we discovered in 2017 that there were new textbooks focused on developing communicative competencies, we

were almost in tears—how could this be? Why didn’t these textbooks exist before?” (orig. “Грамматика татарского языка давалась детям очень тяжело. [...] В четвертом классе дети были вынуждены изучать деепричастия, когда по русскому языку деепричастия проходят только в 7 классе. Четвероклассники не могли тесты сдавать, просто плакали. [...] Когда в 2017 году мы увидели, что есть новые учебники, основанные на коммуникативных технологиях - мы чуть не плакали от обиды - как же так, почему этих учебников не было раньше?”) (*Idel.Realii*, 18.11.2019).

In addition to discussions about teaching methodologies, the Russian-language media also highlighted a range of supplementary initiatives aimed at supporting the Tatar language. These measures, undertaken by both private individuals and governmental bodies, were presented as constructive responses to the evolving linguistic landscape. One article noted, “We have many national specialists who have either completed a Tatar school or studied Tatar philology. Many wanted to protect the language. What has emerged? Small media in Tatar, an increased number of Internet groups on various topics in Tatar, including religious and educational projects. [...] The republican government also took measures: the Commission for the Preservation of the Language was established. The members of the commission analyzed the experiences of universities, schools, kindergartens, and city districts” (orig. “У нас же национальных кадров много, людей, которые прошли через татарскую школу, которые учились на направлении татарской филологии. Многие люди хотели защищать язык. Что у нас появилось? Маленькие СМИ на татарском языке, сеть пабликов на татарском языке о разных предметах, в том числе религиозные, образовательные проекты. Приняли и контрмеры со стороны республиканского правительства: создали комиссию по сохранению языка. Члены комиссии изучали опыт и университетов, и школ, детсадов, муниципальных районов.”) (*Perito*, 28.09.2023).

A third theme in the Russian-language media concerned the positive legacy of the earlier language policy. Commentators argued that the decades of bilingual education prior to 2017 laid a strong foundation that helped mitigate the potentially negative effects of the reforms. Reflecting on this continuity, one educator stated, “I don’t like to remember the year 2017, when the amount of the hours of Tatar suddenly was reduced—that was a language revolution. We experienced it very painfully. I was afraid that many Russian parents would choose Russian and turn against Tatar. But that did not happen at all! We were even pleased to see that the approach followed since the nineties, with Tatar and Russian being taught equally for 25 years, has served its purpose. There are Russian parents who now say, ‘We need the Tatar language; let the child learn it’” (orig. “”Я очень не люблю вспоминать 2017 год, когда мы резко перешли с большого количества часов – это была языковая революция. Мы переживали ее очень серьезно. Я боялась, что очень многие родители из русских семей уйдут в родной русский и будут активно выступать против татарского языка. Ничего подобного! Мы даже порадовались что линия с 90-х годов с момента суверенитета, когда 25 лет шло паритетное изучение татарского и русского языков в РТ – оно сделало свое дело. И есть русские родители, которые говорят: «А нам нужен татарский язык, пусть ребенок его изучает””) (*Milliard Tatar*, 25.02.2021).

Taken together, these discourses in the Russian-language media presented the new language policy not merely as a setback but as an impetus for reflection, reform, and renewed commitment to the development of Tatar-language education. The emphasis on improving teaching methodologies, fostering grassroots and institutional initiatives, and recognizing the achievements of earlier bilingual policies framed the reforms as an opportunity for constructive adaptation rather than wholesale linguistic decline.

6.4 Russian-language media: disadvantages

In contrast to the Tatar-language media, which predominantly framed the new language policy as a form of cultural and political marginalization, the Russian-language media offered a somewhat more varied perspective, acknowledging both advantages and disadvantages. However, like their Tatar-language counterparts, Russian-language outlets identified a range of negative consequences associated with the reform, with overlapping but also distinct emphases. These critiques in the Russian-language discourse centered on institutional unpreparedness, the political instrumentalisation of language, concerns about linguistic inequality, declining interest in the Tatar language, and the endangered future of Tatar cultural heritage and education. The examples of texts with these focus topics were included in the domains of cultural identity, legal arguments and educational rights.

A shared point between both media spheres was the unpreparedness of the education system for the abrupt changes. While Tatar-language media emphasized the loss of Tatar language instruction and professional displacement of Tatar teachers, Russian-language outlets framed the issue more broadly as a crisis of capacity in adapting to new teaching demands. The simultaneous reduction of Tatar-language instruction and expansion of Russian-language hours strained the system, exacerbating existing staffing shortages. One article lamented: “[...] suddenly, the hours for Russian increased, even though we were already suffering from a shortage of staff for Russian, while at the same time, the number of Tatar teachers decreased due to the reduction in Tatar language hours [...] These changes required time and we did not have it!” (orig. “[...] случилось резкое увеличение количества часов русского языка при нехватке учителей русского языка и сокращение учителей татарского языка за счет сокращения часов. Эти кадровые движения требовали время, а времени у нас не было!”) (Milliard Tatar, 25.02.2021). Furthermore, Russian-language media highlighted mistrust from parents toward retrained Tatar teachers now tasked with teaching Russian, adding a psychological and social dimension to the institutional challenges: “We sensed mistrust from the parents and doubts about our skills. There was skepticism about how a Tatar teacher can teach Russian” (orig. “Со стороны родителей к нам ощущалось недоверие, сомнение в нашей компетентности. Татарка - и преподает русский.”) (Idel.Realii, 18.11.2019). This focus on institutional and interpersonal trust issues within the educational system, categorized under the domain of educational rights, echoes but also broadens the Tatar-language media’s portrayal of systemic disorganization.

A distinctive feature of Russian-language media discourse was its greater attention to the political instrumentalisation of language,

that allowed these examples to be correlated with the domain of legal arguments. While the Tatar-language media predominantly framed the policy as a threat to cultural identity, Russian-language commentators emphasized language as a bargaining chip in center-periphery relations. Political scientist Dmitry Oreshkin characterized the policy as part of “haggling between Moscow and Tatarstan” (orig. “форм торга между федеральными властями и Татарстаном”) (Radio Svoboda, 8.11.2017), framing it as a mechanism to “restrict the rights of the regions” (orig. “ужимания прав регионов”) (ibid.). Another article likened Tatarstan’s defense of Tatar-language education to “the last Stalingrad battle for sovereignty” (orig. “это как последняя сталинградская битва за суверенитет”) (Business Online, 8.09.2017). This framing aligns with the Tatar-language media’s narrative of erosion of regional autonomy, but places greater emphasis on language as an arena of power politics rather than solely cultural loss.

Moreover, similar to the Tatar-language media’s concerns about the declining prestige of the Tatar language, Russian-language media highlighted how the reforms reinforced linguistic inequality and symbolic subordination. Commentators warned of a deepening imperialist hierarchy of languages, in which Russian was privileged at the expense of national languages. Rkail Zajdulla argued that resistance to learning Tatar was symptomatic of an “imperialistic mindset,” (orig. “имперского сознания”) positioning Russians as “a great nation and its language is the best and most powerful” (orig. “русский народ великий, его язык великий и могучий”) while relegating others to “second-class” (orig. “второсортные”) status (Business Online, 8.09.2017). The irony of the state’s support for foreign languages while curtailing national ones was noted: “The situation looks like mockery when two foreign languages are mandated as compulsory subjects in the federal education standards, while the opportunity of compulsory learning of national languages of Russia is being declined” (orig. “Как насмешка выглядит ситуация, когда два иностранных языка согласно ФГОС изучаются обязательно, а родные языки народов России лишаются такой возможности.”) (Kommersant, 23.04.2018).

This critique mirrors the discourses of linguistic injustice and inequality prevalent in Tatar-language media, suggesting overlapping ideological concerns despite linguistic differences in the outlets themselves.

Additionally, both media spheres identified a growing disinterest in the Tatar language among students and parents, yet Russian-language media placed a stronger emphasis on its instrumental consequences for educational attainment. Low rates of students choosing Tatar as an exam subject were reported as evidence of the language’s declining relevance. An article observed that “without ministerial pressure, children would not consider the necessity of Tatar language” (orig. “без министерского нажима татарский язык детям особо не нужен”) (Business Online, 8.04.2018), while another lamented: “Only few parents would risk their child’s future by choosing ‘Tatar as a Mother Tongue’ as a subject since the final exam must be taken anyway in Russian” (orig. “ММало какой родитель теперь рискнет будущим своего ребенка, которому ЕГЭ сдавать на русском, и выберет для изучения в качестве родного язык своего народа.”) (Večernjaja Kazan’, 27.07.2018). This framing underscores parental pragmatism and educational utilitarianism, a theme also present but less explicitly emphasized in the Tatar-language discourse.

Finally, Russian-language media shared the Tatar-language outlets' profound concern about the threatened future of Tatar cultural and literary heritage, framing the reduction of Tatar-language instruction as jeopardizing both linguistic competence and cultural continuity. These examples of discourse were correlated with the domain of cultural identity, which is being threatened due to the new language policy. Articles highlighted that limited instructional time made it "impossible to teach this material to the children" (orig. "нет возможности дать этот материал детям") (Tatar-inform, 21.11.2022), while the merging of language and literature into a single subject under reduced hours was expected to lead to cultural impoverishment: "Soon, students will not know a single literary work, except for a few fairy tales by Tukaj" (orig. "Скоро ученики, кроме двух сказок Тукая, не будут знать ни одного другого произведения татарской литературы.") (Business Online, 8.04.2018). Echoing Tatar-language fears of cultural extinction, literary scholars in Russian-language media warned that "the current generation of pupils who write stories, poems, and so on in the Tatar language is the last generation about whom we can confidently say they can become writers" (orig. "поколение нынешних студентов, пишущих на татарском языке рассказы, стихи и так далее, — это последнее поколение, о котором мы можем уверенно говорить, что они могут быть писателями") (Perito, 28.09.2023). This shared discourse of impending cultural discontinuity further blurs the boundaries between Russian- and Tatar-language media narratives.

In summary, while Russian-language media presented a somewhat broader and more politically framed critique than Tatar-language outlets, the two media spheres converged on key concerns: institutional unpreparedness, erosion of linguistic equality, declining interest in the Tatar language, and the endangerment of Tatar cultural reproduction. These parallels suggest a crosslinguistic discourse of anxiety surrounding the reform's implications for identity, education, and regional autonomy, albeit articulated through different emphases and rhetorical strategies.

7 Discussion

Our findings underscore that the recent language policy reforms in Tatarstan are deeply embedded within broader educational policy debates, with education serving as the primary arena through which language policy is contested, justified, and resisted (RQ1; H3). Both Tatar- and Russian-language media predominantly emphasized the disadvantages of the reform, while references to its advantages were comparatively rare and unevenly distributed. This asymmetry reflects a shared perception of loss and anxiety across both communities, albeit articulated through different lenses and priorities (H4).

The scarce positive discourses clustered around three main themes: the revision of teaching methodology, the promotion of communicative approaches to Tatar-language instruction, and the symbolic reaffirmation of Tatar's status as a state language. In Tatar-language media, these discourses were predominantly voiced by educational professionals—teachers and school administrators—who highlighted the adaptation of Tatar teaching to a foreign language framework, acknowledging that for many students, Tatar functions less as a mother tongue and more as a second or foreign language (H2; H3). Such positioning aligns with

broader trends in minority language education, where shifts toward communicative, learner-centered methods have been promoted to counter declining proficiency and engagement (Hornberger, 2006; García, 2009). Tatar-language media thus framed the reform as an opportunity to modernize pedagogy and sustain children's interest in the language through creative instruction despite systemic constraints.

However, the discursive optimism in Tatar-language outlets must be interpreted in the context of state-controlled media agendas and an older, Tatar-speaking target audience, who may be receptive to narratives of institutional resilience and gradual reform. In contrast, Russian-language media discourses, articulated mainly by politicians and policy commentators, foregrounded structural deficiencies and policy failures rather than pedagogical improvements.

Criticism centered on the belated acknowledgment of Tatar's grammatical complexity, the shortage of communicative teaching materials, and the delayed reform of curricula—issues only addressed after 2017 (H1; H3). This focus resonates with critiques found in other multilingual contexts, where minority language education reforms are frequently perceived by dominant language speakers as disruptive or burdensome (May, 2012; Spolsky, 2004). These discourses must be situated, in turn, within the ideological landscape of language rights and language ideologies (May, 2012; Shohamy, 2006). While framed as educational reforms, they enact a negotiation of Tatar's symbolic status as a state language under the constraints of federal policy. Importantly, these discourses address both the pragmatic (instrumental) and symbolic (identity related) values of Tatar—a distinction theorized by Warditz and Meir (2024), who emphasize how minority language speakers navigate the tension between functional utility and cultural symbolic affiliation. In Tatar-language media, symbolic values were foregrounded through calls for societal cooperation in supporting Tatar's survival, while Russian-language media questioned the pragmatic relevance of Tatar in educational and economic trajectories dominated by Russian.

A key divergence between the two media spheres lies in their representation of responsibility and agency. While Tatar-language media stressed the need for collaborative action across families, schools, and the state to sustain Tatar, Russian-language media framed the preservation of the language as a private or civil initiative, distancing the state from direct responsibility (H4). Moreover, Russian-language outlets portrayed the situation as less critical than their Tatar counterparts, attributing current challenges to the cumulative effects of a 25 year experiment with "balanced bilingualism." Such framing reflects broader ideological patterns in center-periphery relations, where regional linguistic initiatives are depicted as temporary deviations from an assumed normative monolingualism (RQ2; RQ4; H1).

When analyzing discourses on the disadvantages of the reform, a convergence of themes emerges across both linguistic domains, yet with distinct emphases. Both media spheres lamented the erosion of Tatar-language instruction, the cancellation of culturally specific subjects (such as regional history and geography), and the symbolic marginalization of Tatar (H2; H4). These findings echo broader scholarship on linguistic minoritisation under centralizing state policies (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Fishman, 1991), wherein reduced institutional support leads to shrinking domains of use

and intergenerational transmission. Notably, Russian-language media placed greater emphasis on the institutional unpreparedness for the reform, particularly the shortage of qualified Russian-language teachers and the necessity of retraining Tatar teachers for Russian instruction (**RQ3**; **H1**; **H3**). This critique highlights a tension between linguistic policy and educational labor markets, a phenomenon observed in other multilingual regions undergoing rapid language policy shifts (Wei and Wu, 2010). Furthermore, Russian-language discourses problematized parental pragmatism, suggesting that, absent state mandates, families would naturally deprioritize Tatar in favor of Russian, perceived as more instrumental for academic and economic advancement (**H1**). This aligns with international findings that minority language maintenance is often undermined by parents' perceptions of reduced utility and status (Baker, 2011; Tollefson, 1991).

Both Tatar- and Russian-language media converged in their articulation of linguistic inequality and symbolic subordination (**H4**). Nevertheless, while Tatar-language outlets framed the inferiority of Tatar vis-à-vis Russian through a narrative of cultural loss and Moscow's hegemony, Russian-language media expanded this critique by positioning Tatar as doubly subordinated—not only to Russian but even to foreign languages prioritized in federal curricula (**H1**). This observation resonates with Shohamy's (2006) argument that language policy operates as a mechanism of control, simultaneously elevating and marginalizing languages through overt and covert processes.

One striking divergence is the absence of overtly politicized discourses in Tatar-language media. While Russian-language outlets openly linked language policy to broader struggles over regional sovereignty and framed the defense of Tatar as a “final battle” for autonomy (**H4**), Tatar-language media largely avoided such framing. This omission may reflect editorial caution in state-controlled media to avoid accusations of nationalism or separatism (Wilson, 2002). It also suggests a discursive strategy aimed at depoliticising the issue to maintain space for cultural advocacy without triggering state repression.

Finally, it is notable that across both media spheres, the dominant voices were institutional elites—educators, politicians, and policy experts—while the perspectives of parents and students were largely absent (**RQ3**). This top-down discursive structure mirrors patterns identified in other multilingual policy contexts, where grassroots actors are rarely represented as legitimate stakeholders in formal debates (Heller, 2011).

Taken together, the findings suggest that while the reform has not precipitated acute ethnic or linguistic conflict, it has generated a pervasive sense of linguistic precarity and cultural diminishment across linguistic communities (**RQ1**, **RQ2**). The discursive focus on shortcomings over achievements reflects a shared anxiety over the future of Tatar as both a communicative and symbolic resource. Viewed comparatively, the Tatarstan case exemplifies the dilemmas of minority language policy in multilingual states: navigating tensions between state integration, cultural pluralism, and the unequal political economy of languages. In this context, the reduction of Tatar-language instruction is not merely an educational reform but a manifestation of broader processes of linguistic devaluation and symbolic disempowerment (**H2**; **H4**)—processes that, if unaddressed, risk transforming balanced bilingualism from an aspiration into an empty rhetorical ideal.

8 Limitations

Despite careful design and rigorous data collection, this study has several limitations. First, our data are time-bound, reflecting media coverage only within a specific period following the 2017 abolition of compulsory Tatar-language instruction. While the selected media sources are representative, they do not encompass all outlets, and some perspectives may be underrepresented. Second, the study's methodological approach, relying on critical discourse analysis, allowed us to explore the qualitative nuances of media narratives but limited the number of parameters we could examine in depth. Certain aspects of language policy debates, such as quantitative measures of audience reception, frequency of themes, or broader sociolinguistic trends, remain outside the scope of this analysis. Consequently, our findings should be interpreted as providing an exploratory, case-study perspective rather than a comprehensive or generalizable account of all media discourse or public opinion. We encourage future research to complement this study with quantitatively designed approaches, longitudinal analyses, and additional data sources—including interviews with key stakeholders, broader media sampling, and social media content—to provide a more complete understanding of language policy and its impacts in Tatarstan and comparable post-Soviet contexts.

9 Conclusion

We have explored the shifting landscape of language policy in the Republic of Tatarstan since the abolition of compulsory Tatar-language instruction in 2017. By analyzing media coverage in both Tatar- and Russian-language sources, this research highlights the multifaceted nature of language policy debates and reveals distinct differences in how these communities frame the issue of bilingualism and linguistic rights. The findings demonstrate that Tatar-language media tend to emphasize cultural and identity-related implications of the policy change, whereas Russian-language media focus more on legal, political, and national unity concerns. This comparative discourse analysis shows that language ideologies and power dynamics are central to how language policy is understood and represented across different linguistic communities in Tatarstan.

Our case study underscores the tense and shifting nature of language relations in post-imperial spaces within the Russian Federation. Within a historically layered context marked by oscillations between support for linguistic diversity and efforts at Russification, the recent policy shifts reveal enduring ideological tensions at the heart of Russian federalism. The competing discourses—between centralizing, efficiency-driven narratives and those rooted in cultural preservation and minority rights—reflect broader post-imperial dynamics, where language serves as both a symbolic and practical site of negotiation. As such, the Tatarstan case not only highlights the ideological fault lines surrounding bilingualism and national identity but also reflects the incomplete and contested nature

of language policy in states still grappling with the legacies of empire.

While our study focuses specifically on Tatarstan, these insights are relevant for understanding language policy and ideological fault lines in other Russian republics with similar federal constraints, such as Bashkortostan or Sakha (Yakutia). Russia's multilingual reality, with its 150 languages, offers fertile ground for such studies, though existing scholarship often overlooks this complexity by privileging Russian-language sources and underrepresenting regional perspectives. Future research could expand on our work by incorporating more indepth interviews with key stakeholders, such as policymakers, educators, and members of the Tatar and Russian-speaking communities, to further understand the lived experiences and perceptions behind the discourses analyzed here. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how the shifting language policies in Tatarstan continue to affect interethnic relations and language use in the region over time. Comparative studies with other bilingual or multilingual regions in Russia and post-Soviet states would also offer valuable insights into the broader dynamics of language rights, identity, and national discourse in post-imperial and post-Soviet contexts. Moreover, further analysis of the role of social media and digital platforms in shaping contemporary language debates could offer a timely perspective on how language ideologies are disseminated and contested in the digital age.

Data availability statement

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found at: Please see References.

Author contributions

AG: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft,

Writing – review & editing. VW: Conceptualization, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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