Language ideologies and topoi in web discussions on Russia's minority languages

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Abstract. The article argues for the need to study the language ideologies aired on the Web and social media as these represent an important but still under-investigated source for discovering the actual, live public opinions and language attitudes among the linguistically diverse Russian populations. The article relies on the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology with an emphasis on the argumentation schemes and content-related topoi behind the views opposing minority language maintenance. The reasons for narrowing down on this type of argumentation schemes are limitations on the article size and the greater relevance of 'negative' language ideologies and related topoi for explaining the continuing extinction of minority languages in Russia. The research revealed several of such language ideologies including those of language hierarchy, the normalcy of the (Russian) monolingualism, the "naturalness" of minority languages' extinction due to their "uselessness", "backwardness", and "lack of prospects", or association of support for these languages with nationalistic attitudes. Many Russian Internet-users believe that language is strongly tied to ethnicity and territory, that multilingualism is harmful for children's development, and that the responsibility for language maintenance lies solely with the family. Discussants resort to a variety of topoi referring to legal, pseudo-scientific, pseudo-economic, quantitative, territorial arguments, and/or refer to a danger of separatism as a threat for national security. The list of the most popular and frequent topoi derived from statements in social media includes, among others, such topoi as "maintaining a minority language is a waste of money", "learning many languages is a burden for children", "it is only the ethnic group X that needs the ethnic language X", etc. One of the findings is the coherence of ideology and pragmatics when people, depending on their initial attitudes, can invoke any convenient ideological justification for their (language) decisions to 'persuade' themselves and others. The article notes that both the opponents and supporters of minority languages' maintenance may resort to the same ideology and topoi, with the former more often using the 'standard' arguments.

Everyday consciousness gravitates toward simple solutions and explanations, toward more practical and obvious reasoning. The article concludes that the intensity and heat of language-related discussions, the prevalence of 'Darwinian' views and non-supportive language ideologies and arguments largely explain the current state of many minority languages in Russia.

Keywords: language ideologies; minority languages [1] of Russia; Internet, social networks; Critical Discourse Analysis, argumentation schemes, topoi.

Языковые идеологии и топосы в интернет-дискуссиях о миноритарных языках России

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Аннотация. В статье обосновывается необходимость изучения языковых идеологий в интернете и социальных сетях, которые представляют собой важный и все еще недостаточно изученный ресурс для выявления актуального

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[1] This paper defines a minority language based on two criteria: a numerically smaller speaker population within a specific geopolitical context (in our case, in the Russian Federation) and a lower official status compared to the national (state) language of the country. This term is convenient because it concisely describes the position of all Russian Federation languages, except that of Russian. This position is evident in the sociolinguistic classification by the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences which gives every language of Russia a profile from 1A (extinct language — the last active speakers died in the XX century) to 4B (healthy language). Russian is the only language that has the 4B profile in this classification, with the others balancing at different stages of language shift (*Statusy yazykovoy vital'nosti* [Language vitality profiles] 2022).

общественного мнения и языковых установок «из первых уст» лингвистически разнообразного российского общества. В статье автор опирается на методологию критического анализа дискурса с акцентом на аргументативных схемах и содержательных топосах, обосновывающих взгляды противников поддержки миноритарных языков и их изучения в школе. Акцент на аргументативных схемах такого типа обусловлен как ограничениями размера статьи, так и большей актуальностью таких топосов и связанных с ними языковых идеологий для объяснения продолжающегося исчезновения миноритарных языков России. Исследование выявило ряд языковых идеологий, которые включают представления о языковой иерархии, нормативности (русского) одноязычия, «естественном» характере исчезновения миноритарных языков из-за их «бесполезности» и отсутствия перспектив, ассоциации этих языков с национализмом и стариной. В сознании многих российских интернет-пользователей язык тесно связан с этнической принадлежностью и территорией, многоязычие считается вредным для развития детей, а задача поддержания языка рассматривается исключительно как обязанность семьи. Участники дискуссии используют различные топосы, относящиеся к правовым, псевдонаучным, псевдоэкономическим, количественным, территориальным аргументам, а также к аргументам национальной безопасности и угрозы сепаратизма. Список наиболее распространенных и частотных топосов, извлеченных из высказываний в социальных сетях, включает, но не ограничивается такими, как «поддержание миноритарного языка — пустая трата денег», «изучение многих языков является бременем для детей», «этнический язык X нужен только этнической группе X» и т. д. Одним из результатов исследования является установление когерентности идеологии и прагматики, когда люди, в зависимости от своих первоначальных установок, могут ссылаться на любое удобное идеологическое основание для обоснования своих (языковых) решений, «убеждая» себя и других. Отмечается, что одна и та же идеология и топос могут использоваться как противниками, так и сторонниками поддержки миноритарных языков, причем апелляция к «общим местам» характерна скорее для первых. Обыденное сознание склонно к простым решениям и объяснениям, к более практичным и очевидным доводам. Автор приходит к выводу, что интенсивность и накал языковых дискуссий, распространенность «дарвинистских» языковых идеологий и аргументов во многом объясняют современное состояние многих миноритарных языков России.

Ключевые слова: языковые идеологии; миноритарные языки России; интернет, социальные сети; критический анализ дискурса, аргументативные схемы, топосы.

1. Introduction

The future of the minority languages of Russia, the factors that contribute to their vitality or lead to language loss have long been in the focus of interest by linguists and language activists. The factors affecting the country's multilingualism are obviously complex. On the one hand, the maintenance of the numerous languages of the Russian Federation is a duty of the state as laid down in the RF Constitution and other legal documents. The role of educational factors, education being one of the fundamental lines of the official language policy, is also very important. On the other hand, it is ultimately up to the ethnic group to preserve or lose their language, given that this group is provided with at least minimal conditions to maintain their language, see [Kibrik, Daniel 2005].

Modern sociolinguistics views the so-called micro-level of a language policy by a particular group as one of the key factors in the preservation / disappearance of the respective language. Modern family preferences, however, continuing the XX century trend, are often not in favor of minority languages, the lack of intergenerational language transmission being the most threatening factor for their future. As N. Vakhtin wrote with regard to languages of the peoples of the North, "People stop speaking the titular languages because they no longer consider it necessary for themselves — simply put, because they do not want to" [Vakhtin 2001: 230]. As a follow-up to this idea, it would be logical to ask if reluctance to speak a language is the only possible and self-explaining reason in this situation. The answer would be that there are always in-depth reasons behind similar language behavior / decisions. In the absence of direct prohibitions or coercion, the language decisions made by families and individual

members of ethnic communities depend primarily on the *language ideologies* and *linguistic culture* of a broader society. It is obvious that a variety of factors influence language decisions, with educational and economic reasons (Russian as the language of "job and bread" [Filippova 2013] has every chance to displace minority languages) quite prominent among them. At the same time, rather than directly, social reality determines human behavior indirectly through complex holistic processes in human minds. Among other things, these cognitive processes produce specific speech behavior, including language choice. For example, the language shift in favor of Russian that occurred during the Soviet period was not solely a result of the USSR language policies, but also of the system of people's beliefs, attitudes, and ideas with respect to their languages and social values. Such systems are usually referred to as *language ideologies* [Kroskrity 2000: 5].

Based on the above, the *purpose* of this article is to (1) substantiate the importance of studying language ideologies, and (2) identify the language ideologies manifested through argumentation schemes and topoi in Internet discussions on minority languages and the language policies of Russia. Although the initial plan was to analyze the argumentation schemes used by both supporters *and* opponents of minority language maintenance, the article focuses on those argumentation schemes and language ideologies that eventually work *against* minority languages maintenance or advancement. This focus on only one side of the picture makes it possible to both shorten the article and provide a deeper qualitative analysis of the arguments 'against' and the language ideologies behind them to explain how these language choices are made on the micro-level of language policies. Notably, the arguments of minority languages opponents represent a more interesting and extensive linguistic material for an analysis of the use of topoi.

2. Language ideologies and minority languages of Russia on the Internet: background

The issue of language ideologies is an extremely complex object of research, given the broad geographical distributions and the various

national traditions involved as only one example. Most well-known authors in the field including M. Silverstein, J. Blommaert, J. Irvine, S. Gal, P. Kroskrity, K. Woolard represent the North American tradition of linguistic-anthropological research. There is also a powerful European tradition where the ideological nature of language use was addressed way before the Second World War, while M. Silverstein, considered to be the pioneer of studies in language ideologies, published his seminal work [Silverstein, 1979] much later. In Europe, V. Voloshinov's ideas about the role of the subject in language, the heterogeneity, polyphony, and dialogical nature of discourse were first published in Russian in 1929 in *Marksizm i filosofiya yazyka* [Marxism and the Philosophy of Language]; see [Voloshinov, 1993]. These ideas were further developed in the ideology and subject theory proposed in France by the neo-Marxist Louis Althusser [Althusser, 1970]. Later, the ideological aspect of language use was discussed in the theory of habitus and symbolic systems by P. Bourdieu and in institutional discourses by M. Foucault.

The modern idea of language ideology as a rule refers to morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world [Irvine, 1989]. They are also defined as "the cultural conceptions of the nature, form, and purpose of language, and of communicative behavior as an enactment of the collective order" [Gal, Woolard 1995: 30]. Language ideologies necessarily contain an evaluative component — people consciously or unconsciously evaluate languages based on their own experience and interests which, in turn, correlate with the ideas about the languages that exist in society. By virtue of their 'common sense' naturalization, language ideologies contribute to linguistic and social inequality [McCarty 2011: 10].

The challenge of studying ideologies lies in their dualistic nature. On the one hand, they exist in human minds or in the memory structure, while on the other hand they are social in nature, i.e., they represent a system of social cognitive structures common to members of a certain group and consisting of a set of relevant attitudes that are organized at higher levels in accordance with selected group norms, values and interests [van Dijk, 1989: 30]. A *linguistic culture*, closely related to language ideologies, is defined as "the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs,

attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious structures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture" [Schiffman 2006].

Ideology as a term has a broad and a narrow meaning. The widespread conception of ideologies as phenomena that are "constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group (i.e., they are rooted in the socio-economic power and vested interests of *dominant groups*" [Dyers, Abongdia, 2010: 6–7]) refers to the narrower understanding of ideology where its source is seen in ruling groups imposing it on subordinate groups. In the broader meaning, the emphasis is not on political connotations, with ideology understood as a comprehensive construct where no one can be free from ideology (see the definitions above). Accordingly, ideologies are inherent in any social group or individual. Rather than immediately, human behavior is determined by the influence of the existing reality indirectly — through a holistic reflection of reality in the activity subject through his / her attitudes. The impact of reality invariably comprises an ideological component which is not just 'inserted' into consciousness, its processes and products as a ready-made module, but is "produced within and by the subject him/herself, although under certain control/influence" [Rubtsov et al., 2016: 31]. Language ideologies are adopted, formed, and applied in social situations under certain social circumstances and with certain social consequences.

Linguists distinguish many ideologies hampering the use, development, and promotion of minority languages. These include, inter alia, folklorisation, hypertraditionalisation, or association of a language with only the past [Sallabank, Marquis 2018]. Language ideologies can show up in many things like speech behavior, language choice, linguistic landscapes, etc. Accordingly, one can identify them by sieving through various data using various techniques. Thus, K. Fedorova and V. Baranova rely on two main datasets: (1) a meta-discourse on language attitudes, and (2) the linguistic landscape of Russia's two major cities, Moscow and Saint-Petersburg [Baranova, Fedorova 2020].

Meanwhile, online discussions, an important segment of modern life and communications, seem to be understudied in this respect. Linguists are mostly interested in the *presence* of languages in the

cyberspace. The existing research on the use of Russia's minority languages in the Internet can be divided into quantitative and qualitative studies. A quantitative approach, for example, was undertaken in the project by the Higher School of Economics Research University, completed in 2016. The aim was to search and quantify Internet texts in Russia's various national languages. All the materials, including the assembled corpora, are now available online at http://web-corpora.net/wsgi3/minorlangs// [Karta yazykov Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2016]; also see: [Orekhov et. al. 2016; Orekhov 2017b]. Some individual publications also apply quantitative approaches for analyses of the use of certain Russia's languages [Orekhov, Gallyamov 2013] or to determine the scope and character of the representation of Russia's minority languages in Wikipedia (by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches) [Orekhov, Reshetnikov 2016]. The qualitative research algorithms used are based on works about the Udmurt Internet [Pischlöger 2010; Pischlöger 2016; Bártfai 2016] and the Buryat language online [Khilkhanova 2019].

Studies on language ideologies and their representation in the Russian Internet discourse are scarce [e.g., Kharitonov, Stepina 2020; Baranova, Fedorova 2020; Kalinin, Suzen 2020; Pischlöger 2010]. According to C. Pischlöger, although Udmurt is one of the most popular languages of Russia on social networks, the ideology of language purism characteristic of Russia with its 'standard Russian language culture' impedes its dissemination and learning [Pischlöger 2016]. V. Kharitonov and D. Stepina [2020] analyzed online discussions around topics related to Russia's languages and language policy. Their study revealed quite consistent attitudes associated with the idea of actual / desired homogeneity of language and culture, widespread in many Russian communities. Although these works have contributed to understanding some language ideologies and shed light on the linguistic culture of the Russian society and its attitudes to multilingualism and minority languages, many areas still remain unexplored. One of them is how and by using what arguments people explain to themselves and to others their attitudes toward the country's language diversity. It is this gap that this article intends to fill.

3. Methodology and materials

As mentioned earlier, the Russian society still lacks full understanding of even the very existence of language ideologies, to say nothing of the importance of probing into them. This explains the lack of comprehensive research into language ideologies in Russia, especially in the Internet domain. The main difference that lies between Internet discussions in blogs, posts, comments, etc. and the traditional sociolinguistic sources (surveys, interviews, official statements or legal / other documents) is the *anonymous, depersonalized*, and *mediated* nature of Internet communications [Kuzheleva-Sagan, 2016; Gritsenko, Demidova, 2018] which enables the participants to speak out in a way impossible in other communicative situations.

For a more focused research into language ideologies, this article narrows down its *topic* and *time limit* to the period of 2017–2018 in the recent Russian history, when language attitudes/opinions regarding minority languages came to the fore. The issue of teaching 'state' (local republican) languages at schools in Russia's national republics triggered public discussion that spilled over beyond the educational domain. Already at that period, the discourse was qualified as a language conflict [Mikhalchenko 2019: 18; Wingender 2018]. This, initially purely educational, issue makes this period a perfect research case to probe into language policies, language attitudes and the social values ascribed to Russian and to the minority languages of Russia. Most of the materials in my database come from web publications of that period, with some evidence dating back to more recent times — all collected in 2021 under the project *Metody prognozirovaniya i budushchiye stsenarii razvitiya yazykovoy politiki (na primere mnogoyazychnoy Rossiyskoy Federatsii)* [Prognostic methods and future scenarios in language policy — multilingual Russia as an example].

Overall, my research database includes 12 online articles / news / posts / blogs / interviews on the language policies and language situation in Russia and 3032 comments thereon[2]. The bulk of the material comes

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[2] Not all comments collected in 2021 are still available on the web.

from readers' comments to the post by B. Orekhov, a lecturer at the Higher School of Economics, on the abovementioned "Languages of Russia" Project led by him. His post caused an extensive discussion of 1069 comments about the future of minority languages, the necessity/uselessness of their preservation, etc. [Orekhov 2017b]. Other sources of the material used here are comments to the post *Kak i zachem sokhranyat yazyki narodov Rossii?* [Preserve the languages of the peoples of Russia: how and why?] on the Livejournal platform [Kak i zachem 2013], and a publication in "Novye Izvestia", a daily Russian socio-political newspaper based in Moscow [Uchit ili zabyt 2017]. A significant portion of the material used has a clear *geographical (regional*) focus, given that the most intense discussions on minority languages teaching took place in the Republic of Tatarstan, the quarry of most of the Internet sources analyzed. The most important of these is "BUSINESS Online" ["Vnutrenniy separatism …" 2018; V Omske… 2020; "Russkiy dolzhen usvaivatsya…" 2021]. "BUSINESS Online" is a useful source because this is a new product of "media reality, which includes *the full use of the capabilities of social network*s" [Rozhkova 2018] (emphasis is mine) and positions itself as "the most quoted online edition in Russia outside Moscow and St. Petersburg and the leading business media in the Republic of Tatarstan" [Redaktsiya]. The Internet-newspaper "Realnoe vremya" also allows readers' comments, apart from providing "business news, industry analytics and up-to-date information on the development of the economy and technology in Tatarstan, Russia and the world" [Dilyara Khusnetdinova 2017; Trudnosti perevoda 2017]. The third regional source was "Idel.Realities", a media project of the Tatar–Bashkir Service of Radio Liberty about the Volga region [Khisamova 2017; Yangarov 2018; Osoznaniye… 2022; Simbirskaya 2021][3]. It provided a platform for people to express oppositional views and is also open for comments, which again gives social scientists an opportunity to measure the tension in the society and evaluate the argumentation schemes applied in discussions around the minority languages of Russia.

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[3] Currently, the project's website is inaccessible in Russia.

The various methods available for analyzing similar material include a combination of corpus linguistics with language ideology studies. For instance, R. Vessey argues that the statistically significant frequency, concordance, and 'keyword' functions of corpus linguistic programs can help in the identification and exploration of language ideologies within corpora. Using this approach, she analyzed French and English language ideologies in the corpora of Canadian newspapers. The approach revealed both its usefulness and limitations, the latter referring to the lack of contextual richness [Vessey 2017].

I relied on the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis as the most suitable for the purpose of this study, given the material collected. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use. CDA considers discourse as a form of social practice [Fairclough, Wodak, 1997] and proceeds from the fact that discourses form social practice and at the same time are formed by it [Wodak et al., 2009]. In contrast to other types of discourse and conversation analysis, CDA does not pretend to be able to assume an objective, socially neutral analytical stance, because such ostensible political indifference, according to its representatives, ultimately assists in maintaining an unjust status quo [Wodak et al., 2009] [4].

The late 1980s saw a convergence of research on (language) ideologies and CDA; as J. Irvine puts it, "linguistic anthropology had developed a strong interest in political economy and power relations (and came close to "Critical Discourse Analysis" in this respect)" [Irvine, 2022: 5]. This convergence seems to be not only natural, but even inevitable, because the methodology of CDA can be an effective tool for studying (language) ideologies, especially in a narrower, politically engaged understanding of the term 'ideology' (see *Section 2* for details).

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[4] However, all research, even beyond the framework of discourse analysis, is value laden. I believe that all positions taken on sociolinguistic issues reflect values and ideologies of their exponents [cf. Woolard, 1998].

The methodological approach used in this article basically follows the approach of the Vienna School of Critical Discourse Analysis [Reisigl, Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al. 2009; Matouschek et al. 1995]. This approach, as well as the practice of discourse analysis in general, is rather inductive, i.e., conditioned by the very nature of the texts analyzed. R. Wodak and her colleagues propose three dimensions of discourse analysis — *content, argumentation strategies* and *linguistic means* [Wodak et al. 2009]; see also [Titscher et. al. 2009]. Although a full analysis involves the study of all three dimensions, one can focus on one of them depending on the research purpose and various limitations. In my case, to identify language ideologies, it is appropriate to focus on the second dimension — argumentation strategies, namely on argumentation schemes used by people to substantiate their points of view, since these schemes are most explicitly related to and reveal their language ideologies.

In the tradition of the Vienna School of CDA, *argumentation schemes* are also called *topoi*. The use of the term *topos* by R. Wodak and her colleagues is not unproblematic and requires a separate comment. In the first major work in English by M. Reisigl and R. Wodak, the following definition of topos is given (with reference to M. Kienpointner [Kienpointner, 1992: 194]): "Within argumentation theory, 'topoi' or 'loci' can be described as parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable, premises. They are the content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim. As such, they justify the transition from the argument or arguments to the conclusion" [Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 75]. An example would be the *topos of advantage* or *usefulness* that can be paraphrased through the following conditional: if an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then one should perform it (e.g., usefulness of *'guest workers'* for a national economy). To this topos belong different subtypes, for example the topos of *'pro bono publico'* (to the advantage of all), the topos of '*pro bono nobis*' (to the advantage of 'us'), and the topos of '*pro bono eorum*' (to the advantage of 'them' [ibid., emphasis in the original].

In a later work, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, the authors provide a list of argumentation schemes (topoi) which gives the

impression of mixing all possible topoi, from formal (for example, *locus a minore*) to content-related (for example, *topos of history as a teacher* or *disaster topos*) [Wodak et. al. 2009: 36–42]. A. Alekseev gives well-grounded and more detailed critique of terminological confusion with the use of the *topos* notion in works by R. Wodak, M. Reisigl and other discourse analysts. The main claim is the inconsistency and incompatibility of topos interpretations by discourse analysts where, within the framework of one concept, its new and old meanings coexist. This, in turn, leads to its excessive stretching and blurring of the meanings inherent in the term at earlier stages [Alekseev 2019: 110].

In my work, the term *topos* is used to a certain extent in the 'classical' Aristotelian meaning — as a 'common place' [Aristotle 1978: 23], although Aristotle, as is known, did not give an explicit definition of *topos.* The Dictionary of Rhetoric, Linguistics and Effective Communication reproduces both the 'formal' and the content-related understanding of *topos*: "The success of the speech depends on whether you can reduce the topic to such statements that the audience will accept unconditionally. ⟨…⟩. The found topos forms the conceptual basis of the argument. ⟨…⟩. One can also find a broader understanding of topos as an opinion shared by everyone, by the majority or by a certain community, a view that does not require proof (for example, 'All people are mortal')" [Slovar]. The interpretation adopted in my work is narrower than that in CDA and only refers to the content-related topoi which are defined in the CDA as follows: "content-related topoi are topic and field specific and are standardized common places" [Wodak 2011: 213]; also see: "topoi can be described as reservoirs of generalized key ideas from which specific statements or arguments can be generated" [Richardson, 2004: 230]; cited in: [Wodak 2011: 42]. Finally, an important terminological difference is that I distinguish between the terms *topos* and *argumentation scheme*. *Topos* is a part of *argumentation scheme*, its essence, while *argumentation scheme* is more detailed and more extended, containing a lead to a certain conclusion. For example, the core of the argumentation scheme "No need to save // learn language X, because only group X needs it" is the topos "only group X needs language X" (for a more detailed analysis, see *Section 4*).

4. The findings

This paper aims to show *the most common and popular* argumentation schemes, topoi and related language ideologies which largely feed the existing linguistic culture in Russia. Therefore, instead of a detailed textual analysis, it provides a condensed table format overview summarizing the findings. Using an inductive approach to move from discourse fragments (quotes) to the argumentation schemes / topoi to the language ideologies behind them (i.e., from specific discourse to stereotyped arguments), the table makes it possible to expose the deeper, underlying language ideologies. The table is divided into 10 segments, with the discourse fragments grouped by their content reflecting the argumentation and language ideologies behind them. Though this format makes the table largely self-explanatory, a number of important points derived from the analysis are discussed below the table. Many (though far from all) of the quoted statements concerned the problem of teaching and learning native regional/republican languages, since most of the material used dates back to the 2017–2018 discussions. Given that these discussions were most active in the Volga region, they focus on the regional languages, i.e., Tatar, Bashkir and Chuvash.

To differentiate between topoi and non-topoi was a task in itself. The interpretation, adopted in this paper, of content-related topoi as evaluatively loaded commonplaces of the discourse required exclusion of some argumentation schemes from the analysis. In a sense, a topos with its strong orientation towards the audience is always a sort of a simplified evaluation, given the "banal, obliterated, "automatic" character of most topoi" [Stepanov 2018: 45]. Therefore, the detailed scientific argumentation used in the discussion about minority languages is not taken into account here, since it is not a topos. Also, the topoi that stray too far from the minority languages (ML) topic, even where they are indirectly related to the problem of minority languages preservation, fall outside my analysis, as well as a small number of comments in Tatar, because the discussion was mostly conducted in Russian. Finally, the list of topoi presented in *Table 1* is *not* exhaustive. Given the limited scope of one paper, it captures only the most frequent cases.

Table 1. Language ideologies, argumentation schemes and topoi in online discussions on minority languages of Russia [5]

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumentation schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
1	"Let the Tatars learn their language, maintain it and be responsible for it before their descendants." "Russian children are discriminated when forced to learn a non-Russian language." "Tatarstan is not [only] your republic. Let me remind you — half of the people here are people of other nationalities. They have their own native language. We will not learn yours." "If you convince your children to learn the Tatar language, then of course it will remain. But Russian and Chuvash children have nothing to do with it." "[Since] the Tatars need it, let the Tatars support their language. ⟨…⟩ Languages have existed without state support somehow, why can't they do this now?"	*No need to save* // *learn language X because **only group X needs it***	**Language = ethnicity //** **one** **language —** **one ethnicity** **Language belonging** **Language ownership**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumentation schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
2	"But what is happening now in the republics, when schoolchildren are forced to learn dead languages only spoken by ancient grandmothers in remote villages, [they are] often forced to learn them at the expense of Russian and other subjects, I consider this [to be] unacceptable. ⟨…⟩ And approaching the question from a logical point of view, what is the point of learning a language spoken, God willing, hardly by [several] hundred thousand people around the world or even less; and there are practically no people who speak exclusively this language and do not know Russian at all." "Now mastering a certain small language is just hours thrown out of life to study it. It makes no more sense than any other hobby." "And is there a need to preserve what has died naturally as [something] unnecessary?" "Is it necessary to study it [the Tatar language. — *E. K.*]? I do not know — I have not been to Tatarstan, I cannot assess its relevance. But logic suggests that if there were a demand, then everyone would want to learn it on their own. According to the information I know, this is not the case."	*No need to save // learn language X because **ML is in little demand (=> few people (no one) need it) // ML is of no use for a career and for the future in general***	**Small languages are doomed to extinction**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumentation schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
3	"Tatyaz [abbreviation for 'Tatar language'. — E. K.] will never be resuscitated! It is a language of the backward and dark past." "… this is a backward language and let it be studied only in the everyday life, but not at the state level." "As a result, ⟨…⟩ they have a choice: to keep their language and live in an information bubble (in which there is nothing, there are a couple hundred people in total ⟨…⟩) or to break the bubble and consume the culture of someone bigger in any desired quantities (and not 1 new film every 50 years)." "We here, like, look from the perspective of tourists from high capitals — oh, it's cool when there are two hundred tribes of Chuchmeks [a derogatory name for people of non-Russian ethnicity] in the country, and each tribe has its own language, so different that the neighboring tribes do not understand each other. And I wonder if it's funny for such a "Chuchmek" himself that only the other 200 residents of his native village understand his native language? And there is no normal literature, no education, there is nothing really in this language, there will be nothing, there cannot be anything, and there is no need? And if all this is intensively supported by the state, you will get something in between galvanizing the corpse of a frog and strengthening the crumbling language barriers…"	*No need to save // learn language X because **it is a backward language // ML means isolation, vacuum***	**MLs are languages-of-the-past**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumenta-tion schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
4	"What the f..k would a goat need a bayan [*bayan* is an accordion-like musical instrument] for? I studied the Chuvash language from the 1st to the 9th grade, [then] left for permanent residence for Kazan, I don't need it now. Wasted time and budget money on my «training». So it is with the Tatar language: now I live here, and in a few years I will move, and what? I and my children will not need Tatar either." "If you live in Tatarstan, this means that this is your native language!" "I understand the anxiety of parents that the child is given «unnecessary» knowledge. But you need to think in the long term, if your child is definitely leaving somewhere from Tatarstan, then this is really «unnecessary» knowledge. And if the child stays in Tatarstan, then knowledge of the Tatar language is necessary."	*No need to save // learn language X, because* **language X is not needed outside the national region // only people living in X need to know language X**	**One language — one territory**
5	"… the fourth reason is that, in principle, all non-Russians in the Russian Federation have already been convinced that all non-Russian languages in the Russian Federation are second-class. After all, almost all the comments to this article have been reduced to why do we need second-class languages, let them study first-class [languages] (Rus+English)." "I have Russian citizenship! And Russian citizens are required to know only the state Russian language!"	*No need to save // learn language X because language X* **is an inferior // insignificant language**	**Language hierarchy, different social values of languages**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumentation schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
6	"I will not pay for someone else's language out of my own pocket" "Imagine how much more you will have to chip in to ensure at least an equal (otherwise the death of their original culture will be a matter of time) level of consumption for all these small nations. Are you ready for such costs? Personally, I don't. I'm not even ready to chip in on Russian (and I therefore consume free English on the Internet)." "a typical leftist [approach. — E. K.] to take away and divide. Allegedly, the majorities should maintain minority languages with taxes, by default, what for? why? unclear. Why should my taxes go to print national [= ethnic. — E. K.] newspapers in their language and support [their] national [the original uses *natsmenskogo*, a derogatory word for 'national'. — E. K.] television? If they want to save them, let them do it on a general basis, who needs it buys a subscription, and so on.	*No need to save // learn language X because* **maintaining language X is a waste of money**	**Multilingualism is a burden**
7	A: "You probably have a very narrow understanding of the meaning of the words 'everyday level'. The everyday level is not only whether people speak this language at home or not. This is school education ⟨…⟩, and when the application in Tarandia [an invented country name] is not accepted by an employee who does not know Tarandian language with the requirement 'rewrite in a normal language' ⟨…⟩.	*No need to save // learn language X, because* **there is a «normal» language instead that everyone should speak**	**«Normality» and the default status of the dominant language**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumentation schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
	B: If an employee says 'rewrite in a normal language' — this is a normal requirement. An employee can't know all the surrounding languages, right?" In Omsk, a man hit a 66-year-old woman who was talking by her phone. According to the victim, Lucia Timofeeva, the attacker did not like her speaking Tatar. The incident happened on September 21 in a shuttle bus. "I was talking quietly, turned away to the window and spoke calmly. I was talking to an old lady, she doesn't hear well, maybe sometimes I spoke louder, I don't know. He tapped me on the shoulder, roughly so, and then said: "Either speak Russian, or shut up!" Such a tall, healthy bully. I looked at him and said, "You go to! Why can't I speak my own language?" And I started talking again. And he hit me on the head with his fist," the pensioner told the local newspaper *ngs55.ru*."		
	"And they are mostly local nationalists who stand for this, for whom their village is the center of the world»." "Well, the establishment of own separate language is the tool of separatism."	*No need to maintain language X because* ***maintaining language X means nationalism and separatism // linguistic unification is good for mankind //***	**One country — one language**

	Discourse fragments (quotes)	Argumenta-tion schemes and topoi	Language ideologies
8	"A single language is, first of all, conve-nient. Correct me if I'm wrong, but, damn it, it's convenient when all numbers and math-ematical symbols are written the same all over the world. In those regions where the numbers are written differently, I feel un-comfortable — I have to learn them." "In Russia, you only need to know Russian."	*we need only big languages (only one language)*	
9	"After all, there are studies (conducted outside Russia) proving that the more languages a child learns, the worse he/she masters each of them (which is logical). "The fact that mastering two languages facilitates the study of the third one does not at all negate the fact that the study of the second language slows down the development of the first [language], and the study of the third, the first two."	*No need to learn language X because* **learning many languages is a burden for children**.	**Multilingual-ism harms the develop-ment of the child**
10	"No enforcing of formal teaching [of ML] on non-native speakers will save it from oblivion, if it is not used in everyday life in the families of the native speakers themselves." "But if these languages are really needed, then why no one wants to speak them? And if everyone wants to, then why do they need artificial support?" "It's just a language. If you want to, you speak, if you don't, you don't speak. You don't even have to get up from the couch."	*No need to save // learn language X because* **the language can only be transmitted in the family. If they don't speak the language at home, it means they don't need it**	**Language transfer is the task of the family only**

It should be emphasized that identification of the separate topoi and ideologies listed in Table 1 is merely an analytical procedure. In fact, both the ideologies and the topoi manifesting them are closely intertwined. All these topoi represent common sense reasoning and are standard and typical arguments in ML discussions all over the world.

The *mechanism* of their connection with language ideologies is that the latter represent more general and abstract systems of beliefs and values, while topoi connect the argument with the conclusion and are used to substantiate the thesis. Thus, the argument "only group X needs language X" serves to justify the conclusion "if someone does not belong to group X, this someone does not need that 'foreign' language". This topos is based on the conscious and unconscious ideological view of the immanent connection between language and ethnicity and language ownership. These justifications, however, are only relevant in relation to 'non-prestigious' and 'useless' languages; when it comes to languages such as, for example, English or Chinese, these ideologies are set aside. Instead, the ideology of language hierarchy enters into force, where the place of a language is primarily connected with people's ideas about its pragmatic, practical value. This language hierarchy in people's minds is described, for example, in terms of "first-class (Russian+English) vs. second-class (all non-Russian idioms) languages" in one of the comments in *Table 1*.

The topos of finances ('maintaining language X is a waste of money') follows the same conclusion rule as in the work by Reisigl and Wodak: if a specific situation or action costs too much money or causes a loss of revenue, one should undertake actions that diminish the costs or help to avoid the loss. This topos comes close to the 'topos of burdening' [Resigl, Wodak 2001: 78]. This argumentation scheme does not assume knowledge of any reliable statistics; its persuasive power lies in its pseudo-financial nature and in its appeal to the economic, monetary interests of people.

The statements collected in *Table 1* give us an idea of how the topoi are formed. Sometimes they are just standardized common places, views that do not require proof as in the case with the topos of finances / topos of burdening. Sometimes, however, they are 'bundles' of collective experience made up of individual experiences, such as, for example, the story of a person who learned Chuvash and does not need it anymore after moving to Tatarstan (see *Table 1*). In this particular story, the topos "language

X is not needed outside the national region // only people living in X need to know language X" is based on personal experience. Subsequently, supplemented by the experiences and assessments of other people, such individual experiences are simplified, 'averaged' and turn into 'ready-made' argumentative cliches. This mechanism is similar to that of stereotyping. In stereotypes, scholars distinguish *the space of adequacy, the space of simplifications* and *the space of deformations* [Il'yushkin, 2014: 32]. Topoi also vary between these spaces. It can be assumed that the degree of adequacy or deformation of topoi depends on the direction of the cognitive process. If the topos is derived from someone's real life experience, it is a generalizing conclusion and is therefore more adequate. If the topos is taken from a reservoir of common key ideas circulating in a society, someone using it for argumentation saves thereby own mental energy. In that case, the degree of simplification and deformation may be greater.

The same ideology and topoi can be used both by ML opponents and supporters. For example, the ideological view of a strong connection between language and ethnicity is usually considered to underlie ML supporters' arguments. Therefore, this ideology and the related *native language* concept are criticized by constructivists and language assimilation devotees who advocate dismantling the category of native language to break the 'firmly glued' connection of language with the category of ethnicity in the Russian discourse [Tishkov 2019: 133]. However, as we can see from the table, the 'language = ethnicity' ideology is widespread in the mass consciousness of the opponents of ML maintenance and is used by them as an argument against learning regional languages, for example. This suggests that language ideologies can be and are used as an instrument not only by authorities (which is a well-studied topic in CDA), but also by individuals, which is a much less evident and underinvestigated issue. The appeal to an 'appropriate' language ideology serves to argue and legitimize the language decision that seems to be right and desirable to a particular individual[6]. In this sense, ideology is

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[6] This serves as an argument in favor of the primacy and unconscious nature of (language) attitudes in contrast to the partial rationality of ideologies; for more detail, see: [Uznadze 1961; Khilkhanova 2022].

a 'persuading consciousness' [Rubtsov et al. 2016: 133], a means to persuade and manipulate not only others, but — which is more important and interesting — oneself. A. Rubtsov speaks in this sense about the coherence of ideology and pragmatics — depending on the task, a person can (consciously or just following the socially dominating ideologies) use a convenient ideological formula [Rubtsov et al. 2016: 133–136].

In their search for arguments, the discussants turn to various fields of knowledge. Basically, the opponents of ML maintenance and learning appeal to:

— legal arguments on the status and legitimacy of languages and language requirements, language rights of people and, specifically, children.
— pseudo-scientific arguments — for example, about the harmful effect of bi- and multilingualism on children's development in general and on language learning, in particular;
— pseudo-economic, pseudo-financial arguments regarding the cost of minority language support paid "from our taxes" (usually without providing 'real' figures or facts);
— numerical (a small number of ML speakers) and territorial arguments to justify the limited or absent lack of demand for ML; and
— arguments to do with national security and the threat of separatism.

From the structural point of view, the analyzed discussion provides examples of both brief, concise topoi, and detailed standardized descriptions, large narrative fragments. The most salient structural features used in the analyzed argumentation schemes include:

— imperative and modal constructions with the meaning of necessity and obligation: "*let it be studied* only in everyday life", "In Russia, you *must* know only Russian."
— inclusive "we": *We* will not learn yours <languages>."
— the "we — they" or "we — you" opposition, where the opposite or third parties are represented by the appropriate pronouns: "As a result, ⟨…⟩ *they* have a choice: to keep *their* language and

live in an information bubble (in which there is nothing, there are a couple hundred people in total ⟨…⟩) or to break the bubble and consume the culture of someone bigger in any desired quantities (and not one new film every 50 years).”
— rhetorical questions (“*is there a need to preserve what died naturally as unnecessary*?”), and
— direct appeals to the reader (“Are *you* ready for such costs?”).

Attempts to influence the opponent/s are made through lexical means as well. This includes the use of various metaphors (to preserve one’s language and live in an information bubble, galvanizing a frog corpse, strengthening crumbling language barriers), paroemias (“What the f..k would a goat need a bayan for?”), pejorative lexemes (kishlak, chuchmeki, natsmenskij), an appeal to other discourses — legal or political, marked with appropriate lexemes — ‘separatism’, ‘discrimination’ (“Well, the establishment of own separate language is the tool of separatism”, “Russian children are discriminated by forcing them to learn a non-native language”).

The use of topoi in arguing one’s position is especially common among ML opponents. For example, the statement “And is there a need to preserve what died naturally as unnecessary?” builds on two topoi: “few people (no one) need language X” and “the death of language/s is a natural process”. Such arguments are typical for supporters of the so-called ‘Darwinian’ approach. They fail to include in their reasoning more complex cause-and-effect relationships leading to the death of a language; for example, if the existence of a language is under threat, the causes are usually multiple and include complex external and internal factors, language ideologies being one of the most powerful internal subject-related reasons.

Generally, the list of the most frequent topoi extracted from the analyzed Internet-discussions includes [7]:

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[7] The list of topoi is longer compared to *Table 1*, because in the table they are presented in conjunction with the debaters’ statements; one statement can contain several slightly different topoi. Here, I have separated them for clarity purposes. Once again, it should be emphasized that the list of such topoi presented here is not exhaustive.

— only ethnic group X needs ethnic language X
— ML is in little demand
— few people (no one) need ML
— ML is of no use for a career and for the future in general
— language X is a backward language
— ML = isolation, vacuum
— language X is not needed outside the national region
— only people living in X need to know language X
— ML is an inferior language
— ML is an insignificant language
— maintaining language X is a waste of money
— there is a "normal" language instead that everyone should speak
— maintaining language X means supporting nationalism and separatism
— linguistic unification is good for mankind
— we only need 'big' languages
— we only need one language
— learning many languages is a burden for children
— a language can only be passed on in the family
— if they don't speak language X at home, it means they don't need it.

Although ML supporters (their arguments are not analyzed here) also use topoi, they mostly appeal to the cultural value of languages and their importance for their speakers' identity, as well as to language ecology. Their arguments are more extensive and sophisticated, because the need for ML support is less obvious for non-linguists and requires additional explanation. Consider one comment by a professional linguist: "You present the case as if a language were [simply] a communication tool, and if there is no understanding between people, it is because of different languages. Unfortunately, this is a misunderstanding of language. Language is not just a communication tool. It is language that preserves culture. No subculture can preserve Pushkin's poems, if the Russian language goes away. No one will be able to read them, the living culture will become dead. By itself, language as an object is also an object of culture, it is a complex highly organized system, and it is not fully understood [yet]

how it is arranged. And the more such (internally very diverse) systems we preserve, the richer human culture will be in the future" [Orekhov 2017b].

Unlike the argument above, the arguments 'against' are simpler and easier to understand, because they are pragmatic, practical and appeal to common sense. To some extent, this shows the difference between expert and profane ideologies, topoi, and discourses. This difference can be further illustrated by interpretations of the link between language and ethnicity provided by linguists and the 'ordinary people'. In the scientific literature, the 'one language — one ethnicity' ideology is considered obsolete as an oversimplification of the much more complex relationship between language and ethnic identity [Blackledge, Pavlenko 2001; Khilkhanova, Khilkhanov 2003]. However, as the argumentation in Table 1 shows, it is well alive in the mass consciousness of many Russian citizens. For many 'ordinary people', ethnic groups are a social reality along with their connection to the corresponding languages. In Russia, people tend to interpret the link between language and ethnicity along the essentialist lines. The statements of discourse participants are often categorical and include not only topoi, but also direct insults, fact distortions and other incorrect discussion practices (about the manner of conducting discussions, also see [Baranova, Fedorova 2018]).

5. Conclusion

The paper considers the ideological views of Russian Web users who are '*against*' ML maintenance or ML teaching at school. This does not mean that other, opposing viewpoints do not exist. On the contrary, we have been recently witnessing a rise in language activism and ML-affirmative actions by 'ordinary citizens'. At the same time, the research revealed a number of 'negative' language ideologies that support, among other things, notions like *language hierarchy, normativity of (Russian) monolingualism, the 'naturalness' of ML disappearance due to their 'uselessness' and lack of prospects, or connection of ML with nationalism and 'old times'*. These language ideologies, like any mental formations, are difficult to account for

due to their implicit character, as they are often buried deep in the speakers' consciousness. Sometimes they are expressed through linguistic markers, sometimes are seen in non-verbal behavior (see Table 1 for the Omsk incident where a woman was punched for speaking Tatar). On a regular basis, they can be reconstructed through topoi used by the debaters. In an effort to underpin their position, Web users resort to legal, pseudo-scientific, pseudo-financial, quantitative, territorial arguments, as well as to arguments of national security and the threat of separatism. The topoi show significant variance in both structure and volume, and include all possible lexical, grammatical or rhetorical tools intended to win the opponents over.

The topoi list provided in the previous section demonstrates the wide spread of more practical, obvious, and common-sense reasoning in the mass consciousness. The ordinary thinking is prone to simplification, simple solutions or explanations. Also, the research shed some light on the mechanism of topoi formation: on the way to become 'common places', they have been someone's life experiences. Subsequently, processed in people's minds, these 'bundles' of experiences turn into 'ready-made' argumentative cliches with varying degrees of adequacy, simplification, or deformation. Like stereotypes, topoi perform both positive and negative functions. In a positive way, they save mental energy by simplifying decision-making. The disadvantage is that template arguments claim the absolute truth, thereby excluding any alternative points of view.

One of the notable findings of this study is the manipulative aspect of language ideologies. People can invoke any convenient ideological justification for their position in order to 'persuade' both themselves and others. Topoi are ideally suited for this type of argumentation as they are plausible, although built on limited experience pretending nevertheless to be a universal truth.

In general, my research shows that the Russian case is not an exception to world practices, with all the language ideologies already described in the literature being present in the Russian Internet discourse as well. Some Russian-specific features, though, may be viewed in the manner discussions typically evolve in Russian social networks. All ML-related discussions in the Russian Internet are extremely strung-up, polarized and reveal swarms of emotion, hate, and hidden phobias. The conspicuous

intensity of Internet discussions, the prevalence of 'Darwinian' views and non-supportive language ideologies described in the article largely explain the continued withdrawal of minority languages of Russia from the sphere of communication, the decrease in the number of schoolchildren learning 'native languages' despite the fact that, as some Internet users put it, "no one forbids you to learn them".

In conclusion, I must say that today the public consciousness in Russia tends to harbor mutually exclusive language ideologies where, on the one hand, there is an evident gradual change towards greater linguistic tolerance and acceptance of language diversity as well as some increase in language activism mentioned above, while on the other hand, the negative language ideologies described in this paper are also very much alive in the mass consciousness of the population.

Further avenues of research may include a study of the competing language ideologies — those in support of Russian minority languages and of language diversity in general. As mentioned above, this was the initial idea of the present paper that failed to be implemented due to the large volume of the material exceeding the article format (although some observations on such arguments are briefly presented above). Finally, the database itself can and should be extended to include other Russian regions, which should provide a more exhaustive picture of the public opinion regarding language diversity country-wide.

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