

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Russian Language Preference among Youth in Kyrgyzstan*

Ertan Özensel**

Abstract

This article aims to explore the reasons why Kyrgyz youth continue to prefer Russian in their daily lives more than thirty years after Kyrgyzstan's independence. For this purpose, a quantitative study was conducted by administering a survey to a sample of 384 young individuals aged 15-39 living in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital, who reported predominantly using Russian in their daily interactions. The findings indicate that the primary reasons for Kyrgyz youth preferring Russian in everyday life include their perception that they can express themselves and communicate more comfortably in Russian compared to Kyrgyz; the dominance of Russian as the language of education, business, public spaces, social settings, and peer groups in Bishkek; a lack of confidence in their Kyrgyz language proficiency; and the belief that speaking Kyrgyz in daily life may lead to perceptions of rural origin, judgment, or criticism. These socio-cultural factors emerge as significant contributors to this preference.

Keywords

Language use, Russian, Kyrgyz language, Central Asia, Post-independence.

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Kırgızistan'da Gençler Arasında Rusça Kullanım Tercihî*

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Öz

Bu makale, Kırgızistan'ın bağımsızlığının üzerinden otuz yılı aşkın süre geçmesine rağmen Kırgız gençlerinin gündelik yaşamda Rusçayı neden tercih ettiklerini incelemektedir. Bu amaçla, Bişkek'te yaşayan, 15–39 yaş aralığında bulunan ve günlük iletişimlerinde ağırlıklı olarak Rusça kullandığını belirten 384 gençle nicel bir araştırma yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, gençlerin Rusçayı tercih etmelerinde Rusçada kendilerini daha rahat ifade etmeleri; Bişkek'te eğitim, iş yaşamı, kamusal alanlar, sosyal çevre ve arkadaş gruplarında Rusçanın yaygınlığı; Kırgızca yeterliklerine duydukları güvensizlik, Kırgızca konuşmanın kırsal kökenle ilişkilendirilebileceği, yargılanma veya eleştirilme doğurabileceği yönündeki algılar gibi sosyo-kültürel etkenlerin belirleyici olduğunu göstermektedir. Araştırma, Rusçanın gündelik yaşamda süreklilik kazanmasının yalnızca dil yeterliğiyle değil, eğitim sistemi, iş piyasası, kentleşme, toplumsallaşma süreçleri ve psikolojik algılarla birlikte değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Dil kullanımı, Rusça, Kırgızca, Bişkek, Orta Asya, bağımsızlık sonrası.

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Introduction

The nations in the Central Asian region have historically endured the dominion of various civilizations and, they were also subject to Russian invasion during the past century until the 1990s. Among the prominent policies pursued by Russia during this period are its language policies.

Language is not merely a tool for communication among individuals coexisting in the world of social interactions; it is a destiny for them (Sapir 162). Through language, nations are able to express their culture, literature, history, and art, cultivate a sense of national identity, and transmit this heritage to future generations. Gökalp emphasizes that a person's most cherished language is their mother tongue, which conveys to the individual all religious, moral, and unique emotions that shape their soul (Gökalp 19-20). Despite the significant role of the mother tongue in identity construction, policies in some countries may push its use into the background. Language, which is one of the critical elements that form a nation's identity and distinguish it from others, has been described as "a tool used in all wars waged against cultures" (M. Aydın 56). In short, language is the foundation of every culture, deeply intertwined with its history, traditions, and customs. It is one of the most significant elements that connect individuals to their cultural heritage. The way a person's native language is spoken, written, and expressed plays a vital role in defining and shaping their cultural identity.

Within Western academic discourse, there is a considerable body of literature exploring the influence of language on cultural structures. Fanon argues that each language embodies a distinct mode of thought, and that fluency in a language entails a deeper engagement with the worldview it conveys and constructs (Fanon). Consequently, speaking a language other than one's mother tongue or the language of one's cultural geography necessitates the internalization of its underlying cultural codes. The Black individual, unable to escape the constraints of his skin color, seeks alternative forms of "whitening"; one such method, Fanon suggests, is through language itself (Ünlü 40). In the context of the former Soviet Union, although people were not Black and thus did not experience a racial imperative to "become white," speaking the dominant language was still perceived as a gateway

to being modern, urban, and intellectual as also evidenced by the research findings.

Said, examines how Western literature and culture are intertwined with imperialist systems, illustrating how language and narrative reinforce cultural dominance (Said). Similarly, Geertz highlights the significance of linguistic symbols in the formation of cultural frameworks, aiming to articulate their impact on both individual consciousness and social life. Nunberg examines modern culture through the lens of language, analyzing its influence across domains such as political discourse, technology, and the business world. Ramesh explores the impact of language on cultural identity, social integration, education, and communication. In this context, he examines and evaluates how language shapes various aspects of society.

The primary aim of this article is to investigate the reasons why Kyrgyz youth prefer using Russian in their daily lives. Therefore, it will not delve into a detailed analysis of the importance of language in forming a society or its vital function in constructing a nation. However, the transformative power of language within any society has been widely addressed in numerous studies. In this context, providing a few striking examples will be meaningful in highlighting the significance of the issue.

Colonial powers often sought to weaken native languages in occupied societies. Thomas Macaulay emphasized English as a transformative tool, asserting that English-educated Hindus would abandon their traditional beliefs (Kalın 117). Similarly, Cromer, British colonial governor in Egypt (1883–1907), disregarded Arabic, viewing the language and culture with disdain (Marlowe 20–21). In Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, France banned Arabic in state schools, administration, and official correspondence, while the Dutch prohibited native language teaching in Indonesian schools (T. Aydın 57–58).

During Tsarist Russia, Kyrgyz society began experiencing linguistic influence, which intensified under strict Soviet language policies. The Soviet regime promoted Russian to maintain control over occupied territories, a strategy that continues to impact Central Asia over 30 years after independence. Lenin defined a nation as a “unity of language,” while Stalin emphasized a “stable community of language, territory, economy, and culture” (Sarı 27).

These definitions shaped Soviet policies, whose effects remain evident in former Soviet states.

For generations caught between their national and imposed identities, reclaiming language and identity has been a significant challenge. During Gorbachev's era, efforts to establish Kyrgyz as the official language intensified, resulting in its designation as the state language in 1989. However, Russia's influence persisted post-independence. In 2001, Kyrgyz was recognized as the state language, while Russian was designated the official language. Despite this, Russian remained dominant in education, administration, and politics, limiting the official use of Kyrgyz (Li 27).

In today's Kyrgyzstan, where both languages are in use, Russian continues to be widely used as a language of communication due to reasons such as the prevalence of education in Russian, the dominance of Russian in academic discourse, its extensive use in politics, its continued influence in economic life, and its international validity. Russian maintains its prominence as a city language in various domains particularly in the capital city of Bishkek.

In Kyrgyzstan and other Turkic republics in the region, it is observed that direct studies on the use of Russian by the local population alongside their native languages are quite limited. One of the rare studies addressing this topic is the 2019 research examining the reflections of young people's language use habits on cultural life in Kyrgyzstan (Başkapan ve Ünal 362-397). In contrast, as briefly mentioned in the literature, research in the Turkic republics that gained independence has primarily focused on Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet language policies. Meanwhile, studies in other countries on the use of the local language tend to concentrate more on migrants living in those countries.

This study aims to explore the factors influencing Kyrgyz youth's preference for the Russian language in their daily lives, focusing on the impact of the language of education, the language spoken within families, governmental policies, as well as psycho-social, cultural, and economic dynamics. The paper begins by briefly addressing the language policies implemented in Soviet Central Asia under Russian influence, followed by the post-independence language policies of Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, it provides an overview of the current usage of both Russian and Kyrgyz in today's Kyrgyzstan. Finally,

based on the research findings, the study identifies the reasons why young people prefer Russian in their everyday lives.

Language Policies Implemented by Russia in Central Asia

The peoples of the Turkic states located in Central Asia today have been subjected to the dominance of various nations during a significant portion of historical periods. This situation has given rise to major issues in social, cultural, economic, political, national, religious, and linguistic matters, among others. These regions, known as Turkestan, came under Russian invasion from the late 19th century onwards and remained under such circumstances until they gained independence in the late 20th century. For over a century, language and national policies of the Russians were applied in the Turkestan region. Among the most affected aspects by these policies is the issue of language (Baytok 45).

Language policies, which formed the basis of the policy of nations in the Soviet Union, were implemented as the most ambitious social engineering project of the Soviet Union. The Russian language policies began in the Kyrgyz lands when the Khokant Khanate was destroyed by the Russians in 1876 and came under Russian rule. One of the most important elements of the language policy implemented by the Russians in Kyrgyzstan was the alphabet, and the alphabet was shaped depending on the political conditions. In this period, Tsarist Russia wanted to convert the alphabets of the Turkic peoples into Cyrillic alphabet (Baytok 48) and succeeded in this.

Language Policies of the Independence Period in Kyrgyzstan

Efforts to declare Kyrgyz Turkish as the official language began in the mid-1980s, gaining momentum under M. Gorbachev. In 1988, Kyrgyz intellectuals began discussing bilingualism and advocating for Kyrgyz as the state language. In 1989, nine of the fifteen Soviet republics, including Kyrgyzstan, enacted laws promoting their national languages, addressing the marginalization of Kyrgyz by Russian (Huskey 251). On September 23, 1989, the Kyrgyz Parliament passed the “State Language Law of the Kyrgyz SSR,” declaring Kyrgyz the sole state language and Russian the language of interethnic communication (Abdiyeva 112).

Following independence, Russia’s economic, social, political, and cultural influence remained significant in Kyrgyzstan. After extensive debates,

Russian was officially designated as the “official language” in the 2000 Law on the Official Language and the 2001 Constitution. This introduced a distinction between “state language” (Kyrgyz) and “official language” (Russian), legally reinforcing Russian’s linguistic dominance, which negatively impacted Kyrgyz Turkish. Public demand grew for all citizens, particularly public officials, to learn Kyrgyz Turkish, with proposals for mandatory language exams. However, in 2001, the parliament rejected the draft law on language examinations, approving only the requirement for presidential candidates to be tested in Kyrgyz. This state-official language structure remained unchanged in the 2007 Constitution adopted after President Akayev’s resignation (Abdiyeva 112; Alkan 224; Demirtepe 6).

Even though the declaration of Russian as the official language in Kyrgyzstan was initiated by Akayev, the subsequent Bakiyev government did not actively work to promote the Kyrgyz Turkish language or enhance its usability. For example, in May 2006, Taşboo Cumagulov, the Chairman of the State Language National Commission, announced a plan to transition completely to the state language (Kyrgyz Turkish) in editorial offices by 2015. However, President Bakiyev rejected this statement. He also emphasized the need for teaching Russian in Kyrgyzstan, especially in villages, citing the practical benefits it brings. Bakiyev also reassured Russian-speaking individuals in the country that there was no need for them to be concerned about a shift in the official language (Kılıç 38-39).

The language issue continues to be discussed in post-independence Kyrgyzstan by all circles today as it was at the end of the pre-independence periods. Famous Kyrgyz thinker and man of letters Ch. Aytmatov (1928-2008) made a statement to the newspaper “Literaturnaya Gazeta” in 1985 before independence, arguing that every nation should be able to speak in their mother tongue, develop their literature and civilization in their native language, and this matter should be addressed starting from kindergartens and nurseries (Kamchibekova 33-34). In a post-independence interview, Aytmatov made significant observations regarding language. Aytmatov stated that although Kyrgyz is officially recognized as the state language, in practice, Russian dominates in all spheres. He also emphasized that for Kyrgyz to sustain its national mission, it must be actively used not only in

daily life but also within the country's political and administrative spheres (Rayev 62-64).

Efforts to strengthen Kyrgyz Turkish and enhance its social role have intensified in Kyrgyzstan since 2013. On July 1, 2013, President Almazbek Atambayev issued a decree on improving the national language and language policy. This led to the development of the State Language Development National Program for 2014–2020, which outlined step-by-step measures. The program aimed to establish an effective language policy, promote the widespread use of Kyrgyz Turkish, and raise a multilingual generation fluent in their mother tongue, state, official, and international languages. It emphasized that learning Kyrgyz Turkish is a duty of every citizen and a means of fostering social participation and competitiveness. The program addressed the limited use of Kyrgyz Turkish in government, official correspondence, and higher education despite its status as the state language. It also focused on improving the teaching of Kyrgyz as a mother tongue, second language, and foreign language, along with developing the necessary infrastructure and standards for these processes (Abdiyeva 112).

The state occasionally took coercive measures to promote Kyrgyz Turkish. In November 2017, Prime Minister Sapar Isakov signed a decree requiring all government employees to have a basic knowledge of Kyrgyz by 2019. From March 1, 2018, government and municipal employees across provinces were tested in Kyrgyz Turkish, with civil servants' language proficiency evaluated starting January 1, 2019 (TARSAM). In March 2015, a parliamentary proposal sought to revoke Russian's status as an official language. The Chairman of the National Language Commission, Egemberdi Ermatov, announced plans for constitutional amendments by 2020. However, Article 13 of Kyrgyzstan's fourth constitution, adopted on May 5, 2021, reaffirmed Kyrgyz as the state language and Russian as the official language (Kyrgyz Republic 4).

The Status of the Russian Language in Today's Kyrgyzstan

The development of the national language remains a critical issue in Kyrgyzstan's language policy. Despite some state efforts, no significant changes have been observed in the use of Kyrgyz Turkish in administration, official documents, professional circles, and education (Baytok 64).

Although Russian retains its official status, Russian-speaking citizens feel increasingly marginalized, while many Kyrgyz express frustration over limited access to quality education and employment in their native language. Bishkek, formerly known as Frunze during the Soviet era, was considered a “Russian city,” with Russians outnumbering Kyrgyz until 1999. In Soviet Frunze, advancing professionally or holding managerial positions required knowledge of Russian. The city predominantly spoke Russian, and most schools taught in Russian, effectively excluding Kyrgyz from public life. Elmira Nogoibaeva argued that “unlike other Central Asian republics, Kyrgyz was practically not taught in Kyrgyzstan, and those who fought for the right to learn their mother tongue were persecuted and oppressed.” This led to the marginalization of Kyrgyz people in their own country while the colonial Russian language became increasingly dominant (Riskulova).

After the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet education system continued in Kyrgyzstan to a large extent. In schools where education is mostly conducted in Russian, a few hours a week are dedicated to teaching the foreign language, which is Kyrgyz, as part of the curriculum. Russian words and phrases (including those in mathematics) in Kyrgyz conversations today constitute half of the Kyrgyz language. Students attending Russian-language schools might not become proficient in Kyrgyz, but since their family and friends predominantly speak Russian and this language is prevalent in their daily lives, not having strong Kyrgyz language skills might not present a problem for them in their daily interactions.

Despite the immigration from rural areas where the language of communication is predominantly Kyrgyz, Russian is mainly used in daily life in Bishkek. Although advertisements and signs are generally bilingual in Bishkek today, services in shops and cafes are offered mostly in Russian. Moreover, due to the necessity of maintaining documents in two languages, it remains quite challenging to find employment in a government institution without knowing Russian. Nazarkul Ishekeev, the Chairman of the State Language National Commission, stated in 2019 that only about 40% of all state documents were in Kyrgyz (Riskulova). When one listens to a speech by the deputies, the president and interviews with local celebrities, it will be seen that their speech is a mixture of Kyrgyz and Russian words if they do not have a memorized text before them (Samiev).

Today, nearly all international films are shown in Russian in Kyrgyz cinemas, and cartoons in Kyrgyz began airing on state channels only recently. In Bishkek, Russian language classes outnumber Kyrgyz ones in schools and preschools. President Sadyr Japarov proposed translating official documents into Kyrgyz to support the language's development. The language issue is often raised by politicians during parliamentary elections, with nationalist parties, such as "Mekenchil," led by Japarov, advocating for the removal of Russian's official status. Kyrgyzstan's 11th President, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who delivered all his official speeches in Kyrgyz, faced ridicule for his limited Russian proficiency. While Japarov promotes the Kyrgyz language, he and previous leaders continue to emphasize the importance of Russian in Kyrgyzstan, particularly during interactions with Russia (Riskulova).

Striking examples of language use are evident in daily life. For instance, many Kyrgyz people cannot name the days of the week in Kyrgyz and may resort to saying "first day," "second day," and so on, starting from Friday. Similarly, most cannot name the twelve months in Kyrgyz and instead use the Russian names, often believing them to be Kyrgyz. Russian words are so deeply integrated into Kyrgyz that many assume they are native. For example, students commonly use the Russian-derived word "студент" (student) instead of the Kyrgyz equivalent, insisting it is a Kyrgyz term.

Attempts to use the Kyrgyz language more widely in the country may be the subject of such evaluations by some circles as "the authorities demand the dominance of the Kyrgyz language under the influence of nationalism and populism" (Sokolov). Another striking phenomenon is that approximately one million Kyrgyz immigrants living in Russia earn their living in Russia with the help of the Russian language, feed their families in Kyrgyzstan and make a substantial contribution to the country's economy.

Method

The study on the reasons behind young people's preference to speak Russian in daily life in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan is a quantitative and situational research. Therefore, no hypothesis testing was performed in the study. On the other hand, although there are various studies on the position of the Russian and Kyrgyz languages in Kyrgyzstan, no research has been found in the relevant literature addressing the reasons that cause Russian to be spoken in

daily life. In this context, a preliminary study was conducted on 20 people in June 2023 on a sample in Bishkek, where 23 statements were made. Then, the ineffective statements were removed and the study was carried out, in September 2023, on 384 people in total covering an age range of 15-39 using the sample questionnaire containing 15 statements. Before the administration of the survey to the participants involved in the study, they were asked “In which language do you communicate more in daily life?” and the questionnaire was applied to those who answered “in Russian”. If a participant gave the answer “Kyrgyz”, the questionnaire was not applied to him or her. Our sample consists of the capital city of Bishkek. Today, Bishkek is a city where Russian is predominantly spoken. As seen in Table 2, 413,152 people in the 15-39 age group live in Bishkek according to 2021 data. Again, the number of samples was determined according to the age groups included in the sample. The reliability level of the research is 95% and the margin of error is 5%. In addition, the “purposive sampling” technique was used in our sample. The reason why the purposive sampling was chosen was to determine the reasons why the generation who began to attend school after the independence of Kyrgyzstan used the Russian language in daily life. It was also assumed that revealing the policies of the Kyrgyz governments after independence regarding the Kyrgyz language and the sense of belonging in a country that was freed from intense Russian domination before independence would be meaningful. Therefore, the population over the age of 40 who started school during the period of Russian domination and the population before the age of 14 who were thought to lack maturity to understand the meaning of the subject were excluded from the sample.

Table 1

Population distribution by gender among individuals aged 15 to 39 residing in Bishkek

	Male	Female	Total
Number	504.594	569.481	1.074.075
Percent	46.98%	53.02%	100%

Table 2
Distribution of the population by age groups

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percent
15-19	31273	30763	62036	15.02%
20-24	30310	30799	61109	14.79%
25-29	37589	40799	78388	18.97%
30-34	56918	67218	124136	30.05%
35-39	39983	47500	87483	21.17%
Total	196073	217079	413152	100%

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2019-2023

All the participants were interviewed face-to-face by the students of the Sociology Department of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University who were given special training for the application of the questionnaire, and the participants filled out the questionnaires themselves in an environment where the interviewer was also present. A separate questionnaire including criteria related to the aims of the research was administered to each participant. The questions in the questionnaire form consisted of two main parts. The first part consisted of multiple-choice demographic and informative questions, and the second part consisted of five-point Likert-type statements (I totally agree, I agree, I have no idea, I disagree, I totally disagree) measuring to what extent the participants agreed with the statements concerning “language” use. Evaluation of the data was conducted via “percentage data” and “factor analysis”. In this article, the frequencies used in the reported analyses, factor groups related to their samples, and gender and age differences are included in data interpretation.

Results

The participants of the research consisted of a total of 384 individuals, with 51.8% (199) being female and 48.2% (185) being male. The age distribution of the research sample is given in Table 2. Among the participants, 26.6% have spent most of their lives in rural areas, while 73.4% have spent their lives in urban areas.

Table 3

Distribution of the sample by age groups

Age Groups	Number	%	Cumulative %
15-19	70	18.2	18.2
20-24	73	19.0	37.2
25-29	81	21.1	58.3
30-34	93	24.2	82.6
35-39	67	17.4	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0

Table 4

In which language did the participants receive their education?

Schools	Language of Instruction	Number	Cumulative %
Primary School	Kyrgyz	145	37.8
	Russian	239	62.2
	Other Languages	-	-
Total		384	100.0
Middle School	Kyrgyz	124	32.3
	Russian	256	66.7
	Other Languages	4	1.0
Total		384	100.0
High School	No High School Education	5	1.3
	Kyrgyz	114	29.7
	Russian	260	67.7
	Other Languages	5	1.3
Total		384	100.0

College/University	No University Education	31	8.1
	Kyrgyz	36	9.4
	Russian	303	78.9
	Other Languages	14	3.6
Total		384	100.0

Today, the common languages of instruction in Kyrgyzstan are Kyrgyz and Russian. In addition, education is also provided in Uzbek, especially in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan, more specifically in the city of Osh. There are schools that provide education in Kyrgyz and Russian at every stage of education, in the capital Bishkek in particular. University education, on the other hand, is commonly conducted in Russian. Two significant universities can be highlighted as exceptions in this regard. Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University offers bilingual education in Turkish and Kyrgyz, whereas the American University provides education solely in English.

The language of instruction is a crucial factor influencing the prevalence of a language in a country. According to the education data of the research sample (Table 3), the rate of individuals educated in Russian is significantly high and increases with education level. For primary school, 62.2% were educated in Russian and 37.8% in Kyrgyz. For secondary school, the rates are 66.7% in Russian and 32.3% in Kyrgyz. At the high school level, 67.7% studied in Russian and 29.7% in Kyrgyz. Finally, 78.9% received university education in Russian, compared to just 9.4% in Kyrgyz. Education in other languages, such as Turkish and English, is minimal. This dominance of Russian in education is a key factor in the participants' preference for Russian in daily life.

An interesting phenomenon is observed in the responses given to the question about in which language the participants commonly communicate in the family (Table: 4). Considering that the survey was conducted only on those who preferred to speak Russian in daily life, the fact that Kyrgyz (54.9%) is used more frequently than Russian (45.1%) as the language of communication in the family can be considered as a rather interesting finding. However, when evaluated in the context of the data to be provided

below, the fact that the main determinant of social and economic life is Russian and a psychological superiority is attributed to speaking Russian reveals that this situation is not a contradiction.

Table 5

In which language do the participants communicate more in the family?

Language of Communication	Number	%	Cumulative %
Kyrgyz	211	54.9	54.9
Russian	173	45.1	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0

When the opinions of the participants were sought about which language would be more widely spoken in Kyrgyzstan in the future, it was determined that 48.2% of them thought that both languages would be extensively used. On the other hand, 23.4% of them stated that Kyrgyz would be used widely whereas 22.1% stated that it would be Russian. The positive views expressed by people speaking Russian in their daily lives towards the Kyrgyz language can be considered a result of the recent regulations adopted in the Kyrgyz Parliament regarding the Kyrgyz language as well as a shift in public opinion and an increasing awareness concerning the Kyrgyz language. However, the idea previously expressed by Aytmatov that “Kyrgyz and Russian are like the two wings of a bird; without one, it is not possible to fly,” is a prevalent belief among Kyrgyz intellectuals and a significant portion of the society, and it can be said that this understanding still persists.

Table 6

What kind of language policy should the state pursue in education?

State's Language Policy in Education	Number	%	Cumulative %
Education in Kyrgyz language should be expanded.	126	32.8	32.8
Education in Russian should be expanded.	8	2.1	34.9

It should prioritize bilingual education (Kyrgyz-Russian)	244	63.5	98.4
No Idea	6	1.6	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0

The participants predominantly exhibited a tendency (63.5%) towards the state’s following an educational policy emphasizing bilingual education (Kyrgyz-Russian). On the other hand, the second highest proportion (32.8%) of the participants expressed the need to promote Kyrgyz language education. The percentage of those advocating for the popularization of education in Russian language was only 2.1%. In light of these data, it can be inferred that the participants lean towards the importance of bilingualism in education by placing emphasis on both Kyrgyz and Russian languages to be used concurrently.

Results of the Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation for the Statements

First, factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted in our study to determine the underlying domains represented by the statements included in our research. The preference for varimax rotation stems from our desire to maximize variation across all factors. When the variation of a factor is maximized, there must be both high and low loadings under that factor. In such a case, variables with low loadings will be entirely removed from the analysis, making it easier and more accurate to interpret the factor. Among various rotation methods, varimax is the one that comes closest to achieving this scenario, hence leading to the choice of this rotation type in our analyses. Therefore, statements with low loadings were excluded from the analysis in our research, as it was aimed to maintain clarity and accuracy in interpreting the factors.

In the factor analysis, a five-factor solution emerged as a result of the “Eigenvalue greater than one” criterion. These five factors, which delineated the domains represented by the statements under investigation in our research, were appropriately named by us in accordance with their contents. The results of the analyses were presented in tables, and the statements were interpreted in line with the identified factor categories.

On the other hand, the five dimensions that emerged in the factor analysis that was made regarding the statements were turned into a variable using

the available data, and whether there was a significant difference among gender, age, the language in which they received their education, the place where they spent most of their life, the economic status of the family and in which language they predominantly communicated in the family was analyzed separately for each factor. In order to reveal these differences, “one-way analyses of variance” were performed.

Table 7

Factor 1. The Feeling of Proficiency in the Russian Language

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Loadings
Factor:1, The Feeling of Proficiency in the Russian Language			
I can explain my problem better in Russian.	3.77	1.30	.890
I find it easier to speak Russian.	3.84	1.19	.863
I get along better with others when I speak Russian.	3.81	1.25	.849
I speak Russian because I am more proficient in it.	3.57	1.28	.788
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.900		
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	3.152		
<i>Explained Variance [%]</i>	21.01		

The first factor is called “the feeling of proficiency in the Russian language”, which explains 21.01% of the total variance and has an Eigenvalue. The statements gathered under this factor have high arithmetic mean.

As can be seen in Table 7, the variables gathered under this factor generally indicate that individuals believe they have a higher level of mastery over the Russian language and possess a stronger sense of expressing themselves in that language. In other words, they find it easier to communicate in Russian in their daily lives and can articulate themselves more effectively. Additionally, their belief in having a better command of the Russian language is also higher.

The feeling of proficiency in Russian does not significantly differ between genders, as both men and women attribute similar importance to this factor ($P > 0.005$). However, a significant difference exists between the 15–19 and 35–39 age groups ($F: 2.52$; $df: 4$; $P < 0.005$), with younger individuals valuing this factor more. This finding highlights the dominance of Russian among the younger generation, despite their education occurring post-independence, and underscores its prevalence in Kyrgyz society, particularly in Bishkek. Additionally, urban residents, especially in Bishkek, place more importance on Russian proficiency than rural residents ($t = -7.314$; $df: 4$; $P < 0.05$), reflecting urban reliance on Russian. Education in Russian strongly correlates with a preference for speaking Russian in daily life ($P < 0.001$). Similarly, family language significantly influences daily language use—those communicating in Russian at home predominantly use Russian daily ($P < 0.005$). The natural transition of Russian from family communication to everyday usage emphasizes its role in Kyrgyz society. No significant relationship was found between economic status and the importance attributed to this factor ($P > 0.005$).

Table 8
Factor 2. The Feeling of Not Being Proficient in Kyrgyz

	Mean	Standart Deviation	Loadings
Factor:2, The Feeling of Not Being Proficient in Kyrgyz			
I believe I will not be able to express myself well in Kyrgyz.	2.56	1.32	.822
I don't think I'm very proficient in Kyrgyz.	2.34	1.24	.786
It is hard for me to think in Kyrgyz.	2.42	1.30	.773
Cronbach's Alpha	.810		
Eigenvalue	2.228		
Explained Variance [%]	14.85		

The statements under the second factor align with the findings of the first, revealing participants' strong proficiency in Russian but a lack of confidence

in their native Kyrgyz. Participants believe they are not proficient in Kyrgyz, struggle to think in it, and cannot express ideas effectively. This phenomenon, rooted in historical factors, reflects Kyrgyzstan's long history under Imperial Russian and Soviet influence. Despite over 30 years of independence, the distance individuals feel towards Kyrgyz is largely attributed to post-independence language policies. Russian remains the official language, dominates official correspondence, and influences all aspects of daily life, further solidifying its role in participants' preference to think and speak in Russian.

No significant difference has been found between genders or age groups regarding the feeling of not being proficient in Kyrgyz, with men and women showing similar lack of confidence ($P > 0.005$). However, urban residents attach less importance to this factor than rural residents ($P < 0.01$). This factor contrasts with the first, which focused on preference for Russian due to proficiency, while this highlights a perceived lack of proficiency in Kyrgyz. Urban dwellers and those educated in Russian attribute more importance to this factor ($P < 0.001$), as do individuals who use Russian for family communication ($P < 0.001$). Economic status shows no significant relationship with this factor ($P > 0.005$).

Table 9

Factor 3. Pervasiveness of Russian in Business Life

	Mean	Standart Deviation	Loadings
Factor:3, Pervasiveness of Russian in Business Life			
The broader job opportunities available in Russian-speaking contexts influence my use of the Russian language.	3.81	1.12	.806
The fact that official and private sector business procedures are conducted in Russian leads me to prefer using Russian in daily life.	3.72	1.15	.773
The absence of equivalents for many technological concepts in Kyrgyz leads me to prefer using Russian in daily life.	3.81	1.07	.757

<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.691
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	1.917
<i>Explained Variance [%]</i>	12.78

The third factor, “The Pervasiveness of Russian in Business Life,” highlights the strong presence of Russian in Kyrgyzstan’s job market, especially in Bishkek, where non-agricultural opportunities are more prevalent. Participants agree with statements such as, “Broader job opportunities in Russian-speaking contexts influence my use of Russian,” and, “The use of Russian in official and private sector business procedures leads me to prefer it in daily life.” Interactions, whether shopping or seeking medical care, are consistently in Russian. Additionally, the absence of Kyrgyz equivalents for many technological terms, as noted in the statement, “The lack of Kyrgyz terminology for technological concepts leads me to prefer Russian,” reinforces this preference. Instructions for products are rarely available in Kyrgyz, making fluency in Russian essential for participation in the business world.

No significant differences were found between genders, age groups, urban or rural upbringing, language of education, family communication preferences, or economic status ($P > 0.005$) regarding the pervasiveness of Russian in business life. This highlights that the widespread use of Russian in Kyrgyzstan’s business environment consistently influences young people’s preference for Russian in daily life. Business life is a key factor in shaping young individuals’ future expectations, further reinforcing the dominance of Russian in their everyday language use.

Table 10
Factor 4. Psychological Effects of the Language Used in Daily Life

	Mean	Standart Deviation	Loadings
Factor:4, The Psychological Effects of the Language Used in Daily Life			
I believe I will be criticized if I speak Kyrgyz.	1.67	1.01	.773

I am reprimanded when I don't speak Russian.	1.75	1.06	.758
People who speak Kyrgyz look like peasants to me	1.48	0.80	.743
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.648		
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	1.780		
<i>Explained Variance [%]</i>	11.86		

Considering the statements in the fourth factor, the influence of psychological factors on participants' avoidance of using Kyrgyz in their daily lives is clear. Additionally, the statements in the first factor regarding the reasons for preferring Russian in daily life align with the statements in this factor. Indeed, the statements "I believe I will be criticized if I speak Kyrgyz" and "I am reprimanded when I don't speak Russian" indicate that not speaking Russian is perceived as a deficiency and a cause for condemnation, which is a crucial observation in terms of revealing the psychology of Kyrgyz individuals. Similarly, the rate of agreement with the statement "People who speak Kyrgyz seem like peasants to me" within the same factor supports this psychology.

In terms of the psychological effect of the language used in daily life, there is no significant difference among independent variables such as gender ($P>0.005$), age groups ($P>0.005$), where they spent the majority of their lives ($P>0.005$), the language they received their education in ($P>0.005$), the language they use as the means of communication within their families ($P>0.005$), and the economic status of their families ($P>0.005$). These data indicate that for the majority of the young individuals, psychological factors play a prominent role in preferring the Russian language in their daily lives. The prevalence of such sentiments among the youth provides us with valuable insights into the future of the Kyrgyz language in Kyrgyzstan. However, the arithmetic mean of this factor is quite low. This indicates that psychological concerns, although analytically meaningful, are not widespread across the whole sample.

Table 11
Factor 5. The Process of Socialization

	Mean	Standart Deviation	Loadings
Factor:5, The Process of Socialization			
I believe that growing up with Russian-speaking neighbors led me to prefer speaking Russian.	2.60	1.34	.902
I believe that having childhood friends who were mostly Russian had an influence on my preference for speaking Russian.	2.76	1.36	.849
Cronbach's Alpha	.782		
Eigenvalue	1.644		
Explained Variance [%]	10.96		

In Kyrgyzstan, bilingualism (Russian and Kyrgyz) plays a central role in socialization. While Kyrgyz is spoken among families, Russian dominates daily life, especially in rural areas and among families with rural origins. Russian holds a particularly strong position in Bishkek, where its population remains significant despite a decline post-independence. Children are exposed to Russian outside their homes, with many television broadcasts and social media content in Russian. Russian also dominates all stages of education. Statements like “Growing up with Russian-speaking neighbors led me to prefer speaking Russian,” and “Having childhood friends who were mostly Russian influenced my preference for Russian,” reflect this influence.

This overall picture in Kyrgyzstan, which is a country known for its tolerance of coexistence of diversities, brings about a negative consequence in Kyrgyz people’s use of their native language. From an early age, children are exposed to the Russian language as part of the socialization process, and this situation manifests itself as a dominant element in various aspects of daily life. In a sense, a way to engage with the ‘other’ also involves knowing Russian.

No significant relationship was found between genders, age groups, upbringing location, education language, or family economic status ($P > 0.005$) regarding the factor of socialization. However, a significant relationship exists between intra-family communication and this factor. Children from families who use Kyrgyz at home tend to use Kyrgyz in daily life, while those from Russian-speaking families prefer Russian ($P < 0.005$). This highlights the critical role of family language use in shaping youth language preferences.

Conclusion

For the Kyrgyz people, who remained under Russian dominance for many years, one of the significant challenges they encountered after gaining independence was the “language problem.” Following independence, Kyrgyzstan faced a difficult choice regarding language. The Russian language had become widespread across all aspects of life due to the compulsory/repressive policies implemented during the Russian rule, leading a significant portion of the country’s population to receive education in Russian. Even during this period, the language of education largely remained Russian.

Factors such as the inability of the Kyrgyz language to gain international recognition, deficiencies in accessing information in Kyrgyz, the dominance of Russian in the realm of education, and the predominance of digital resources in Russian have all played crucial roles in the continuing prevalence of the Russian language in the country. Moreover, many families, including those in the capital Bishkek, raise their children in a bilingual environment. From an early age, children learn both Kyrgyz and Russian, but Russian holds the dominant position. This situation is particularly pronounced in the northern part of the country, where the majority of the Russian population resides, including the capital Bishkek and the Chuy Valley. Simultaneously, this condition significantly contributes to the preservation and proliferation of the Russian language in the nation. The concentration of a large portion of the country’s universities in Bishkek and their tendency to offer education primarily in Russian, along with the city’s pivotal role in shaping the economic, social, political, and cultural landscape, solidifies the dominance of Russian in all aspects of life. Additionally, Russia continues to hold a substantial position globally in terms of economic, social, and individual competition. In such a context, the influence of cultural policies

implemented by Kyrgyz governments during the process of independence has perpetuated the dominance of the Russian language. Russian remains the language of communication in daily life, particularly among the youth in Bishkek. Although attempts are being made in the Kyrgyz National Assembly to promote the spread of the Kyrgyz language, it can be said that there is still a need for time to significantly impact the widespread use of Kyrgyz in daily life. On the other hand, according to the 13th Article of the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted in 2021, “The official language in the Kyrgyz Republic is the Russian language.” Thus, according to the Constitution, the Russian language continues its existence under the protection of the state in Kyrgyzstan.

As indicated by the research data, young people have a greater proficiency in the Russian language compared to the Kyrgyz language. Consequently, they prefer to use Russian in their daily lives because they feel they can express themselves better and communicate more comfortably with others. However, they do not possess the same level of confidence when it comes to their native language, Kyrgyz. This lack of confidence stems from their perception that they do not know Kyrgyz well enough and will not be able to express themselves effectively. Furthermore, the dominance of Russian in the business world increases the interest of young individuals in learning and using Russian. The widespread use of Russian as a communication language in both the public and private sectors, along with the absence of Kyrgyz equivalents for many technological concepts, influences the preference for using Russian. On the other hand, psychological factors also play a role in the avoidance of using Kyrgyz in daily life. Speaking Kyrgyz seems to evoke a perception of rural background for them, and they believe that speaking Kyrgyz might lead to judgment and criticism. In the process of socialization, the widespread use of Russian in external environments and among friend groups is a significant factor. Furthermore, the nearly exclusive use of Russian throughout various stages of education underscores its importance as the predominant language of communication and daily life in the capital, Bishkek. In addition to all these factors, the extensive use of Russian in almost all stages of education contributes to the continued prevalence of the Russian language as the primary language of communication and daily life in Bishkek.

Moreover, as in the past, the economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan today compel even non-Russian-speaking groups to acquire proficiency in Russian. Each year, thousands of young Kyrgyz migrate to Russia to work and earn a living. Additionally, due to the high number of Russian tourists, university students frequently travel to Turkey and former Eastern Bloc countries to work seasonally or for extended periods in service sectors such as hotels and restaurants. This situation constitutes another factor contributing to the widespread use of Russian in daily life.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

Ethics Statement

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (BAYEK) of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University. The approval was granted at the committee meeting held on May 26, 2023 (Meeting No. 2023-5; Decision No. 7; Document No. R.30.2023/BAYEK-8272; Document Date: May 30, 2023).

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