

Chuvash Language in Chuvashia's Instruction System: An Example of Educational Language Policies in Post-Soviet Russia

Hèctor Alòs i Font*

Chuvash State Institute of Humanities

This article presents the situation of the Chuvash language in the education system of the Republic of Chuvashia and its evolution since the end of the Soviet period. The analysis relies on several sources: governmental statistics, observations on the ground, interviews with teachers and school officers, and a sociolinguistic survey among secondary and upper secondary school students. The data show that most of the gains for Chuvash, achieved by the language policies in education in the early 1990s, had already been neutralized 10 years later. Since the mid-2000s Chuvash-language instruction has steadily decreased, and seems to have lost the weak support it had from the Chuvash authorities. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, Chuvash has been declared compulsory in the districts where it was an optional subject, although the teaching of Chuvash, especially as a state language of the republic, is clearly inefficient. The conclusion is that it is not the letter of Russia's education reforms in Putin's era that is crucial in this case, but the spirit. A republic such as Chuvashia, which is dependent on Moscow's subsidies, does not seem able or even willing to counteract the state-promoted language ideology.

Keywords: Russia; Chuvash language; education reform; language education; language policy

Chuvash is a Turkic language spoken by approximately one million people, mostly in Chuvashia, one of the constituent republics of the Russian Federation, situated halfway between Moscow and the Urals. It is Russia's fifth largest language by number of native speakers (after Russian, Tatar, Chechen and Bashkort). Along with Russian, it is one of the two official languages of the Chuvash Republic, which is one

*Research Fellow, Chuvash State Institute of Humanities, Shupashkar/Cheboksary, Chuvashia, Russian Federation. Email: hectoralos@gmail.com.

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of the most ethnically homogeneous republics in Russia. Since the convulsions of the early 1990s, the teaching of Chuvash has been compulsory throughout the whole school system. However, despite these conditions, the decline is evident: the 2002 and 2010 national population censuses show a drop from 1.3 to 1.0 million speakers, i.e. 21% in eight years. In Chuvashia, the decline in this period was 14%. This is not at all an isolated case in Russia. Other official languages in Russia's republics lost a considerable number of speakers. In the same direction, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Atlas of the World's Language in Danger (Mosely, 2010) lists 131 languages of Russia as endangered, that is, almost all of Russia's native languages except Russian and Tatar. Visibly, a substantial language shift is occurring in Russia which is affecting even large nationalities with republican structures.

This paper focuses on education policy and its consequences in order to better explain the rapid decline in the number of Chuvash speakers. It goes into depth about one case study in order to elucidate the current problems faced by minority languages in Russia in the field of education.

Outside Russia, the Chuvash case has been mostly neglected in the social and political sciences (exceptions are, *inter alia*, Gorenburg, 2003; Marquardt, 2010). Its meagre economic and political strength in comparison with its Tatar and Bashkort neighbours has put it in the shade; its demographic weight means that language preservationists do not tend to focus on it; its fairly peaceful inter-ethnic situation seems to make it uninteresting for political scientists; and as Chuvash is a Turkic language, it has not been of interest to the active set of researchers focusing on Russia's Finno-Ugric minority languages. Only the fact that Chuvash is the most divergent of the Turkic languages (Johanson, 1978: 81) makes it popular in Turkic linguistics. However, Chuvash is an excellent example of a shift in a large minority language with unusually high concentration in a region.

Educational policies are considered to be among the most fundamental fields for language policies (Spolsky, 2009; Grin, 2003; Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997), although scholars have also warned against over-rating them (Fishman, 1991). School systems do not only transmit the knowledge of one or several languages, but also instil notions of language correctness and appropriateness in specific contexts. For mastering both the minority and majority languages at a high level and to identify positively with them, authors on bilingual education have emphasized the importance of instruction *in*

minority languages, for subjects other than the languages themselves (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Baker, 2011; Cenoz, 2009). However, as Skutnabb-Kangas underlines, “bilingualism” is understood quite differently by people defending different educational goals. A “bilingual” may be someone who has a complete or native-like competence in two languages, or someone who ‘can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language’ or ‘has at least some knowledge and control of the grammatical structure of the other language’ (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000: 573). Distinct conceptions of bilingualism lead to different models of bilingual education.

Baker (2011: 206-252; see also Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000: 579-622), in his influential typology of bilingual education, distinguishes between ‘monolingual forms of education for bilinguals’, ‘weak forms of bilingual education’ and ‘strong forms of bilingual education for bilingualism and biliteracy’. The first type can be exemplified by the use of the dominant language (e.g. Russian) for minority-language students (e.g. Chuvashes) (so-called “mainstream” or “submersion” programmes). Among the second type, one can find the “transitional” programmes, which differ from the previous ones in that ‘language minority students are temporarily allowed to use their home language. Such students are taught briefly through their home language until they are thought to be proficient enough in the majority language to cope in mainstream education’ (*ibid*: 215). And he clarifies: ‘the basic aim of “weak” forms of bilingual education is assimilation of language minorities rather than maintenance of their home languages and cultural pluralism’ (*ibid*: 219). Cases of “strong” bilingual education include the “maintenance” or “heritage language” programmes for language minorities, where both majority and minority languages are used in the classroom with an emphasis on the mother tongue, and the “immersion” programmes, aimed at majority-language speakers, where both languages are also used but with an initial emphasis on the non-native one.

Whichever educational programme the authorities choose to promote, education language policies should be evaluated according to their results. Grin (2003: 161-190) proposes a framework for this evaluation. He distinguishes between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ effectiveness, the former being processes taking place primarily within the education system (e.g. the effectiveness of a textbook in improving students’ language skills), while the latter examines the policy outputs in society (e.g. the increase of competent speakers and users in a language, or the improvement of attitudes towards the minority language by means of a higher rate of transmission in families).

Sociolinguistic surveys should be used for measuring external effectiveness of education language policies.

This paper will briefly introduce the general economic, ethnic and linguistic situation of Chuvashia and, to provide comparisons, the situation of languages in the education systems of neighbouring republics. Chuvashia's recent history and its language policy is presented, before analysing the place of minority languages in education. The core of this article (Section 4) presents the current situation of Chuvash-language teaching in Chuvashia as a medium of instruction and as a subject (for each of the forms "as native language" and "as state language")¹, depending on the level of instruction and the type of settlement. For the sake of completeness, the work also presents data about the teaching of Tatar and Mordovian Erzya in Chuvashia, and analyses developments over the last two decades.

I mainly refer to internal ministry statistics, kindly provided to the author by the Chuvash Ministry of Education.² I also collected further information about the district centres by consulting documents from the ministry archives.³ I verified part of the data on the ground myself by visiting 82 secondary schools and 6 professional schools in 8 of the 9 cities and 20 of the 21 districts of Chuvashia between September 2012 and October 2013. In particular, Chuvash and Tatar language instruction was observed at all schools in the small cities, rural district centres and other villages with more than 3,000 inhabitants (22 localities) and 20 other rural schools in two specific districts (Murkaş/Morgaushi and Elěk/Alikovo⁴). Some 50 interviews (in all rural and small-city schools) were carried out in Russian with a school representative, usually the principal or a deputy, about language use in the school. Government statistics, observations on the ground and interviews were supplemented with a survey I conducted in the schools visited of approximately 2,900 secondary and upper secondary school students, which permitted me to evaluate the external effectiveness of education language policies.⁵

1. General situation: Chuvashes and the Chuvash language

With 1.2 million inhabitants in an area of 18,000 km², Chuvashia is the smallest and one of the least populated of the 14 federal subjects that make up the Volga federal district. Belonging to this district, besides Chuvashia, are the republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Mordovia, Mari El and Udmurtia. In the first two the official languages, along with Russian, are Turkic, while in the last three they are Finno-

Ugric; nevertheless, with regard to religion, Chuvashes, like Russians, Mordovians, Maris and Udmurts, generally are Orthodox Christian, while most Tartars and Bashkorts (also known as “Bashkirs”) are Muslims. In Chuvashia, bordering Tatarstan, Mordovia and Mari El, it is possible in some villages to have primary education in Tatar, and also to learn Tartar or Mordovian Erzya as a subject at both primary and secondary levels. There are significant Chuvash minorities in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and other subjects of the federal district, although the teaching of Chuvash is very limited outside the republics. According to the 2010 Russian census, almost half of the people of Chuvash nationality live outside Chuvashia, but only one third of Chuvash speakers.

From an economic perspective, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of Chuvashia is 50.0% of the federal average and 65.6% of the federal district average. According to this indicator, Chuvashia is ranked eleventh among the members of the Volga federal district (data for 2012).⁶ Moreover, with 58.8% urban population (2010), Chuvashia is also the most rural federal subject of the Volga federal district, relying on subsidies from the federal government.

Chuvashia is also distinguished by its relative ethnic homogeneity: 67.7% of the population is of Chuvash nationality. In the Volga federal district only Tatars comprise over 50% of the population of their eponymous republic, and in only three of Russia’s republics does a “titular” nationality have a broader majority: Chechnya and Ingushetia (in the Caucasus), and Tyva (bordering Mongolia). However, as elsewhere in Russia, the distribution of nationalities in Chuvashia is disproportionate between urban and rural populations (Table 1): only in the 1970s did the Chuvashes become a numerical majority in cities, while among the rural population they are a large majority (83.5%). Ethnic Russians make up 26.9% of the population and 85% of them live in the cities.⁷

Table 1. Distribution of the population per nationality and type of settlement (2010 Russian census).

| | Total | Chuvashes | Russians | Tatars | Mordovians | Others |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------|------------|--------|
| Total population | 1,251,619 | 67.7% | 26.9% | 2.8% | 1.1% | 1.5% |
| Urban population | 735,890 | 55.5% | 39.6% | 1.7% | 0.9% | 2.2% |
| Rural population | 515,729 | 84.2% | 9.6% | 4.4% | 1.3% | 0.6% |

From a sociolinguistic point of view, one should distinguish a three-scale gradation in the centres of population.

First, the cities (9,000-450,000 inhabitants) add up to 736,000 inhabitants (59% of the population). Among them, 52% are Chuvashes. However, there is an extreme language shift, and Chuvash is virtually lost in the first generation born in the city. According to our survey, Chuvash is spoken to children in 16% of urban families—always along with Russian by at least one of the parents—and is almost never used more than Russian (less than 1% of the families).⁸ Less than half of urban upper secondary school students (grades 10 and 11) of Chuvash nationality feel able to speak Chuvash. However, it is spoken by a large part of the urban population who moved from their native villages to the cities (the exception being the South West city of Alatyr with 38,000 inhabitants and a considerable Russian majority of 86% in contrast to 8% Mordovians and 3% Chuvashes).

Second, the remainder of towns with more than 3,000 inhabitants totals 86,000 inhabitants, i.e. 7% of the population. This group consists of 15 towns, mostly district centres and a few Shupashkar suburbs. According to our survey, Chuvashes amount to approximately 75% of the population, but there is a significant language shift, mainly in the Shupashkar suburbs and biggest towns. Only half of the upper secondary school students of Chuvash nationality (in the best cases around 70%) feel able to speak Chuvash. Chuvash is largely spoken by the middle aged and elderly of both local and small village origin.

Third, the rest of villages are almost mono-ethnic, the great majority being Chuvash (more than 85%), but also with large Tatar, Russian and Mordovian settlements (the first mainly in the South East, where they are a minority, the second and third mainly in the South West, where Russians are a majority). Survey data and interviews show clear signs of language shift among Chuvashes, although Chuvash still dominates family conversations.

2. Neighbouring republics

Zamyatin (2012b, 2012c) gives an excellent analysis of the post-Soviet education language policies in Russia's Finno-Ugric republics with detailed statistical data. Zamyatin (2012b) also provides information on the republics with majority Turkic-speaking population in the Volga Federal District. In order to better understand Chuvashia's trends, a short overview of its three neighbouring republics will be given

next. According to 2010 census data, Mordovia has 830,000 inhabitants (40% ethnic Mordovians and 53% ethnic Russians);⁹ 60.4% of the population is urban. The GDP per capita is 60.7% of the federal district average (thirteenth of 14 subjects). Mordovians speak in two varieties, Erzya (in the North) and Moksha (in the South), which are usually considered to be two different, albeit closely related, languages (no official statistical data is given for their relative share). Both were declared official languages, along with Russian, in 1990. According to Zamyatin's study (2012c: 225-227, 243-245), in 1990/1991 Erzya and Moksha were taught as native languages (including as the language of instruction) to some 38% of ethnic Mordovians in primary schools. The situation did not change until 1998, when Erzya and Moksha were added as non-compulsory subjects in "Russian" schools. In 2004 they were declared compulsory in school programmes, but by 2009/2010 only 22% of schoolchildren learned them. At the same time the number of pupils learning it as a "native language" dropped by half, reaching some 28% of ethnic Mordovian schoolchildren. In 2010 Erzya and Moksha were again declared non-compulsory. Some 11% of ethnic Mordovians received native language instruction in Mordovia in 1990/1991. This share increased slightly until the mid-1990s and then decreased. By 1999/2000 some 9% ethnic Mordovians received native language instruction. This share remained constant until the mid-2000s, but decreased again in the second half of the 2000s (6% in 2009/2010).

According to 2010 census data, Mari El has 700,000 inhabitants (44% ethnic Maris and 47% ethnic Russians); 63.1% of the population is urban. The GDP per capita is 64.1% of the federal district average (twelfth of 14 subjects). Mari is considered to be one single language, although it has two standard varieties based on different dialects (Meadow Mary, which is spoken by the majority, and Hill Mari). Both standards were declared official, along with Russian, in 1990. According to Zamyatin (2012c: 223-225, 243-245), the share of students learning Mari as their native language (some 55% of ethnic Mari schoolchildren in 1990/1991) did not change significantly until the mid-2000s when it began to decrease (some 40% in 2009/2010), while the rate of students learning Mari as a state language of the republic increased. In 1995 its teaching was made compulsory to all schoolchildren, but in 2001—when some 40% of students were not yet learning it—this obligation was lifted. Some 17% of ethnic Maris received native language instruction in Mari El in 1990/1991. This share began to decrease in the second half of the 1990s. By

1999/2000 about 13% of ethnic Maris received native language instruction. From 2001 native language instruction had been ‘virtually eliminated’ (Zamyatin, 2012c: 245), reaching only 2% of ethnic Maris in 2004/2005 and 2009/2010. It should be added, as Zamyatin points out, that official Mari El’s statistics on language education are controversial, and do not coincide with independent research data (which are cited herein).

For its part, according to the 2010 census data, Tatarstan had 3.8 million inhabitants (53% ethnic Tatars and 40% ethnic Russians); 75.4% of the population is urban. The GDP per capita is 142% of the federal district average (first of 14 subjects). Tatar was the only language in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), along with Russian, which was used as a language of instruction throughout the whole school cycle until the 1980s, although in few rural schools. In the beginning of the 1990s, it became compulsory for all schoolchildren to learn it as a subject. According to Zamyatin (2012c: 247), in the 1990/1991 school year Tatar was taught as a subject to approximately 79% of ethnic Tatar schoolchildren in Tatarstan, and 27% received education by means of Tatar. By the mid-1990s the rates grew to 43% and 96% respectively, and in 2000/2001, to 48% and virtually 100%. Tatar-language instruction reached 53% of ethnic Tatar schoolchildren in 2007/2008 (41% of urban Tatar schoolchildren), but began to decrease afterwards, still reaching only 46% in 2010/2011 (Musina *et al.*, 2011: 145).

There are important differences between the three cases presented, as well as significant similarities. The three cases also show how changeable, even erratic, language policies can be, e.g. in the case of compulsory teaching of non-Russian official languages. In the “Finno-Ugric” republics, instruction in the minority language did increase somewhat in Mordovia at the beginning of the 1990s, but from the second half of the decade it decreased in both Mordovia and Mari El. In Tatarstan the initial situation was significantly better, and there was a leap forward in the first half of the 1990s. However, over the next 10 years the increase in the rate of Tatar as a language of education (including bilingual education) was half of what it was in the first five years and scarcely exceeded half of ethnic Tatar students. From 2008 this rate gradually decreased, even in Tatarstan. With regard to teaching the minority language as a subject, neither Mordovia and Mari El succeeded in ensuring that all minority students learned the language of their nationality; in Mordovia in 2008/2009 as many as half of them did not. In both republics there was a major shift from

instruction “as native language” to instruction “as state language” in the second half of the 2000s.

3. Recent history

At the end of the Soviet period, as in many other territories of the Soviet Union, the position of the Chuvash language was somewhat contradictory. It was a language used in literature and media, taught in schools and universities, and had some visibility in meetings and in the public sphere. At the same time, it was positioned manifestly beneath Russian in public life, and was mostly relegated to villages: Chuvash-language press and schools were almost only rural.

This state of affairs was challenged in the late 1980s thanks to the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* which permitted discussion of the national and language problems latent in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In a republic in which a large majority was non-Russian, the debates were inevitably louder than in many of the other republics of Russia. In October 1990, the Law on Languages of the Republic (hereinafter the “language law”),¹⁰ the first in a republic of the RSFSR (Romashkin, 1999), gave a period of 10 years after which the public would be able to interact with the administration and private companies in any of the two official languages that citizens chose (Art. 3). A period of five years was also given to organize compulsory teaching of Chuvash at all levels of education (from nursery to university) and the possibility of electing it as a medium of instruction in secondary education (Arts. 19 and 20 and Additional Provision 2). Chuvash quickly became widely used on the streets of the capital (Boiko, 2011: 504), where previously pressure from the authorities had virtually banned it. All this worried the population of Russian nationality, of which, according to the 1989 census, only 2.8% spoke Chuvash (in particular, 1.7% of the urban population).

In the first elections for president of Chuvashia (1991), the Chuvash nationalist candidate, Atner Husankay, the driving force behind the language law, lost by a narrow margin. Later, President Nikolai Fëdorov (1994-2010) began to gradually modify the main elements of the law through subsequent amendments.¹¹ The catastrophic economic crisis that Russia endured during the 1990s also hindered mobilization of the funds necessary to implement it. This was coupled with a re-centralization policy of the federal government and a reassertion of the Russian language, especially after the first election of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia in

2000. Three consecutive federal programmes on the Russian language have been launched from 2001 onwards,¹² the Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation¹³ was passed in 2005, and 2007 was declared the Year of the Russian language by the federal government.¹⁴ In December 2012 a new Nationalities Policy Strategy was signed by Putin, introducing important amendments to the previous 1996 Concept of State Nationality Policy (see Prina, 2013). All these documents contained numerous references to the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Russia and to the need to preserve languages and cultures, but at the same time sent a clear, unquestionable message to society about the supremacy of Russian over all other languages of Russia. It is not by chance that no similar document or programme has been passed for the languages of Russia altogether.

The promotion of the new priorities of the federal authorities has been evident in the field of education. Federal authorities have also strongly advised against compulsory teaching of the titular languages of the republics (State Council, 2011: 44; see also: Zamyatin, 2012a: 33-34; Marquardt, 2013: 10-12). This fact can be considered an assertion of the role of Russian as the exclusive language of communication between nationalities in Russia, even in regions such as Chuvashia where the majority of the population has another first language.

In this environment, the question of “language nests” has been much discussed. “Language nests” are immersion-based education programmes, which originated in New Zealand and spread to Australia, the United States, Finland and other countries. They are especially suitable for language revitalization policies in cases where inter-generational transference has been seriously damaged, as for example in Russia’s “Finno-Ugric” republics or in Chuvashia’s cities. In 2003 they expanded to Mari El, and in 2009 to Karelia (Kuldkepp, 2010). Yet federal authorities declared that “language nests” created ‘closed language environment within the frames of pre-school institutions where children plunge into native language from the early childhood’ (Russia’s Third Report, 2010: 102). Such measures and statements may have been softened, but nevertheless signalled the position of the federal authorities—a position which could not be overlooked by an economically dependent republic such as Chuvashia. Still, several republics, including Komi, Udmurtia and Mari El, launched “language nests” from the autumn of 2011 (Zamyatin *et al.*, 2012: 155). On the contrary, Chuvash-language teachers’ specialization for pre-school and primary education was discontinued in Shupashkar in the late 2000s, allegedly because of

insufficient enrolment, without any reaction from the Chuvash educational authorities.

In fact, the view that the social functions of Chuvash should not develop has gained strength among the Chuvash authorities over the last two decades. In the area of education, this was sharply reflected in the 2008 document ‘Strategy for the development of education in the Chuvash Republic until 2040’ (Chuvash Republic, 2008). The document pays little attention to the Chuvash language, in contrast to foreign languages for example. It admits that there has been ‘ineffective work to enhance the prestige and social significance of the study of the Chuvash language’ (Chuvash Republic, 2008: 65), but does not find space over the course of its more than 90 pages to analyse the causes of this ineffectiveness or possible ways of resolving it. Moreover, the document does not consider Chuvash part of the republic’s language capital, and does not speak of it in the development of ‘polylinguism’ (Chuvash Republic, 2008: 61). The official gazette of the Ministry of Education, for its part, merely mentioned the teaching of Chuvash in its presentation of the strategy, stating that ‘the practical significance and the results of the study of Chuvash must be shown’ (Yaroslavskii, 2008: 9).

Two cornerstones of education centralization policies in the 2000s have been the establishment of a new Federal State Educational Standards, according to the 2007 amendments of the Federal Law on Education,¹⁵ and the Unified State Exam to access university. The new standards have caused heated arguments about, among other things, the position of minority-language instruction in the programme, or the withdrawal of the regions’ authority for the development and publication of textbooks and syllabi (Prina, 2011; Lotfullin, 2012; Zamyatin, 2012a). In its stead, the Unified State Exam was gradually launched in the 2000s as the test conferring the secondary degree and, by extension, permitting entrance to university or professional college. Currently, there are only two compulsory subjects, Russian and mathematics; from 2020 English will be added. Other subjects may be required for certain faculties or courses of study. As Protassova (2010: 165) points out in her analysis of multi-lingual education in Russia, ‘the Unified State Exam somehow may make education in the national tongues seem worthless, until school-leavers decide to study these languages at the universities’. In fact, examination systems have been pointed to in the literature as being able to exercise pressure and control on the language decisions of pupils, parents and teachers (Spolski, 2009: 98). In light of our results, we will further discuss below the consequences of this exam for Chuvashia’s education system.

It should also be noted that there is no special department in charge of Chuvashia's language policy. Generally, the Ministry of Education is responsible for keeping track of the "programme of implementation" of the language law; no specific position, dedicated to language policy or language promotion, has been established. A new programme was approved in September 2012 for the period 2013-2020,¹⁶ replacing the earlier programme for 2003-2012.¹⁷ Briefly, it listed a series of measures, decided upon without basic skills in language policy, had no clear criteria for the objectives to be achieved, specified no measures specifically related to improvement of the status of Chuvash (external effectiveness evaluation), and was accorded only a very low budget. As an example, the annual budget for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 was nearly half what it was in the preceding three years; although this was likely due to poor planning as from 2016 onwards the budget was due to once again increase to the level of 2011 and 2012. Nearly 730,000 roubles (€15,000) for each of the three years between 2013 and 2015 were budgeted almost entirely for the design and publication of new Chuvash primary school textbooks (in paper and electronic forms), Chuvash, Tatar and Erzya teaching aids (which, like the textbooks, were required by the new standards), and for organizing language, literature and culture school awards.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Chuvashia's language policy has been called 'largely symbolic' and 'in comparison to struggles regarding language policy in Tatarstan [...] minimal' (Marquardt, 2012: 141-142).

4. Chuvash-language education

Schools in Chuvashia (which are almost entirely public) closely follow these language policy guidelines. In the 1990s, Chuvash-medium instruction expanded to a few schools in cities and district centres. However, in the same decade its use as language of instruction shrank and gradually returned to the villages, the exception being a couple of boarding schools for village pupils, which only moved to fully Russian-medium education in the 2000s. The last one, the Litsei-Internat Lebedev in Shupashkar, was closed by the city authorities in 2012, allegedly because of the bad state of the building.¹⁹ In the 2012/2013 school year, there was no school or nursery in the cities where Chuvash was the language of instruction for any subject.²⁰

Conversely, in the early 1990s, following the language law, efforts were made to expand Chuvash-medium education beyond the fourth grade, although it seldom reached the sixth. In fact, in 1992 it was announced that new textbooks for the sixth to

eighth grades would be translated into Chuvash for geography, history and biology (Halăh şkulă, 1992: 7). However, by 1998, the authorities were already beginning to neglect Chuvash-medium instruction in secondary school ‘in the conditions [at that time] of acute shortage of financial, material and human resources’ (Andreev and Chernova, 1998: 94). In the 2012/2013 school year, in only 2 of Chuvashia’s 21 districts was Chuvash the medium of instruction in the fifth grade for more than 100 schoolchildren, according to ministry statistics, although this did not apply to any of the district centres. The intended expansion of Chuvash-language education to urban schools also quickly fell off the Chuvash authorities’ agenda. Chuvash philologist Ivan Andreev, who was the president of the commission which drew up the 1990 language law and one of the redactors of the 1993 programme on its realization, in a 1997 article proposed the creation of Russian-language Chuvash national schools in cities (Andreev, 1997).

Some considerations should be made here. First, teaching takes place, in principle, in a single language for all subjects (except, in some cases, for languages). This means that students in rural schools tend to move from education entirely in Chuvash (or Tatar) in the fourth grade to fully Russian-language education in the fifth grade and beyond. They are, therefore, “transitional” in Baker’s (2011) terminology. As an exception of this general rule, in small villages Chuvash may still be used in secondary school, especially for the fifth and sixth grades, for the subject ‘Culture of the native land’ (*kul’tura rodnogo kraja*) introduced into the syllabus by the Chuvash government in the 1990s for one hour per week. Chuvash or Tatar may also be used in an informal way during classes, especially in the first years of Russian-language education. In fact, that was actually done in Shygrydan school No. 1, where Tatar (the language of virtually the whole town) was still orally used after the fourth grade; however, as school officials explained in interview, after the introduction of the Unified State Exam, teachers and parents decided to ban the use of Tatar during classes after the fourth grade (although it continues to be used universally during breaks).

Second, following the Soviet tradition, schools are divided into Chuvash, Tatar and Russian “national schools” and “schools with a multi-national student composition”.²¹ In 2012/2013 there was no difference between the last two (and both are usually referred to as “Russian schools”), but until 2008 Chuvash was not taught in Russian “national” schools (see below). In a few schools there are Chuvash

“national” classes alongside Russian ones. Chuvash (or Tatar) national schools or classes are only found in rural areas. Chuvash national schools also devote significantly more hours to Chuvash language and literature throughout the whole education system than “Russian” ones, and in the first four grades the number of hours for Russian language and literature are significantly less in the former than in the latter. However, Chuvash national schools or classes may only use Russian as the language of instruction, but still have more hours devoted to Chuvash, and Chuvash classes are in principle conducted in this language. On the other hand, in “Russian” schools students study Chuvash, in principle from the first to the ninth grade, in groups of at most 24 pupils (19 pupils in village schools), so that instruction is more effective given the relatively small number of pupils (Chuvash Ministry of Education, 1998: 17).

Third, in theory, parents choose the school for their children, including the type of instruction and the language of instruction. The right to education in one’s mother tongue is declared in both the federal and the republican legislation ‘within the possibilities offered by the education system’.²² In practice, this right is non-existent in cities for Chuvashes, Tatars and other minority groups, as there are only “Russian” schools. In rural Chuvashia, it is normally limited by the availability of free places in the schools. Families in the geographical vicinity of the schools have priority but, as a result of reduced birth rates and rural exodus, there are usually free places in every village school. Therefore, parents living in villages near district centres can choose between a “national school” in their village or in the vicinity or a “Russian” school in the district centre; their choice is however limited in the second case, as they have to make their own arrangements for transportation to and from the school. Most villages are situated no more than 20 or 25 km from a district centre, and there is a bus service from almost every village to the centre.

Fourth, there is a lack of conceptual clarity in the aims of teaching Chuvash. This was already noted in a 1998 seminar about language policy in education in Shupashkar, sponsored by the Russian federal authorities with the involvement of Dutch specialists (Conference, 1998: 144).²³ What levels of Chuvash (Tatar, Erzya) are desirable, for what kinds of students, and for what purpose? According to two representatives of the Chuvash Ministry of Education in the seminar, ‘the study of Chuvash in Russian schools prepares pupils mainly for oral communication with the local Chuvash population, and the study of foreign languages, for oral and written

communication with foreigners in their own country and abroad' (Andreev and Chernova, 1998: 93). Considering that more than half of schoolchildren of Chuvash nationality learn in fully Russian-language schools, it does not seem to be aiming at the maintenance of Chuvash (let alone its development). In fact, 10 years later, one of the ministry's two representatives at the conference, in his new role as Chuvashia's Minister of Education, considered that schoolchildren should master Chuvash 'at the level of functional literacy' (Chernova, 2008: 15).

4.1 Chuvash as a subject

Ministry data show regular progress in the teaching of Chuvash as a subject until it covers almost 100% of the students. It should be noted that while learning Chuvash was made compulsory for all grades by the 1991 language law (with a five-year delay for implementation), Chuvash was declared optional in the two South-West districts with a Russian majority and in which Mordovians outnumber Chuvashes (Boiko, 2010: 128-129). These are the districts where resistance against the compulsory teaching of Chuvash is strongest, and where ethnic relationships are considered strained (Boiko, 2011: 508). Nevertheless, in 2008 Chuvash was again declared compulsory in all schools, and since then the teaching of Chuvash has advanced one grade every new school year. For example, our field inspection showed that in the district centre of Păraçkav/Poreckoe in 2012/13, pupils attended Chuvash language classes until the seventh grade. To some extent this measure can be seen as Chuvashia's self-assertion against federal authorities, which advise against compulsory teaching of titular languages in the republics, but it is difficult to understand why local authorities elected this measure as a form a self-assertion rather than, for instance, the much more effective spread of Chuvash-language instruction. Compared to its neighbouring republics, in this aspect of language policy Chuvashia is close to Tatarstan, which also made both official languages of the republic compulsory for all grades from the beginning of the 1990s—a policy which it maintains to date.

Chuvash as native language

As stated above, there are two different types of Chuvash teaching: "as native language" and "as state language of the republic".²⁴ The former is aimed at pupils who already speak the language, while the latter is geared towards schoolchildren with no

initial knowledge of the language. Goals, methods and, therefore, textbooks for the two types of teaching are different, the teaching “as state language” being less in depth and for fewer hours than the one “as native language”. There are no data on their actual distribution, but some facts can help us to estimate the number. First, in the 2012/2013 school year there was no city school in which Chuvash was taught as a native language.²⁵ However, Chuvash was taught as a native language until the early 2000s in a handful of classes in city schools, and later only in a couple of boarding schools. Our visits to all the rural district centre schools in 2012/2013 showed that Chuvash was taught as a native language to just 27% of students. By contrast, in schools in villages with less than 3,000 inhabitants, Chuvash was overwhelmingly taught as a native language. The results of our estimates, which are based on own observations, ministry statistics and ministry archive data, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Estimated distribution of the teaching of Chuvash as native language in schools per level of instruction and type of settlement (2011/12 school year).²⁶

| | Villages | Cities | Villages + cities |
|---|----------|--------|-------------------|
| Primary school (1 st –4 th grades) | 70.6% | 0.0% | 27.2% |
| Secondary school (5 th –9 th grades) | 76.5% | 0.0% | 35.0% |
| Total (1 st –9 th grades) | 74.1% | 0.0% | 30.5% |

It should be noted that the proportion of Chuvash taught as a native language will gradually decline over the next few years. This is because every year, in several schools, classes teaching Chuvash as a native language are being replaced by classes which teach it as a state language, while there is no traffic in the other direction in any school. This was observed during our on-the-ground observations in rural district centres: in the 2012/2013 schools 23% of pupils in first to fourth grades learned Chuvash as a native language, compared to 28% and 33% of pupils in the fifth to ninth grades and tenth to eleventh grades, respectively. That points to a gradual increase in the share of schoolchildren learning Chuvash as a state language, although the differences are partially caused by the shift in higher grades of students from small rural schools to bigger establishments in more populous towns, where Chuvash is not taught as a native language. ‘It’s easier for the students’, explained the principal of a school which recently implemented this shift. The problem was not the difficulty of

Chuvash as a school subject, but the number of hours devoted to it and to Russian in the syllabus of both types of education; shifting to a Russian-language syllabus “saves” some hours of Chuvash, which are transferred to Russian or other subjects that are considered more relevant.

Chuvashia, in comparison to its neighbours, stands close to Mari El in this aspect of language policy. Unlike in Tatarstan, no consistent work has been done to introduce language teaching as a native language in the cities so that, as in Mari El, more than half of Chuvash (Tatar, Mordovian) schoolchildren in Chuvashia learn the language of their nationality under the lower standards of “state language” instruction.

Number of hours for Chuvash

The number of hours devoted to Chuvash, Russian and other subjects are defined in the syllabus (*uchebnyi plan*) of every school. The decrees of the Chuvash Ministry of Education in force for the 2012/2013 school year²⁷ established a “basic syllabus” for all grades, depending on whether Russian was taught as a native language or not. According to them, in “Russian” schools, which are open from Monday to Saturday, Chuvash is studied for two hours a week in the first grade, and three hours a week from the second to the ninth grades. By comparison, Russian is usually taught for five or six hours per week, with two further hours devoted to Russian literature. If schools elect a five-day regime (from Monday until Friday), as do most urban schools, the hours for Chuvash in primary school are reduced to two. On the other hand, in Chuvash national schools, Chuvash is taught for almost as many hours as Russian in primary school, but much less in secondary school (Table 3). This inequality between Chuvash and Russian reaches its peak in upper school, when Chuvash language disappears as a subject, and only one hour a week is dedicated to Chuvash literature in “Russian” schools, and only two hours in Chuvash “national” schools. In addition, the education system does not offer any kind of humanities specialization that increases time devoted to Chuvash, along with other languages, as it does with Russian, foreign languages or other subjects (the last exception was the Litsei Lebedev, closed in 2012). In “Russian” schools, Chuvash literature in the tenth and eleventh grades is taught using Russian-language textbooks, with texts translated into Russian from Chuvash. This neither values knowledge of Chuvash nor improves it, but rather shows that the main aim of teaching Chuvash, at least in “Russian” schools, is not teaching of the Chuvash language but raising awareness of Chuvash culture.

Table 3. Number of hours per week (summing up the grades) devoted to languages according to Chuvashia's basic syllabus for schools operating in 6-day regime for the 2012/13 school year.²⁸

| | | Chuvash language and literature | Russian language and literature | Foreign languages |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 'Russian' schools | Primary school (1 st –4 th grades) | 11 | 33 | 6 |
| | Secondary school (5 th –9 th grades) | 15 | 32 | 15 |
| | Upper school (10 th –11 th grades) | regardless of the specialisation | 2 | 8 |
| | | depending on the specialisation (additional hours) | 0 | 18 |
| 'Chuvash' schools | Primary school (1 st –4 th grades) | 22 | 21 | 6 |
| | Secondary school (5 th –9 th grades) | 21 | 33 | 15 |
| | Upper school (10 th –11 th grades) | regardless of the specialisation | 4 | 8 |
| | | depending on the specialisation (additional hours) | 0 | 18 |

A comparison with the 1998 syllabus (Chuvash Ministry of Education, 1998) shows little difference for Chuvash. There is in principle no difference in the hours devoted to Chuvash in fully "Russian" schools. In Chuvash "national" schools, Chuvash literature has been reduced from six to four hours in upper school, and from 1 September 2012 the Chuvash language has been reduced by one hour in the fourth grade to make room for a new subject introduced by the federal government called 'Basics of religious cultures and secular ethics'. The main differences in the curricula are the increased hours for foreign languages: in "Russian" schools this has reduced the hours for Russian, but not those for Chuvash, while in Chuvash "national" schools the opposite has been done.

However, one should be aware of the ministry provisions and check them on the ground. We therefore analysed the timetable or syllabus of two samples of 23 Chuvash national schools in rural areas and 35 Russian schools in Shupashkar, as published on their website for the 2012/2013 school year. The results show that Chuvash national schools closely follow the curriculum proposed by the ministry. However, a very different picture emerges when comparing the actual timetables of the Shupashkar schools with the ministry standard for "Russian" schools. First of all, schools in Russia, except for the first grade, can choose to teach on Saturdays or not.

The first option allows three more school hours per week. At least half of Shupashkar schools preferred the five-day regime in primary school, and reduced the hours devoted to Chuvash in primary school by 20% (from three hours per week to two in the second, third and fourth grades). This shift from a six-day to a five-day regime in primary school has increased in recent years. From the fifth grade all schools use a six-day regime, and most of them follow the ministry syllabus. However, all elite schools (*gimnaziya* and *litsei*) reduced the hours devoted to Chuvash from three to two hours per week from the fifth to the ninth grades (in the ninth grade in one lyceum, there was only one hour per week dedicated to Chuvash). This was also done in some other schools, especially for the eighth and ninth grades. Schools may request this reduction, which has to be accepted by the Chuvash Ministry of Education. In addition, Chuvash classes in city schools often incorporate, at least partially, the programme of other subjects, such as ‘Culture of the native land’, ‘My city’ or ‘Basics of secular ethics’. The “integration” of ‘Culture of the native land’ with other subjects was already accepted in 1998 for ‘innovative educational institutions’ (Chuvash Ministry of Education, 1998: 17) and is currently commonplace even in rural schools. This frequent combining of Chuvash language with other subjects shows the low status of the subject and the unclear objectives of the teaching of Chuvash. Moreover, as there are no textbooks for the 30-50% reduced Chuvash syllabus, existing ones are being adapted to the new reality. In future ministry reports, they will be accounted as investments in new textbooks made for the sake of Chuvash language.

Interviewees in the district centres and medium-sized towns often mentioned their own concerns, and those of parents, about the importance of Russian language results in the Unified State Exam. Some also mentioned the foreign language. According to majority opinion, the number of hours for these subjects should be increased in order to ensure good results. Therefore, in the coming years the trend observed in the Shupashkar schools will probably expand.

The effectiveness of teaching Chuvash language as a subject

In light of the above, it is not surprising that teaching of Chuvash as a state language in schools is very poor. For instance, according to our survey, 94% of urban respondents who do not speak it with relatives feel unable to speak it fluently. It is striking that after nine years of learning Chuvash at school, 16% of urban upper school students “do not understand” and 25% more “understand very little” Chuvash,

and that 32% feel that they cannot speak it at all.

Previous surveys of urban schoolchildren have yielded similar results (Ignat'eva *et al.*, 2009: 41; 2010: 49). These self-assessments seem to be trustworthy since Ignat'eva *et al.* surveyed a large sample of urban students and Chuvash-language teachers, and did not find significant differences between the opinions of the two groups. Moreover, according to the teachers, in Shupashkar '11% of the schoolchildren do not know Chuvash at all' and 'the percentage of this kind of pupils is almost the same in all grades from the 5th' (Ignat'eva *et al.*, 2009: 42). In a second survey on teachers in other cities, the same researchers also concluded that 'a certain proportion of the schoolchildren [...] do not progress in the Chuvash language classes at all' (Ignat'eva *et al.*, 2010: 49). Nevertheless, they concluded that 'the current methods of teaching Chuvash in Russian-medium schools, despite all the weaknesses, give acceptable results' (Ignat'eva *et al.*, 2009: 44). It should be emphasized that the authors reaching this conclusion are from the Chuvash language department in the Chuvash Republican Institute of Education, the institution dedicated to training teachers of the republic, which advises the government on educational issues and is dependent on the Chuvash Ministry of Education. In order to prevent parents from rejecting compulsory Chuvash education, students might have been passed in examinations even if they performed poorly. The compulsory study of the language, however, allows authorities to show themselves to be actively boosting Chuvash language and culture.

4.2 Language of instruction

According to bilingual education literature, the use of language as medium of instruction gives much better results. Nevertheless, in the 2012/2013 school year, according to the ministry's internal figures, 90.2% of 122,066 schoolchildren from the first to the eleventh grades studied in Russian (Table 4).²⁹

Table 4. Distribution of the languages of instruction in schools according to level of instruction and type of settlement (2012/2013 school year).³⁰

| | Language of instruction | Villages | Cities | Total |
|---|-------------------------|----------|--------|--------|
| Primary school (1 st –4 th grades) | Chuvash | 59.9% | 0.0% | 21.3% |
| | Tatar | 4.4% | 0.0% | 1.6% |
| | Russian | 35.7% | 100.0% | 77.1% |
| Secondary school (5 th –9 th grades) | Chuvash | 2.0% | 0.0% | 0.9% |
| | Tatar | 0.2% | 0.0% | 0.1% |
| | Russian | 97.8% | 100.0% | 99.0% |
| Upper school (10 th –11 th grades) | Russian | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total (1 st –11 th grades) | Chuvash | 25.9% | 0.0% | 9.1% |
| | Tatar | 1.7% | 0.0% | 0.7% |
| | Russian | 72.4% | 100.0% | 90.2% |

These figures contrast with those usually published by the authorities, which are the number of “national” schools. As there are many more rural schools (which are more commonly “national”), although much smaller than those in urban areas (which are always “Russian”), the numbers are quite deceiving, as Zamyatin points out (2012a: 22, 2012c: 208-209). For example, according to the website of the Chuvash Ministry of Education, ‘[i]n the republic there are 313 (63.0%) schools with Chuvash as the language of education, 166 (33.0%) with Russian, 14 (3.0%) with Tatar (938 students), plus 5 schools (1.0%) which teach Mordovian (233 students)’ (Chuvash Ministry of Education, 2013). The same sort of figures can be found, for example, in the document discussing the Chuvash education policy until 2040 (Chuvash Republic, 2008: 60).

Official data show a significant reduction in Chuvash-language instruction compared to the mid-1990s (Table 5). The figures are influenced by the gradual decline in the rural population compared to the urban population: for instance, the number of students in rural primary schools dropped from 43.3% to 35.6% between 2008 and 2012 in comparison to the total number of primary school students. We should also take into account a parallel trend of school concentration in major centres, often in areas with a higher proportion of native Russian speakers and fully Russian-language education: the population of the main rural district centres of Chuvashia was 20% of the entire population of those districts, but in the 2012/2013 school year they had 32% of all schoolchildren. Nevertheless, the share of rural students from the first to the fourth grades receiving Chuvash-language instruction shows a steady decrease

from 70.1% in 2008 to 59.9% in 2012. Still, these figures over-rate the position of Chuvash and do not reflect the recent shift in small village schools discussed below.

Although the figures show a timid increase in the early 2000s, since the 2006/2007 school year the share of students receiving Chuvash-language instruction has decreased every year. The small increase can be attributed to the mobilization of Chuvash-language scholars in 1999 against a possible reduction of the hours devoted to Chuvash in Shupashkar schools (Filippov, 2001: 106-107).

Table 5. Number and share of students (1st to 11th grade) with Chuvash-medium instruction, 1995–2012.³¹

| | 1995/96 | 2001/2 | 2005/6 | 2012/13 |
|--------------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| Number of students | 31,626 | 22,446 | 18,685 | 11,082 |
| Share of students | 14.4% | 11.2% | 12.3% | 9.1% |

In comparison to its neighbours, Chuvashia fares significantly better than Mordovia and Mari El, but is far behind Tatarstan, since there have not been consistent efforts to increase the share of native language-teaching in schools. The overall downward trend is pretty similar to Mordovia's, although Chuvashia started from, and maintains, a significantly better position.

Nevertheless, our interviews in district centre schools and observation of school timetables and syllabi for the 2012/2013 school year show that ministry statistics over-rate the position of Chuvash-language instruction. There is a conceptual confusion between “Chuvash-language instruction” and “Chuvash national school programme”. As stated before, a number of schools are following the syllabus of Chuvash national schools, and teaching Chuvash as native language, but all instruction is conducted in Russian from the first grade.³² Therefore, the Chuvash-national Hěrlě Çutay/Krasnye Chetai district centre school appears as a Chuvash-language school in official statistics even though, according to a local interviewee, from the 1980s at least instruction has been fully in Russian. So, instead of 87% of primary school students in the 14 rural district centres learning in Russian in the 2012/13 school year, as reported by the ministry, our on-site observations showed that approximately 92% were Russian-language. In several district centre schools Chuvash-language classes in the third and fourth grades were replaced with Russian-language ones in the first and second grades (due to a shift to “Russian-school”

programmes), so we foresee that this percentage will increase in the coming years.

Although fully Russian-language instruction has been very common for decades in the district centres, according to our interviews in the Murkaş/Morgaushi and Elěk/Alikovo district schools it has also expanded in smaller towns in recent years. It should be said that the interviewed school principals were often quite reluctant to speak openly about the language of instruction in their schools. Although in principle the language of instruction is decided by the schools, according to the will of the parental majority, a certain number of schools are not willing to inform the ministry about changes in the language of instruction (the exact causes of this attitude warrant further research).

According to ministry data, besides district centres, all but one school in one of the two districts are Chuvash-language in primary education. Nevertheless, in the northern and central parts of the Murkaş district, which are near Shupashkar (20-40 kms), most schools use Russian as language of instruction. The use of Russian is even more widespread in the teaching of mathematics and science. The shift to Russian occurred almost everywhere in the analyzed districts in the mid-2000s, in most cases in the late 2000s. In these village schools the shift in the language of instruction has not entailed a shift in the curriculum, or in the number of hours devoted to Chuvash and Russian (at least, not yet).

Survey data discard the possibility that the language shift in education in these village schools might be the result of a similar shift in family use. Although one third of surveyed students in the northern part of the Murkaş district speak mainly Russian with their parents, this is found to occur among 15% in the central part, and the educational shift is also found in the South and the Elěk districts, where the number of respondents who speak mostly Russian with their parents is less than 10%. If, instead of considering students who speak mostly Russian with their parents (but often also use Chuvash with them), one considers those who do not speak at all Chuvash at home, these percentages are significantly lower.

The interviewees noted the “lack of perspectives” of Chuvash-language instruction, e.g. in mathematics, as the terminology is found to be useless from fifth grade onwards. They also pointed to the difficulty of “new” Chuvash-language terms, which are considered difficult to understand for pupils, parents and even teachers (the example of “triangle” was often given, for which currently Chuvash textbooks do not use the Russian word, but a Chuvash neologism based on “three” and “angle” – in fact

the word is constructed in the same way in Russian too).

In some cases, especially where the language shift to Russian in everyday life was stronger, the village interviewees complained about the lack of new Chuvash-language textbooks to reflect the new education standards (and of Chuvash-language textbooks and exercise books at all) and said this was the main reason for the shift to Russian. Other interviewees played down this factor and said the old textbooks could be used without any problems and that they could afford them. The new standards came into force in 1 September 2011 and advance one grade every year. Chuvash-language textbooks for the second and third grades only arrived in schools in late September 2013, so there has been a delay in the publication of the new textbooks.

The “lack of perspectives” or the new more purist terminology cannot really explain the language shift in village schools since the late 2000s, as both factors predate it. Moreover, the new Federal State Educational Standards are not the reason either, as many interviewees played down the importance of the lack of new schoolbooks. Rather, it should be considered one more element in a series of messages received by teachers and parents in recent years reasserting the position of Russian in the education system and society. In fact, interviewees expressed their concerns about the Unified State Exam at a much higher rate than the new standards.

Although the shift to Russian has not been done overtly by the schools, the ministry could well be aware of it, as it provides schools with Russian-language textbooks (several schools confirmed receiving them, although they are officially Chuvash-medium). The ministry seems unwilling to counteract the shift, or does not know how to do so; it is probably not aware of its magnitude, since it does not appear in its language statistics.

4.3 Results of the Chuvash educational system in family language use

The rise in fully or mainly Russian-language education inevitably has consequences for the knowledge and use of Chuvash and attitudes towards it. In order to better understand the factors causing the language shift among families, we asked students whether the languages they used at home have changed in comparison with their early childhood. The results of these answers, along with answers to other questions (such as the languages of first socialization, the place where Chuvash and Russian were first learned, and the current use of languages in the family), show that some 12-14% of Chuvash respondents increased or decreased the use of Chuvash with their parents

(eventually fully shifting to Russian). In the cities only an increase in Russian was found, almost always in the district centres, but in the villages the shift occurred on both sides (although slightly more in favour of Russian). Interestingly, that coincides with the spread of Russian-language and Chuvash-language instruction in primary school. In fact, half of the respondents who identified this language change pointed out that it occurred at the beginning of nursery or school attendance. It should be emphasized that, as a result of the different degrees of language transmission in cities, district centres and villages, those 12-14% represent some 30-40% of urban Chuvash respondents, who originally spoke Chuvash with their parents but increased their use of Russian. So, when measuring the external effectiveness of Chuvash education, the school system appears to be the main factor in the language shift, as predicted by the literature on language in education.

Conclusion

Chuvashia began to establish language policies, and in particular language in education policies, in support of Chuvash and other minority languages in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, this article has shown that, at least in the field of education, these initiatives were soon stopped and their outcomes reversed. In the early 2000s the use of minority languages as the medium of instruction was almost level with the late 1980s. Today, most Chuvash schoolchildren learn in submersion schools and only children in small villages have access to transitional programmes which, like the former, also advance assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Baker, 2011).

The Chuvash authorities have not established clear targets in minority-language instruction. From very early in the 1990s, their main efforts were focused on teaching Chuvash to all schoolchildren, including elementary notions of the language as well as Chuvash culture and history. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) warned, that constitutes a specific understanding of bilingualism, which is not oriented towards language maintenance. At the same time, authorities failed to back minority-language instruction with other language policies that could improve contact with the target language and attract more interest in learning it. Instead, they accepted a tacit reduction in Chuvash-language instruction by accepting a reduction in the number of hours devoted to it in the school curriculum and its merging with other subjects. Nonetheless, maintaining or even extending the compulsory teaching of Chuvash enabled the authorities to present themselves as active supporters of Chuvash

language and culture. The result, according to our external effectiveness evaluation survey, is a full-blown language shift to the dominant language, as predicted in educational literature. As McCarty, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Magga (2010: 300) point out, ‘[w]hile schools alone cannot “save” endangered languages, schools can extinguish them within a few generations, almost on their own’.

In comparison with the neighbouring republics of Mordovia and Mari El, which have similar low levels of economic well-being and significantly lower proportions of the “titular” ethnic group, the situation of Chuvash in the education system is better; however, when compared to Tatarstan, with its economic strength and minority group density, it is significantly worse. In general terms all neighbouring republics, like Chuvashia, experienced improvements in the position of minority languages in education in the early 1990s, which quickly lost strength, began to stagnate, and finally reverted to reinforcement of Russian-language dominance in education in the second half of the 2000s or earlier. One cannot really blame solely Vladimir Putin’s policies for this regression. Nevertheless, the policies launched in the 2000s and, in particular, the revaluation of the Russian language without parallel effective actions backing minority languages in education and society can be linked to a serious drop in recent years in the use of Chuvash as a language of instruction and in the number of hours in the curriculum dedicated to teaching it. According to interviews, and bearing in mind that these changes have unfolded quickly since the late 2000s, the main factor appears to be the introduction of the Unified State Exam, as has already been pointed out in relation to other republics.³³ The implementation of the new Federal State Educational Standards is also used in some cases as a pretext for shifting to Russian, under the pressure of the federal government’s policies and propaganda. Survey data disprove that the increase of Russian as a language of instruction could be caused by a parallel increase in its use among families in rural areas. On the contrary, the language shift in schools appears to be preceding and strengthening the language shift in families.

In 2008 Chuvashia’s Minister of Education expressed her regret that a ministry-sponsored proposal for supplementary non-compulsory hours for Chuvash in district centres for training future professionals of Chuvash culture garnered little support (Chernova, 2008: 14). However, the fact should not come as a surprise. Authorities have done nothing substantial to promote Chuvash beyond statements affirming their love for their national language. Actually, their conception of bilingualism and multi-

lingualism, as expressed in official documents, and the statements and articles of politicians and senior civil servants, led the administration to perpetuate a non-functional Chuvash language confined to the home and to folklore with a tiny group of professionals window-dressing the vitality of the language.

Federal language policies are not counteracted by the republican authorities, except, to date, in the compulsory instruction of Chuvash in schools. Unquestionably, Chuvashia's feeble economy caused a shortage of available resources to finance an education system where Chuvash was given a more prominent role. Moreover, one cannot disregard that economic dependence makes it difficult for the republican government to risk confrontation with federal authorities. Still, some decisions of the Chuvash government, such as the shortage of funds for minority languages at the very moment when new textbooks had to be published because of the new standards, point to a lack of foresight and commitment on its side.

Notes

1. The meaning of these expressions is explained below.
2. Mostly ‘Forma FSN No. D-7’ (http://www.miccedu.ru/stat/stat_forms.php. Retrieved: May 17, 2013). These statistical data are collected at the request of the federal government by all subjects of the federation. However they usually remain unpublished, as in the case of Chuvashia. According to Zamyatin (2012c: 208), ‘these data are often inaccessible, because the authorities are quite reluctant to make them public arguing the sensitivity of ethnic issues’. Some data may be published in official accounts (e.g. Tishkov *et al.*, 2009) but generally only for the whole of Russia. This prevents an assessment of the actual situation in a given republic, since in many cases ethnic minorities are scattered across different federal subjects, which have different levels of commitment to minority-language education (see also Zamyatin, 2012c: 233).
3. Mostly *Forma gosudarstvennoi statisticheskoi otchetnosti* [Form of State Statistical Reporting] OSh-1, RIK-76’, for the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 school years. See also http://www.miccedu.ru/stat/stat_forms.php. Retrieved: May 17, 2013.
4. Murkaş/Morgaushi and Elěk/Alikovo are situated 48 and 67 km, respectively, from Shupashkar. These districts were selected because of their high ethnic homogeneity (over 95% Chuvash). The Northern part of the first district is relatively close to Shupashkar, which permitted us to analyse the impact of the capital city on nearby villages.
5. The analysis is based on data from 813 upper secondary students (grades 10 and 11) studying in 35 city schools, who are permanent residents of the cities; 558 upper secondary students studying in 24 schools from all 18 rural district centres and other towns with more than 3,000 inhabitants, and who permanently reside in those towns; 929 secondary and upper secondary students (grades 7-11) studying in 23 schools in the Murkaş/Morgaushi and Elěk/Alikovo districts, who live in those districts but not in the district centres. The fieldwork was conducted by the author.
6. *Valovoi regional'nyi produkt na dushu naseleniya po sub"ektam Rossiiskoi Federatsii v 1998–2012gg* [Gross Regional Product per capita by Subjects of the Russian Federation 1998-2012]. Mordovstat.

- http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/vvp/dusha98-12.xls. Retrieved: August 8, 2014.
7. Author's calculations from Chuvashstat, 2013: 23-26.
 8. These rates show the situation among upper secondary students. As discussed below, rates during earlier stages of education were not found to be so unfavourable to Chuvash.
 9. The percentage of declared ethnic Mordovians jumped from 32% in the 1989 and 2002 census data to 40% in 2010, as a result of a government campaign on the eve of the 2010 census.
 10. Law dated 27 October 1990.
 11. Amendments dated 5 December 1994, 13 June 1996, 21 June 2001. New Law No. 36, dated 25 November 2003, amended 27 June 2008 and 5 December 2011.
 12. *Federalnaya tselevaya programma "Russkii yazyk" na 2002–2005 gody* [Federal Special-Purpose Programme "Russian Language", 2002-2005]. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 483, 27 June 2001. <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/2/4422/14451>. Retrieved: January 30, 2014. *Federalnaya tselevaya programma "Russkii yazyk" na 2006–2010 gody* [Federal Special-Purpose Programme "Russian Language", 2006-2010]. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 833, 29 December 2005, available at <http://elementy.ru/Library9/p833.htm>. Retrieved: January 30, 2014. *Federalnaya tselevaya programma "Russkii yazyk" na 2011–2015 gody* [Federal Special-Purpose Programme "Russian Language", 2011-2015]. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 492, 20 June 2011.
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 13. Law No. 53-FZ, 1 June 2005.
 14. On these initiatives and their connection to Russia's language policies, see Vanhalaniszewski (2010) and Pyykkö (2010).
 15. Law No. 309-FZ, 1 December 2007. A new Federal law on education (No. 273-FZ, 29 December 2012) was later passed in the State Duma, but is outside the scope of this article since its impact is not yet clear, and no interviewees mentioned it.
 16. *Respublikanskaya tselevaya programma po realizatsii Zakona Chuvashskoi Respubliki "O yazykakh v Chuvashskoi Respublike" na 2013–2020 gody* [Republican Special-Purpose Programme for the Realization of the Law of the Chuvash Republic "On the Languages of the Chuvash Republic", 2013-2020]. Decree of the Government of the Chuvash Republic No. 390, 13 September 2012. http://gov.cap.ru/laws.aspx?gov_id=13&id=133419. Retrieved: February 2, 2014.
 17. *Respublikanskaya programma po realizatsii Zakona Chuvashskoi Respubliki "O yazykakh v Chuvashskoi Respublike" na 2003–2007 gody i na period do 2012 goda* [Republican Programme for the Realization of the Law of the Chuvash Republic "On the Languages of the Chuvash Republic", 2003-2007 and for the Period until 2012]. Decree of the Government of the Chuvash Republic No. 314, 6 December 2002. <http://mfin.cap.ru/upload/root/rpc/314%20061202.doc>. Retrieved: February 2, 2014. For an assessment of the Realization Programme of the Law for the period 2003-2012, see Alos i Font(2011).
 18. See 2012 Programme (note 16), Annex 2. In fact, in December 2013, the programme, along with some 15 others, was repealed by a Decree of Chuvashia's Cabinet of Ministers (Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Chuvash Republic No. 552, 27 December 2013).
http://gov.cap.ru/laws.aspx?gov_id=13&id=172556. Retrieved: May 26, 2014. The programmes were merged in a single action macro-plan until 2020 for the Ministry of Education and Youth Politics. Since in the new plan actions aimed at implementing the language law are scattered across a 600-page document, language policy becomes less explicit and difficult to scrutinize, for example at the budgetary level (see Alos i Font,

- 2011).
19. This boarding school was opened in 1992. All grades were taught until 2004, and then only from the fifth grade onwards. According to official accounts, in the 2011/2012 school year, it had 379 students. The school proposed different specializations, which included physics-mathematics, chemistry-biology, physics-chemistry, “socioeconomics” and “Chuvash philology”. In 2013 it was reported that the school would open again, but would only prepare musicians (Moi Gorod, 2013).
 20. It is worth noting here that a small citizens’ initiative was well received in the Ministry of Education. Since the 2010/2011 school year in Shupashkar, a class in one school experimentally teaches some subjects in Chuvash. The project has very slowly started to expand, as it has had many difficulties to overcome. The position of the Ministry of Education is teetering between goodwill, a lack of human and financial resources, and the need to show they are making new efforts in support of the Chuvash language. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Savgil’da (2012).
 21. There used to be a slight difference between “Russian national schools” and “schools with multi-national student composition”. The former were located commonly in villages, and the latter in cities, regional centres and large towns. The first used to follow the Russian ministry syllabus, as used in Russian schools outside Chuvashia (Andreev, 1998: 124). Currently, however, there is no difference between them, and in common speech (even in current textbooks) both are often referred to as “Russian schools”.
 22. Art. 6.2 of the Federal Law No. 12-FZ “On education”, 13 January 1996; art. 14.1 of the Federal Law No. 273-FZ “On education in the Russian Federation”, 29 December 2012; art. 6.2 of the Law of the Chuvash Republic “On education”, 28 January 1993 (with amendments until 15 November 2007); art. 5.2 of the Law of the Chuvash Republic No. 50 “On education in the Chuvash Republic”, 30 July 2013.
 23. Judging by the development of policies regarding Chuvash language in education, this valuable conference publication (Danilov, 1998) seems to have been neglected and forgotten by Chuvash authorities.
 24. Teaching of Tatar and Erzya is only done as a “native language”.
 25. This fact makes Zamyatin’s estimate of the share of ethnic Chuvashes learning Chuvash at school as their native language (83.3%) (Zamyatin, 2012b: 85) a gross over-estimate. Indeed, 47% of Chuvashes are urban and none of them learn Chuvash as a native language (until the 2011/2012 school year about 380 students in the Litsei Lebedev or 0.5% of urban schoolchildren). Half of Zamyatin’s estimated percentage would be closer to reality.
 26. Sources: from the data of language of instruction in ‘*Forma FSN No. D-7*’ and ‘*Forma gosudarstvennoi statisticheskoi otchetnosti*’ [‘Form of State Statistical Reporting’] OSh-1, RIK-76’ for all schools of the republic (both for 2011/2012) with slight corrections based on the author’s observations and interviews. On-the-ground observations showed that these statistical data in fact closely follow not the language of instruction, but the teaching of Chuvash as a native language.
 27. Orders of the Chuvash Ministry of Education No. 473, 6 June 2005; and No. 1292, 16 May 2012.
 28. Sources: see the previous note. Eleven hours per week for Chuvash language and literature in primary “Russian” schools is the result of adding up two hours per week in the first grade and three hours per week in the second, third and fourth grades.
 29. We have not analysed special schools for disabled children (*special’nye (korrektionnye) obrazovatel’nye uchrezhdeniya*), nor professional schools (*uchilishche* and *tekhnikum*), which students can begin to attend after the ninth or eleventh grade. All of them are Russian-language.
 30. ‘*Forma FSN No. D-7*’ for the 2012/13 school year provided by the Chuvash Ministry of Education with the author’s corrections from ‘*Forma gosudarstvennoi statisticheskoi*

otchetnosti ['Form of State Statistical Reporting'] OSh-1, RIK-76' (since the former is based on the latter). Observations on the ground show that these figures for Chuvash-language education are somehow over-estimated, even considering bilingual Chuvash-Russian education as Chuvash-language.

31. Sources: for 1995/1996 and 2001/2, from Boiko *et al.* (2011: 69); for 2005/2006 from Chuvashstat (2011: 65); for 2012/2013, from '*Forma FSN No. D-7*' provided by the Chuvash Ministry of Education with the author's corrections from '*Forma gosudarstvennoi statisticheskoi otchetnosti* [Form of State Statistical Reporting] OSh-1, RIK-76'.
32. This confusion seems to originate from the Soviet times. According to Zamyatin, 'the 1958-9 reform removed the previous principle that national schools had to teach with native language instruction and the native language ceased to be taught to all pupils' (2012b: 90).
33. E.g. the local language educators Chevalier surveyed in the republics of Altai and Tyva 'identified the Unified State Exam as the most influential factor motivating the shift from school curriculum taught in local languages to a Russian language curriculum' (Chevalier, 2012: 9).

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