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‘London Goodbye’: How Russian Social Media Users Perceive the Securitisation of English

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‘London Goodbye’: How Russian Social Media Users Perceive the Securitisation of English

Russia’s securitisation of English needs to be understood within a broader geopolitical and ideological confrontation between Russia and the West. Western support for Ukraine following Russia’s 2022 invasion intensified Russia’s efforts to distance itself from Western influence and promote traditional values, with the Russian language increasingly positioned as a symbol of national identity. These efforts extended to English through measures including reductions in foreign-language instruction hours, the exclusion of Western examination bodies, the removal of English from the mandatory Unified State Exam subjects, and restrictions on anglicisms in public life. Such securitising moves created public dissonance, with some supporting the government’s actions and others strongly opposing them. Drawing on the securitisation theory, the study examined the ways Russian citizens perceive these policies by analysing social media comments across five Russian platforms. The findings indicate that the state’s securitising move has not achieved the audience acceptance necessary for securitisation to succeed, with delegitimisation and rejection as prevalent responses across all policy topics and platforms.

Keywords: securitisation; language policy; English language education; social media; Russia

Introduction

Languages are not neutral tools of communication, so language policy can never be neutral: it is shaped by political, ideological, social, and economic agendas. Therefore, the mechanisms of language reflect and advance those agendas, serving to promote and perpetuate them (Shohamy, 2006). Modern developments have turned language into a valuable currency, making it pervasively politicised (Brubaker, 2015). This move has transformed issues like official languages, accents, dialects, and language policies into ongoing sources of political tension and power struggles.

In the Russian context, decisions about which languages are taught, tested, used in public life and granted official status have consistently served as instruments of nation-building, ideological positioning and geopolitical signalling (Davydova, 2019; Piattoeva, Smirnova, & Santos 2023). Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the conflict was rapidly reframed by the Russian state as a confrontation with the 'collective West', accelerating a pre-existing securitisation of the Russian language as a symbol of national identity (Audinet, Daniélou, & Laruelle, 2026). As a result, the Russian government initiated an accelerated programme of measures aimed at reducing Western influence and reinforcing Russian cultural sovereignty. These measures, namely restricting anglicisms in public life, banning Western examination bodies, reducing school hours allocated to studying English, and removing it from mandatory university entrance requirements, constitute a sustained effort to secure the status of the Russian language as a symbol of national identity through the corresponding securitisation of English.

The cultural resonance of these measures was captured evocatively by a regional Russian newspaper headline published on 30 January 2026, the day the Ministry of Education's draft order decreasing English school hours became public knowledge. The title for the article, «Лондон, гудбай» [London, Goodbye], was borrowed from the nostalgic Soviet-era pop group Car-men (Джыга, 2026). The title of the present paper takes its name from this headline. The song's nostalgic register captures the citizens' mood, grieving a departure from the good old days with the ambivalence of loss.

Despite the significance of policy changes with regard to English, the question of how Russian citizens have received, interpreted and responded to them has drawn limited scholarly attention. Existing research has primarily focused on how the state and elite media frame language policy (Piattoeva et al., 2023) rather than on citizens'

reception. The present study addresses this gap by examining 309 social media comments from five Russian platforms in response to four language policy events: reduction of English school hours, IELTS/TOEFL bans, exclusion of English from mandatory EGE subjects, and restriction of anglicisms in public life. Drawing on securitisation theory (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 2011a, b), the study seeks to answer three research questions:

RQ1. How is the removal of English in Russia framed in social media discussions?

RQ2. What attitudes toward English emerge in these discussions?

RQ3. How do social media users interpret or contest state-driven changes affecting English in Russia?

The Background to the Study

Language, education and nation-building in Russia

To understand the politics of English in contemporary Russia, it is necessary to situate it within a longer history of language as an instrument of state power. As Brubaker (2015, p. 98) notes, "language has been widely understood as the chief criterion and main cultural substrate of nationhood", and claims made in the name of language invariably articulate claims made in the name of nations. In the Russian context, this relationship has never been merely administrative; it has been constitutively political.

The Soviet approach to language was not monolithic. Lewis (1986) and Haarmann (1995) document how early Leninist policy was characterised by a relatively pluralistic orientation evident in a strategic accommodation of minority languages designed to secure the loyalty of non-Russian populations within the new federation. This early multilingualism was, however, always instrumental rather than principled. In a way, it served the consolidation of Soviet power rather than the recognition of

linguistic rights as such. From the Stalinist period onward, and accelerating through the postwar decades, the balance shifted decisively toward Russification, resulting in the increasing privileging of Russian as the Soviet *lingua franca* across education, administration, public life, and other spheres of life (Krouglov, 2022; Zamyatin, 2018). By the late Soviet period, Russian dominance in schooling was near-total, with minority-language instruction systematically marginalised (Kreindler, 1993).

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 did not remove the tensions it had produced but seems to have transformed them into a new and unstable political landscape. The new Russian Federation was grappling with a dual challenge: constructing a civic national identity capable of binding together a multiethnic polity, while simultaneously managing the symbolic and practical claims of Russia's many linguistic communities (Piattoeva et al., 2023). These pressures produced a language policy direction marked by oscillation rather than linear progression.

The 1990s saw a degree of decentralisation, including the formal recognition of ethno-regional educational components that allowed some republics to develop curricula in minority languages (Zamyatin, 2012, 2015). This opening, however, was short-lived. From the beginning of Vladimir Putin's presidency in 2000, the consolidation of centralised authority triggered a systematic rollback of linguistic pluralism. The abolition of the ethno-regional component in 2007, the introduction of the Unified State Exam (EGE/USE) in Russian as the sole medium in 2008, and the cancellation of mandatory minority language requirements in 2018 are among other measures that collectively established a regime of linguistic standardisation in which the Russian language functioned as both a practical administrative tool and a powerful symbol of national cohesion.

It is within this context that Zamyatin (2022) locates the constitutional amendments of 2020 as a further turning point, marking the beginning of a new stage of language policy recentralisation that reinforced a broader authoritarian consolidation of the state. Importantly for the purpose of the present study, this turn towards internal Russification ran in parallel with a sharpening of attitudes toward foreign languages, and toward English in particular. The privileging of Russian as the *gosudarstvennyi yazyk* ('state language') and unifying force created a discursive logic in which other languages, and especially the globally dominant English, came increasingly to be framed as "a threat to national unification, national security and mastery of Russian" (Piattoeva et al., 2023, p. 667).

Foreign language policy: from globalisation to securitisation

The development of English language education in post-Soviet Russia cannot be understood in isolation from the broader ideological history sketched above. Even during the Soviet era, English was valued as a vehicle for accessing Western scientific and technical knowledge, a situation that coexisted uneasily with official suspicion of Western cultural influence (Proshina, 2020; Ustinova, 2005). English instruction was thus simultaneously encouraged and circumscribed, that is, promoted as a tool for scientific modernisation, yet carefully regulated to minimise what the state construed as ideological contamination. Popkewitz and Tabachnick (1982) record that Soviet curriculum reforms consistently sought to integrate technical competence with ideological formation, and foreign language teaching was no exception.

The ideological architecture undergirding this ambivalence had deep historical roots. Krouglov (2022) identifies the tension between Slavophiles and Westernisers, originating in nineteenth-century debates about Russia's relationship to European modernity. The Slavophiles advocated the purification of the Russian language and a

unique Russian developmental path, while the Westernisers insisted on convergence with European norms. Both positions are argued to have left traces in successive waves of language planning. This tension is directly relevant to the position of English in post-Soviet Russia since the question of whether foreign language competence represented an asset for national development or a threat to national identity was never a new question, but an old one returning in new institutional forms.

The post-Soviet 1990s represented a significant departure from this pattern. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced a period of rapid de-ideologisation and decentralisation in education, characterised by institutional autonomy, innovation, and a proliferation of internationally oriented school profiles (Pevzner et al., 2019). Foreign companies arriving in Russia generated demand for internationally oriented schools, IB programmes, and Cambridge qualifications, and institutions such as the British Council and the British International School of Moscow represented the most visible embodiments of this globalising impulse (Pevzner et al., 2019).

The opening of Russia to global economic and cultural flows led to a surge in foreign language learning, especially English, driven by the practical demands of economic integration, international travel, and academic mobility (Ivanova & Tivyaeva, 2015). English became, during this period, associated with modernity, economic opportunity, and participation in a newly accessible global order. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's integration into global markets resulted in a surge in direct borrowings and calques from English that flooded Russian through media, business, finance, technology, and popular culture. It has produced what some observers termed 'Ruglish' or 'Ruslish', a kind of anglicised sociolect initially associated with educated urban youth but increasingly absorbed into the broader language through globalisation processes (Krouglov, 2022). New lexical items, such as шопинг ('shopping'), контент

(‘content’), дедлайн (‘deadline’), хайп (‘hype’), entered everyday use, and some developed new semantic characteristics distinct from their English originals. The lexical Anglicisation meant more than vocabulary. Empirical studies of Russian advertising found English-mediated content consistently associated with individualist, cosmopolitan and status-oriented imagery, in contrast to Russian-language content reflecting collectivist norms (Ustinova & Bhatia, 2005).

The positioning of English as a vehicle for mutual understanding and international engagement was formally reflected in educational policy. The 2010 Federal Educational Standard articulated the goal of foreign language education as shaping a “friendly and tolerant attitude towards the values of other cultures” (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, 2010). At the level of students themselves, this aspirational orientation was not merely rhetorical. Research conducted among Russian secondary school students in Surgut, a Siberian city in Russia, found strong motivation toward English, with students expressing positive attitudes toward Western people and culture and a genuine desire to visit English-speaking countries (Komlosi, 2017). Notably, among these positive orientations toward Western culture and language, most students did not perceive English as threatening Russian patriotism.

The Unified State Exam

A key indicator of the evolving role of English in Russian education is the decade-long debate surrounding the *Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Ekzamen* (EGE), known in English as the Unified State Exam (USE), as a mandatory subject. The EGE, introduced as the sole form of graduation examination in Russian schools since 2009, represented one of the most significant education policy reforms of the post-Soviet period, designed to standardise curriculum implementation and evaluation of learning quality across the federation, and to replace the previous system of school-leaving tests and independent

university entrance examinations (Solnyshkina et al., 2014). Since its inception, the only mandatory EGE subjects have been mathematics and Russian. All other subjects, including English, are selected by students according to their individual educational and professional plans. The proposal to add English as a third compulsory subject, at various points between 2012 and 2020, was actively promoted by the Ministry of Education.

Piattoeva and Santos (2023) provide the most analytically precise account of how this shift played out specifically in the domain of English language education. Through analysis of Russian media debates surrounding the proposed mandatory EGE in English, they identify two distinct phases: an earlier period, centred in the early 2010s, in which English was predominantly treated as an instrument for Russia's participation in the global economy; and a later period, from the mid-2010s onward, in which this framing was progressively displaced by one in which English figured as a threat to national security, national unity and the integrity of the Russian language itself. This shift had direct policy consequences, most visibly in the decade-long controversy over the mandatory EGE in English, which was ultimately abandoned in August 2020. Foreign language learning had been formally reconceived from a bridge toward mutual understanding into an instrument for the outward projection of Russian identity.

This process of ideological reframing, as Hye Hyun and Kapitolina (2023) show through analysis of metalinguistic discourse, was accompanied by a broader reassertion of monolingual norms and linguistic purism in Russian public culture, in which English borrowings and English-medium practices were increasingly cast as ‘alien’ intrusions rather than natural features of a globalised linguistic landscape.

Language policy after the invasion of Ukraine (2022–2026)

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marked a qualitative acceleration of the existing ideological trajectory. In official state messaging, the war

was rapidly rescripted not as a bilateral conflict between the two countries, but as a confrontation with the 'Anglo-Saxon' core (New Eurasian Strategies Centre, 2025). Within this anticolonial project of de-Westernisation, 'anglophobia' became a key part of official ideology in which the West and its hegemonic spread of English was treated as a threat to Russian identity. This positioning found textual expression in President Putin's decree:

> Traditional values are threatened by the activities of extremist and terrorist organisations, certain mass media outlets and mass communications, the actions of the United States of America and other unfriendly foreign states, a number of transnational corporations and foreign non-commercial organisations, as well as the activities of certain organisations and individuals on the territory of Russia. (President of the Russian Federation, 2022, clause 13)

A series of legislative and administrative measures adopted in the period 2022–2026 operationalised this discursive threat construction in the form of restricting English in Russian public, media, and educational life. In the domain of media and public-sphere language use, Federal Law No. 52-FZ (28 February 2023) amended the State Language Law to ban the use of foreign words in advertising, signage, and official communications (Federal Law No. 52-FZ, 2023). Federal Law No. 168-FZ (24 June 2025) extended these restrictions further, establishing a government-approved dictionary of permitted terms against which compliance is assessed, with fines and violations enforceable from 1 March 2026 (Meduza, 2025). It is worth noting that the law's provision targets 'foreign words' in general rather than English specifically, though public and political discourse around it has dwelled disproportionately on anglicisms, given their frequency relative to borrowings from French and German. This pattern is reminiscent of France's 1994 Toubon Law, which similarly promoted the

protection of French against foreign linguistic influence while specifically regulating the use of foreign terms, including English loanwords[1].

In parallel, Western educational and testing institutions withdrew from Russia in response to international sanctions. In March 2022, IELTS paper-based exams and TOEFL were suspended in Russia by Western testing providers (RBC, 2022; The PIE News, 2022). Cambridge English examinations became unavailable domestically, with students forced to travel to neighbouring countries for testing. The Russian state's own measures followed, and in May 2023, the British Council was designated an "undesirable organisation", banning its operations and partnerships on Russian territory (MFA, 2025). Ministry of Education Order No. 820 (27 November 2024) withdrew English from the mandatory EGE entrance examination list for the majority of university specialisations (Ministry of Education, 2024). Most recently, a January 2026 draft order proposed reducing foreign language instruction from three to two hours per week in grades 5–7, with implementation from September 2026 (RBC, 2026; TASS, 2026).

In addition, Russia also formally moved away from the Bologna Process in higher education. The European Higher Education Area suspended Russia's membership rights in April 2022, and Russian officials announced a return to the Soviet-era specialist degree model (EHEA, 2022). While degree structure falls outside the direct scope of this study, it forms part of the broader educational de-Westernisation context.

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[1] The Toubon Law (Law No. 94-665 of 4 August 1994) established requirements for the use of French in public, commercial and professional contexts, including restrictions on foreign terms where approved French equivalents exist.

Theoretical Framework: Politics of Securitisation

Wæver (2011a) defines 'security' not as a fixed condition or objective fact but as a particular social and political practice defined by a field of interactions, norms, and power-holders' moves. According to him, security functions as a speech act. Saying something is a 'security' issue is performative. By labelling a development a security threat, state representatives claim exceptional powers to mobilise extraordinary means. Securitisation depends on who perceives security threats and against whom, not just on the objective issue (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitisation situates public issues on a spectrum: non-politicised (ignored by the state and public debate), politicised (handled through ordinary public policy and resource allocation or communal governance), and securitised (treated as a threat to national security requiring extraordinary measures) (Buzan et al., 1998).

Because an issue is framed as urgent and existential, it bypasses normal political bargaining and is handled decisively by top leaders before other matters. Securitisation, regardless of correctness, alters an actor's mode of operation and thus becomes a political act. However, it is not determined at the individual level; its acceptance depends on whether "the audience" sees an issue as "a threat to a shared value" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 31). This fact makes securitisation a social, intersubjective process.

Since the paper deals with language securitisation, it builds on and extends Perera and Makoni's (2019) understanding of language securitisation as "the tendency to align the goals of language education (LE) with national and global security agendas" (p. 859). When a language is seen as threatening national unity, social stability, or cultural identity, authorities typically respond with more coercive, centralised language policies and governance. In doing so, states seek to build a unified national identity by setting language policies: shaping language teaching in schools, controlling media language, and specifying which language is used for public services, all to create a

single national imaginary (Le, 2025). This securitising logic is clearly visible in the Russian case. As outlined above, the November 2022 decree explicitly designated the United States and 'unfriendly foreign states' as threats to Russia's traditional values. This is a typical example of a securitising move in Buzan et al.'s (1998) terms, in which a securitising actor (the Russian presidency) identifies an existential threat to a valued referent object, thereby claiming the right to exceptional measures. While the decree articulates this threat in general civilisational terms, the present study narrows the focus to language specifically, examining English as the linguistic proxy for the 'collective West' the decree identifies as the source of threat.

Methodology

Research design

In line with digital research scholarship, I treat the Internet as a site for studying broader social and cultural phenomena (Rogers, 2024). Social media offers researchers new ways to collect data, enabling qualitative study of user-generated content across platforms (Wilson et al., 2023). McKenna, Myers and Newman (2017) argue that quantitative information systems researchers have already capitalised on social media data (e.g., large-scale Twitter analytics) while qualitative studies remain scarce. The present study fills this gap by adopting a qualitative research approach to explore how Russian citizens perceive and respond to recent state-led language policies.

To examine these attitudes, I employed a qualitative approach by collecting publicly available social media comments, which formed the dataset. To analyse the data, reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was selected to discover themes through iterative (re)reading and coding of the dataset.

Data Collection

Platform selection and rationale

Data were collected from publicly accessible comment sections on five online platforms: Telegram, VKontakte, Facebook, and two specialist web publications (b17.ru and habr.com). This multi-platform approach was used to capture a range of demographic perspectives and audience types. Telegram public channel discussion groups and VKontakte community posts attract broad, politically diverse Russian-speaking audiences and represent mainstream public debate. Habr, Russia's largest technology and IT community platform, provided commentary from a more technically educated and internationally oriented demographic. Facebook comments were sourced from the page of a Russian English language teacher and reflect the perspectives of education professionals and engaged students. The specialist psychology platform b17.ru provided commentary from a professional and semi-professional readership. Instagram and Threads were considered but excluded on methodological grounds. Meta platforms are officially banned in Russia, meaning their user base is self-selected (VPN users), systematically younger and therefore, liable to introduce sampling bias inconsistent with the study's aim of covering broad public views.

Source identification

Posts were identified through keyword searches conducted directly on each platform in Russian. Search items included: запрет IELTS TOEFL ('IELTS/TOEFL ban'), англицизмы закон ('anglicism law'), английский язык школа часы ('English language school hours'), запрет иностранных слов ('foreign words ban'), and отмена ЕГЭ английский ('EGE English cancellation'). Source posts were selected for topical relevance and public engagement.

Comments were extracted using a combination of methods appropriate to each platform. For Telegram, the Telethon Python library was used to connect to the Telegram API and retrieve comments from public discussion groups linked to identified channel posts. For VKontakte and Facebook, I utilised ExportComments.com, a web-based comment extraction service. Habr and b17.ru comments were collected manually due to access restrictions on automated tools. All extracted data were compiled into a master data set in spreadsheet format (.xlsx), with each comment recorded as a discrete row alongside metadata fields including platform, source channel, post identifier, and policy topic category.

The final corpus comprised 309 comments collected from six posts responding to news reports on pre- and post-2022 language policy measures directly affecting English language teaching, learning, and use in Russia, spanning the period July 2020 to February 2026. The corpus composition is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Research corpus description.

Platform	**Source / Channel**	**Policy topic**	**Date range**	**n**
Telegram	@mostoday	english_hours	Jan 2026	99
VKontakte	@portalschool	english_hours	Jan 2026	77
VKontakte	@1tv	anglicism	Feb 2026	49
Habr	habr.com	ielts_toefl	Mar 2022	33
Facebook	tatyanaenglishteacher	ege_cancel	2020	45
b17.ru	b17.ru	ege_cancel	2020	6
Total				**309**

Ethical Considerations

Using social media data in research raises important ethical concerns, similar to other forms of data collection (Evans et al., 2015). A central concern about social media data is whether it should be treated as public or private. The data for this research were collected from a public site. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. In accordance

with established guidelines for internet research ethics (Association of Internet Researchers, 2019), participants' privacy is preserved by replacing usernames with anonymised identifiers prior to analysis (e.g., TG_User_001, VK_User_001).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed following six-phase reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2019). This is particularly appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and the relative scarcity of empirical research on public attitudes to language policy in contemporary Russia. Analysis was performed using NVivo 14 in the following manner. The master dataset was imported as a structured dataset with each comment row treated as a discrete case. Classification attributes (platform, policy topic, etc.) were assigned at import to enable filtering and cross-tabulation during analysis.

In the first phase, I read and re-read the entire corpus to develop familiarity with the data. In the second phase, open coding was applied systematically to generate initial codes. An initial deductive coding framework was developed, comprising five parent nodes: Attitudes towards English, Discourse strategies, Policy evaluation, Referent objects and Securitisation responses. In the third phase, codes were grouped into candidate themes, with NVivo's cluster analysis used to visualise relationships between codes. In the fourth stage, candidate themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to assess their coherence and distinctiveness. Further refinement and naming of themes were carried out in phase five, with the final analytical narrative written in the concluding phase.

As the data were collected in Russian, translation was required for the presentation of findings. Consistent with best practices in cross-linguistic qualitative research (Squires, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004), analysis was conducted entirely in

Russian, the researcher's native language, to minimise analytical distortions that can arise from working with translated data. Quotations selected for inclusion in the findings were translated into English by the researcher.

Findings

This section reports findings around five key themes: (1) The phantom subject; (2) English as the language of exit; (3) Two Russias; (4) Delegitimisation of the securitising actor; and (5) The spectrum of securitisation acceptance.

Theme 1: The phantom subject

This was the most prominent theme across multiple datasets, which reflects English teachers' concerns about the functional non-existence of English as a taught subject in many Russian schools despite official provision. These concerns converged on a uniform point: English exists on the timetable but is absent in practice. Among others, teacher proficiency gaps, students' low language achievement levels, and a lack of policy to compensate for what was never taught were named as the basis for viewing the English language subject as a 'phantom', that is, existing only in appearance, *de jure* but not d*e facto*. The theme is supplemented by three subthemes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. 'The phantom subject' subthemes and quotes.

Subthemes	Quotes
Chronic teacher turnover and systemic inconsistency	*"In 4 years we have had 4 teachers, each demanding things differently – the child already has mush in their head, every new broom sweeps differently. From the whole class only a couple of children learn English properly, and even then only with tutors".* [VKontakte, english_hours] *"Nobody teaches anyone anything".* [Telegram, english_hours]
Teachers' insufficient English proficiency	*"At conferences and courses, paid ones at that, I meet many school teachers whose level is B2 at best, more likely B1. I find it hard to believe that a teacher can prepare students for the EGE if their own level barely reaches It".* [Facebook, ege_cancel]

Subthemes	Quotes
	"They are taught terribly badly, inconsistently and with a lot of criticism and intimidation. After 3-4 years students are still at Starter level. Not because they have the wrong abilities — because they are taught terribly". [Facebook, ege_cancel]
Policy irrelevance in the face of systemic collapse	*"Even with the current number of lessons the level of English in some schools is simply zero... we are degrading slowly...."* [Facebook, ege_cancel] *"2 hours is just the beginning. From this year they cancelled the division of classes into groups. There is your quality of education and individual approach". [VKontakte, english_hours].* *"An exam is just a check –in what way will introducing a check of what does not exist contribute to its appearance?"* [Facebook, ege_cancel]

As seen from these teachers' comments, existing hours were already *"catastrophically insufficient"* before the English hours' reduction, as FB_User_013 puts it. A private tutor reiterated the same point, observing that English levels were *"simply zero"* in many schools even before policy changes (VK_User_021). Many teachers and citizens were openly sceptical about the 'value' of English for their children:

> What English? They should first learn Russian. As for English, anyone who wants to learn it nowadays can do so on their own. Google is there to help. My level is somewhere around Intermediate. The problem with foreign languages isn't that they aren't taught, but that children don't learn them because they don't need to. And specifically with English it's become some kind of fetish lately.
> b17_User_001

Overall, these comments are telling. They imply that the Russian state is securitising something that, in the experience of many citizens, does not exist as a meaningful educational phenomenon. The measures to reduce English in schools are directed at an imaginary threat.

Theme 2: English as the language of exit

Across all four policy topics and multiple platforms, English was consistently framed not as a cultural threat but as a tool of individual freedom, mobility and opportunity. Restricting access to English was interpreted by a significant cluster of commenters as deliberate entrapment rather than cultural protection. The four subthemes created under the main theme are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. 'English as the language of exit' subthemes.

Subthemes	Quotes
English as practical and economic necessity	*"A world language used everywhere has no point? Please do not make me laugh".* [Telegram, english_hours] *"All decent apps, programmes and services are in English".* [Telegram, english_hours] *"It not only opens many prospects but also broadens horizons and develops thinking". [Facebook, ege_cancel]*
English as vehicle for emigration and international mobility	*"IELTS is also needed for immigration programmes like Canadian Express Entry. The ban could seriously complicate life for those planning to move to Canada or Australia".* [Habr, ielts_toefl] *"They do it deliberately so that children, after reaching adulthood, cannot flee to civilised little Europe".* [Telegram, english_hours]
The 'trapped dissident' double bind of pro-Western Russians	*"The US government does not like the policy of the Russian government. Some Russians also do not like it. The US Treasury starts petty harassment of Russians who have chosen the Western path. What is the point?"* [Habr, ielts_toefl] *"It reminds me that free exit from the USSR was written into the constitution – it is just that in practice the attempt to get a foreign passport and leave had certain peculiarities".* [Habr, ielts_toefl]
English as instrument of Russian diplomatic strength	*"I felt pride in our diplomat who without a translator in beautiful French told a journalist everything he thinks about Macron".* [Facebook, ege_cancel] *"We are repeating the practice of CIS countries that cut Russian language lessons as the language of international communication – migrants cannot string two words together in Russian".* [Telegram, english_hours]

The emotional and technical registers of the exit theme differed markedly by platform. Telegram users expressed emotional entrapment. For example, in response to the IELTS ban, TG_User_027 said: *"They do it deliberately so children cannot flee to civilised*

little Europe". Habr commenters mapped the same theme, calling the cancellation of IELTS/TOEFL exams a *"disgusting signal"* that will lead to candidates looking for *"some workarounds like taking the exam in a third country"* (Habr_User_001). At the same time, social media users noted that the situation is also complicated by the anti-Russian politics of the West, as documented in the following comment:

> Some kind of absurdity is happening. The US government does not like the policy of the Russian government. Some Russians also do not like it, and they 'start the tractor' [Russian slang: make a fuss / complain loudly]. The US Treasury starts petty harassment of Russians who have chosen the Western path. What is the point? (Habr_User_013)

This paradox of the trapped dissident finding where pro-Western Russians felt to be simultaneously 'penalised' by Russian state restriction and Western institutional restriction, represents the most geopolitically original observation in the dataset.

Theme 3: Two Russias – elite privilege and ordinary sacrifice

A powerful class-based counter-narrative ran through all four policy datasets. The 'elite' who create and implement language policies are systematically exempt from their consequences. Their children study abroad or receive private English tuition, while ordinary Russian families encounter a binary choice between ignorance and unaffordable private education. The theme has three subthemes, which are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. 'Two Russias – elite privilege and ordinary sacrifice' subthemes and quotes.

Subthemes	Quotes
Elite hypocrisy and exemption from policy consequences	*"Why do those sitting in the Duma receive a good free education and send their children to get it abroad, while at the same time destroying Russian education?"* [Telegram, english_hours] *"Education is in a pit. It is openly stated that from year 7 private tutors in all subjects are mandatory for university admission. And in local newspapers it is pure lies– children without tutors get 100*

Subthemes	Quotes
	points. Everyone knows who, where, how and for how much receives at home. Shameful". [Facebook, ege_cancel]
Privatisation of English education	*"For us tutors the work will increase".* [Telegram, english_hours] *"Either you are a bulldozer operator, or you pay money to study subjects like foreign languages in order to enter a decent university".* [Facebook, ege_cancel] *"The elite and ordinary people – the gap will grow. My son studied with private tutors – and now communicates freely with American clients. And I myself – at conferences I sit in headphones and listen to the translation".* [b17.ru, ielts_toefl]
Children's wellbeing as referent object	*"An extra EGE is extra stress for our children".* [b17.ru, ege_cancel] *"But when do you live?"* [b17.ru, ege_cancel]

The conference headphones image of a mother at an international conference listening to translation while others participate directly in English (b17_User_006) demonstrates the consequences of unequal English access. The ege_cancel Facebook dataset also produced the most serious disclosure within this theme, indicating a widespread informal corruption of the examination system, in which high EGE scores can be achieved through home tutoring arrangements that are openly acknowledged but officially denied: *"It is being stated openly that from year 7, private tutors in all subjects are mandatory for university admission! Shameful!"* (FB_User_013).

Theme 4: Delegitimisation of the securitising actor

This theme, together with five subthemes, reflects active delegitimisation of the state's securitisation narrative through irony, historical precedent, logical contradiction, *reductio ad absurdum* ('reduction to absurdity'), conspiracy framing and civilisational pessimism. The illustrative quotes for these subthemes are included in Table 5.

Table 5. 'Delegitimisation of the securitising actor' subthemes and quotes.

Subthemes	Quotes
Delegitimisation through ridicule	*"Let these parliamentarians conduct an audit in their own heads, look for their brains"*. [Telegram, english_hours] *"When did real patriots appear in the world)))) "* [Telegram, english_hours] *"The world will definitely tremble from such 'hardcoreness' on our part"*. [VKontakte, anglicism]
Delegitimisation through historical precedent	*"What are they trying to achieve? In the USSR this already happened: widespread ignorance of foreign languages"*. [Telegram, english_hours] *"Free exit from the USSR was written into the constitution… it is just that in practice the attempt to get a foreign passport and leave had certain peculiarities"*. [Habr, ielts_toefl]
Delegitimisation through reductio ad absurdum	*"Government – a foreign word. President – a foreign word. Deputy – a foreign word"*. [VKontakte, anglicism] *"VK is also in English. What are we going to do? "* [VKontakte, anglicism] *"Very wisely have the wise boyars of the Duma resolved this matter. The dermatologist shall need to be called a skin-knower. The telephone — a speaking casket"*. [VKontakte, anglicism]
Conspiracy framing and civilisational pessimism	*"Because if the people were educated there would be no such Rashka"*[2]. [Telegram, english_hours] *"We are degrading slowly... "*. [Facebook, ege_cancel] *"You are now behaving exactly like Ukraine. There it is madness about cancellation and here we have the same"*. [VKontakte, anglicism]
Policy incoherence as delegitimisation	*"Not long ago they were introducing a second mandatory foreign language. Now they are cutting even the first one"*. [Telegram, english_hours] *"They say that English exams will be conducted in Russian"*. [Telegram, english_hours]

The *reductio ad absurdum* subtheme was particularly prominent in the anglicism dataset. The observation that правительство ('government'), президент ('president'), and депутат ('deputy') (VK_user_090) are words of foreign origin used by the institutions enforcing the foreign words ban rendered the law self-refuting at the level of its own institutional vocabulary. The following Church Slavonic satirical comment,

[2] Rashka: derogatory slang for Russia used by critics of the state

written entirely in archaic pre-Petrine Russian, demonstrated with linguistic sophistication that removing all foreign-origin words from Russian would require returning to a pre-modern register:

> Very wisely have the wise boyars of the Duma have resolved this matter. Now shall we live well, as our ancestors commanded, without the blasphemous speech of foreigners. The dermatologist, henceforth, shall need to be called a skin-knower. The telephone – a speaking casket. And the president – it seems, not Tsar-Father, and not Grand Prince, but, as it verily is – Big Ataman shall we call him (for it is known to us that we live under people's power). VK_user_127

Cross-platform comparison revealed that delegitimisation operated through different modes depending on the audience community: collective emotional irony on Telegram, analytical legal reasoning on Habr, and elaborate intellectual satire on VKontakte.

Theme 5: The spectrum of securitisation acceptance

A minority but analytically significant cluster of comments accepted and, in some cases, radicalised the state's securitisation logic. Acceptance stemmed from at least five distinct motivations: parental anxiety about Russian literacy, social resentment of performative anglicisation, media-ideological concern about Western narrative infiltration, cultural pride in the richness of Russian, and anti-colonial assertions of linguistic sovereignty. Quotes in Table 6 exemplify these subthemes.

Table 6. 'The spectrum of securitisation acceptance' subthemes and quotes.

Subthemes	Quotes
Mild acceptance – parental anxiety	*"When a foreign language is placed above the native language, the programme is rushed so much that children do not absorb Russian".* [Telegram, english_hours] *"Good, because English was being studied at the same level as Russian…better to have more Russian instead".* [Telegram, english_hours]
Social and aesthetic rejection of anglicisms	*"There are Russian words meaning the same thing, but no, people have to show off! "* [VKontakte, anglicism]

Subthemes	Quotes
	"Youth go around saying 'wow', like dogs, and our Russian 'ukh ty' is wonderful and beautiful. [VKontakte, anglicism]
Strong ideological acceptance – existential threat framing	*"The majority of words in modern Russian are parasitic neo-anglicisms".* [Telegram, english_hours] *"It is precisely with language that the disappearance of peoples begins".* [VKontakte, anglicism] *"Only Russian should be taught. All others should be banned".* [Telegram, english_hours*]*
Anti-colonial sovereignty framing	*"We are not a colony of any Western country".* [VKontakte, anglicism] *"Hallelujah! "* [VKontakte, anglicism]

Securitisation acceptance was most prominent in the anglicism dataset, where the law regulating the use of foreign words mapped most directly onto cultural identity concerns. Acceptance in the english_hours dataset was primarily parental and pragmatic rather than nationalist. As seen from the quotes, the spectrum of such acceptance varied from mild parental concern to calls for banning all foreign languages. This suggests that securitisation logic can be internalised and reproduced through mundane parental anxiety rather than through explicitly political conviction.

A competing securitisation move was found in one Telegram comment, which redirected the threat framing from English toward demographic change, specifically Asian migration:

> English is spoken by people in India, in Asia Minor[3], and in Latin America. It has long been the language of international communication; that is simply how things developed historically. We are repeating the practice of some CIS countries that cut Russian language lessons in schools as the language of international communication. Now migrants cannot string two words together in Russian. (TG_user_014)

[3] Asia Minor ("Малая Азия"), the classical Russian geographical term for Türkiye.

This user did not accept the state's securitisation of English but performed its own securitisation of a different referent object. Such competing moves represent an important boundary case in securitisation theory when the Russian citizens reject the state's specific threat framing while accepting the broader securitisation logic of cultural threat requiring extraordinary measures.

Discussion

The central finding of this study is that the Russian state's securitisation of English has not achieved the audience acceptance that Wæver (2011a) identifies as necessary for securitisation to succeed. Across 309 comments, the dominant mode of citizen response was delegitimisation rather than acceptance. Citizens mocked, historically contextualised, logically dismantled and inverted the state's threat narrative far more frequently than they reproduced it. This finding supports Buzan et al.'s (1998) argument that securitisation is not merely a state act but a social process requiring audience uptake, and the data suggest that this condition has not been met in the Russian context. Pavlenko's (2003) concept of the 'language of the enemy' helps explain why: English's social functions, including cosmopolitan identity, digital access, and individualist consumer culture, remained largely unchanged across the 2022 divide. Yet the state politically reclassified those same functions as evidence of hostile ideological influence aligned with 'destructive ideology' named in the 2022 decree. The securitising move has generated public awareness but not public legitimation, signalling a disconnect between elite securitisation performance and popular securitisation reception that extends existing literature (McDonald, 2008; Stritzel, 2014).

The phantom subject finding significantly demonstrated that the Russian state is securitising something that, in the experience of many citizens, does not exist as a meaningful educational phenomenon. Multiple subject positions with parents, school

teachers and private tutors, among others, rendered the policy debate about hours, exams and class groups almost irrelevant to the extant educational reality. The policy therefore fails both as securitisation (no audience acceptance) and as education (no effective provision). This double failure is captured vividly in one comment: *"an exam is just a check"* (FB_User_010), introducing a *"check"* of something that does not exist cannot make it appear. This finding connects to Perera and Makoni's (2019) observation that securitisation of language education involves aligning language education goals with security agendas. In the Russian context, the alignment is incoherent because the security logic is being applied to an educational system that cannot credibly deliver the competence being securitised.

Interestingly, where the state construes English as a Western imposition to be resisted, citizens framed it as a vehicle for emigration, professional opportunity, international academic access and digital participation. The Habr dataset documented this double bind with analytical precision, commenters noting that the IELTS and TOEFL bans fell most heavily on precisely those Russians most oriented toward Western values. This finding indicates that Western sanctions regimes in educational and certification domains may produce counterproductive effects, potentially causing feelings of alienation among key groups within the target countries (Hwami, 2022). The functional orientation aligns with the sociolinguistic understanding of English as a lingua franca, a contact language whose global spread is not inherently tied to Western cultural identity (Jenkins, 2015), which is at odds with the state's conception of English as exclusively Western.

Furthermore, the Two Russias theme revealed that state withdrawal from English language provision does not eliminate English; it privatises it. State restrictions push demand from public schools to private tutoring, accessible only to those who can

afford it. Several commenters independently observed this privatisation dynamic, and the ege_cancel dataset revealed widespread informal corruption of the examination system itself, in which high EGE scores can be arranged through home tutoring arrangements openly acknowledged but officially denied. This finding corroborates Buzan et al.'s (1998) observation that securitisation raises questions about who performs the securitising move and in whose interests. The study's findings evidence that the beneficiaries of English restriction are not ordinary Russian citizens but elites who can afford private alternatives.

A significant cross-cutting finding is that the same policy events generated radically different modes of engagement across platforms, with audience demographics fundamentally shaping how securitisation is experienced. Five distinct registers were identified: emotional and ironic (Telegram), analytical and legal (Habr), philosophical and humanistic (b17.ru), constructive policy deliberation (Facebook teacher community), and sardonic intellectual wit (VKontakte). This cross-platform variation complicates securitisation theory's tendency to treat audiences as undifferentiated (Balzacq, 2010). Rather than a single public that accepts or rejects a securitising move, the data displayed multiple publics with distinct modes of reception shaped by platform culture, professional community, and educational background.

Limitations and Future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the dataset does not include demographic information about commenters: age, gender, educational level, geographic location within Russia and other sociodemographic variables that may have shaped securitisation reception, including ethnic and religious background. Given Russia's status as a multi-ethnic federation encompassing over 190 ethnic groups, many with non-Slavic, non-Orthodox cultural heritage, English's reception may differ for citizens

whose own relationship to ‘Russianness’ and ‘the West’ is already more complex than the study’s Russian language dataset can capture. Next, the dataset captured a specific moment in Russian public conversation about language policy. Thus, longitudinal explorations tracking changes in securitisation reception as policies are implemented over time would provide valuable insight into how citizen responses evolve. In addition, the sample is necessarily self-selecting: social media commenters are not representative of the Russian population and likely over-represent those with stronger opinions and greater digital engagement. Finally, interview-based research with Russian English teachers, parents and students would enable more detailed examination of the mechanisms through which securitisation logic is accepted, rejected or renegotiated in everyday educational contexts.

Conclusion

To remind the reader, the study’s purpose was to explore how Russian social media users interpret, contest and respond to state-led securitisation of the English language. The key finding is that the state’s securitisation of English has not achieved the audience acceptance that Wæver’s (2011a, b) model requires for securitisation to function as a social constraint. The dominant response was delegitimisation of the securitising actor, a finding that contributes to the small but growing body of securitisation research attending to audience reception rather than actor performance (Balzacq, 2010; McDonald, 2008). Beyond the securitisation framework, the study discovered the presence of the phantom subject, the functional non-existence of English as an effectively taught subject in many Russian schools. The policy debate about restricting English takes place against a backdrop in which English barely exists as a meaningful educational reality for many students, regardless of official provision. This finding, entirely absent from official policy rhetoric, emerged through citizen testimony

across multiple subject positions and represents the kind of insight that social media qualitative research is uniquely positioned to spotlight.

The study also makes a contribution to understanding the socioeconomic dimensions of language policy. The consistent finding that language restriction privatises rather than eliminates English shows a structural class dimension to securitisation that theory has not adequately addressed. When the elite who perform securitisation are exempt from its consequences, and when ordinary citizens bear its costs, securitisation ceases to be a collective security response and becomes an instrument of social stratification. This finding echoes Perera and Makoni's (2019) call for researchers to take a more critical look at the securitised agendas influencing language education policy. It also reminds us that such engagement should not only focus on the security discourse itself but also consider how these ideas are socially distributed in different ways.

Ethical Statement

This study analysed publicly available social media data.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors confirm that this research complies with ethical standards applicable to publicly available internet data (Association of Internet Researchers, 2019).

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required, as the data were collected exclusively from publicly accessible social media platforms.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was not required, as the study involved only publicly available social media comments with no direct engagement with human participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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