

Native language in multicultural republic: symbol of ethnical identity or the method of daily communication?

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Abstract:

This paper raises the question of the status of the Tatar language in the Republic of Tatarstan. Being officially proclaimed state language along with Russian, the Tatar language is nevertheless less in demand. Objective of this paper is to determine the functions of the language of the titular nation in the republic. Based on a representative survey of Tatar youth (1352 persons) in 2015 data on its attitude to their native language were obtained. Most of respondents called the Tatar language their native. Observations over the language situation for several years have shown a decline in the proportion of persons who call Tatar their native language. At the same time, a modal group of Tatar-speaking Tatars lives in the peripheral cities of the republic. The proportion of people who consider Tatar their native language is much less in the capital and rural areas. Limited use of the Tatar language in the same republic inadvertently suggests of the future of the language of the titular nation: Does the Tatar language risk to become a mere symbol of ethnic identity while continuing similar trends? This problem is in the focus of Kazan University sociologists in the context of study of interethnic and inter-confessional relations in the Republic of Tatarstan [1].

Keywords: ethnic identity, language asymmetry, multiethnic society, cultural distinctiveness, monitoring.

Introduction.

Under the proclaimed in the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan Russian/Tatar bilingualism and actual functioning of unilateral bilingualism one cannot answer directly the question about the actual status of the Tatar language. There is a stereotype prevailing in the public consciousness of the people of Tatarstan, that knowing the Russian language is sufficient to live in Russian society. Indeed, historically, the Russian language is dominant in all areas of public life. However, the national language is one of the central factors of ethnic identity [2, p.156], [3, p.15]. Constitutional recognition of the Tatar language as state without its actual demand, upon narrowing its instrumental functions cannot motivate people to study it [4, p.139]. The Tatar language, of course, is used in local communication between relatives, neighbors, colleagues, in a variety of areas, including leisure. However, limited use of the Tatar language in Tatarstan led to the language asymmetry, which can only be overcome by the efforts of the republican government and civil society. "The language "question" in the republic during the entire post-Soviet period was a separate political agenda", famous political scientist N.M. Mukhariamov considers [5, p.48].

Materials and methods. Mass survey of young people of the Republic of Tatarstan, living in different areas such as in Kazan, peripheral cities and in rural areas, conducted in March-June 2015 (field stage of collecting empirical information) is aimed at identifying the dynamics of ethnic and religious attitudes, including attitudes of young people to their native language. The researchers have focused on the age group of 16 to 35 years, with the subgroups: 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35 years, Tatars by ethnos. Interest in the young age group of Tatars is due to the desire to determine the attitude of the youth to the Tatar language practices of the multi-ethnic society, as this attitude tends to changes. The sample is representative, with maximum error of 4.0%. Monitoring units were selected in accordance with the proportional representation of inhabitants of various types of settlements: Kazan / peripheral towns / villages.

Results. The absolute majority of the surveyed called Tatar, which is a state and Tatar people and culture's language, their native language: 1153 persons (83.0%). Meanwhile, different age groups of youth have different Tatar proficiency level. According to the survey of 2015, almost two-thirds of Tatar-speaking youth of the republic speaks Tatar fluently, i.e., can speak, read and write. The proportion of persons proficient only in speaking Tatar is 16.5%, every tenth understands well the Tatar language, but can hardly speak the same, each twentieth has poor knowledge of the Tatar language or does not know it at all. The gender-based approach to the analysis of the attitude to Tatar as the native language revealed no differences between men and women: half of men and half of women have recognized Tatar as their native language.

Monitoring of the language situation in the Republic of Tatarstan over several years indicates a gradual reduction in the proportion of people, mainly the youngest, who call Tatar their native language: a survey in 2015 with a target sample of young people of 16 to 35 years resulted in a fifth of 16-20-year-old people recognizing Tatar as their native language, while the proportion among the older age groups of young people is slightly higher: 21-25 years - 24.4%, 26-30 years - 29.6%, and 31-35 years - 26.5%. A similar trend was revealed in the mass survey of the residents of the republic in 2012, namely the difference in the everyday use of the Tatar language by the representatives of different generations: young people under 30 often practice Tatar-Russian bilingualism at home, thus the proportion of young Tatar-speaking people decreases [6, p.12].

Language ethnic identification has a settlement-related aspect: among the residents of the republic, who recognized Tatar as the native language, both capital residents and villagers count for 27,0% each, and 46% - residents of peripheral cities. The phenomenon associated with the modal group of Tatar-speaking Tatars in the peripheral cities of the country is due to a number of

circumstances. Firstly, it is the migration of rural settlements to the peripheral cities; secondly, the historically developed ethnic homogeneity of the provincials: the presence of the "old" cities with a significant share of the Tatar population (Yelabuga, Bugulma); thirdly, the presence of "young" cities that emerged in Soviet times as the all-union construction sites that attracted ethnic Tatars from other countries and regions of the republic. Indicating the Tatar language as native by only a quarter of all republican Tatars from Kazan can be explained by a large ethnic "diversity" of the capital residents: the limited inflow from the villages populated predominantly with Tatars; the increasing number of migrants from the CIS and foreign countries, representatives of Muslim culture other than Tatars; weakening of "cultural inheritance" of the language in Tatar families; ineffective teaching process of the Tatar language in secondary educational institutions; and uselessness of the Tatar language in everyday life, including business sphere. The language identity allows the representatives of one ethnic group to experience a community spirit, a collective unity, emotional intimacy [7, p.158].

Studying the Tatar language in the comprehensive schools of Tatarstan is mandatory. The majority of respondents expressed positive attitude to this fact – 80%, while proportion of women among them is slightly higher than of men (82.0% and 77.5%, respectively), and 5.0% of men and women expressed their negative attitude toward the study of the Tatar language (the rest gave no answer).

The territorial aspect of the analysis of differentiation of the respondents' attitude to the study of the Tatar language at school revealed no significant differences: 79.3% of Kazan citizens and other towns and villages (80%) express their positive attitude. Negative values vary within 4.3-6.0%. The remaining 14.6 - 15.5% of respondents gave no answer to this question. A similar attitude toward the study of the Tatar language at school was expressed by the representatives of all age categories of young people: positive attitude – 78-82%, negative - 4-5%, and the rest found it difficult to give a definite answer. The researchers suggest, in particular, that school graduates often demonstrate an instrumentalist approach to the choice of language of instruction, associating it with the chances to enter the university, the career and success in life, preferring the Russian language [8, p.168].

The analysis of empirical data, showing the effect of education on the attitudes of respondents to the study of the Tatar language at school, indicates a slight divergence of individual evaluations with different levels of education: persons with incomplete higher education expressed positive attitude - 88%, with secondary vocational - 87%, higher education - 84 %, secondary education - 78.5%, and only 3-4% gave negative feedback.

The question related to the citizens' opinions on the necessary level of the Tatar language proficiency of every resident of Tatarstan is of particular interest. A gender-based approach to the analysis of these data shows that there are no significant differences between the views of men and women, their judgments are identical; as well as no statistically significant differences were found.

Table 1

Division of opinions of men and women on the necessary level of the Tatar language proficiency of Tatarstan residents (% of each gender group)

| Each of citizens must: | Men | Women |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. Be fluent in Tatar language | 15,3 | 15.9 |
| 2. Speak fluently | 15.3 | 19.9 |
| 3. Understand Tatar language | 34.0 | 34.5 |
| 4. Knowing the Tatar language is not necessary | 27.6 | 24.8 |
| 5. No answer given | 7.8 | 4.9 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |

However, we can conclude that men are more loyal to the citizens of the country who do not speak Tatar language - 35.4% (the sum of the responses: *knowing the Tatar language is not necessary, and no answer given*), the same proportion among women was 29.7%.

In terms of territorial aspect - city / village, center / periphery - no significant differences were found in respect of the Tatar language proficiency, except for two positions. Here is the resulting division.

Table 2

Opinions of urban and rural residents on the necessary level of the Tatar language proficiency (% of the number of each type of settlement)

| Every citizen of the Republic of Tatarstan must | Kazan | Other cities | Village |
|---|-------|--------------|---------|
| 1. Be fluent in Tatar language | 12.9 | 13.7 | 21.7 |
| 2. Speak fluently | 17.5 | 18.0 | 17.0 |
| 3. Understand Tatar language | 34.5 | 35.7 | 31.5 |
| 4. Knowing the Tatar language is not necessary | 30.9 | 28.0 | 17.8 |
| 5. No answer given | 4.2 | 4.6 | 12.0 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Analysis of this table shows that rural residents are more sensitive to knowledge of the Tatar language by the citizens of the republic: 21.7% of rural residents spoke in favor of the Tatar language fluency by every citizen of the republic, which is 8-9% higher than the number of residents of Kazan and other cities. In addition, the number of villagers is almost three times higher among the respondents who found it difficult to answer this question. The prevailing opinion in all age subgroups, regardless of place of residence, is the need to understand at least the Tatar speech by the citizens of the republic – 31.5% to 35.7%.

Regarding the age aspect of the attitude towards the need to know the Tatar language we can argue that the youth of the republic is quite tolerant in this matter to their fellow citizens. This is evidenced by the following data.

Table 3

Opinions of the youth on the necessary level of the Tatar language proficiency of Tatarstan residents (% of each age group)

| Each of citizens must: | 16-20 | 21-25 | 26-30 | 31-35 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Be fluent in Tatar language | 20.7 | 11.6 | 17.7 | 13.2 |
| 2. Speak fluently | 18.1 | 17.5 | 16.4 | 18.7 |
| 3. Understand Tatar language | 32.2 | 29.9 | 39.3 | 34.5 |
| 4. Knowing Tatar language is not necessary | 25.4 | 35.7 | 18.9 | 25.4 |
| 5. No answer given | 3.6 | 5.3 | 17.7 | 8.2 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

A significant proportion of young people of all age subgroups - from 30% to 40% - considers that understanding the Tatar language is enough for those residing in the republic, 16-19% of young people thinks important for the citizens of the republic to master the spoken language, and only 12-21% of youth calls for Tatar language fluency by every citizen of the republic. The most loyal are those considering the knowledge of the Tatar language by every citizen of the republic to be optional, – 19-36%.

Studying the criteria of ethno-cultural identity, including mass survey of population of RT by the sociologists of Kazan University in 2012, showed that almost half of the respondents of different age (46%) believe that it is possible to be a person of a certain nationality even if not knowing the language of this nationality, and 44% of young people aged 18-24 years share the same opinion [9, p.95]. Nevertheless, the language is an attribute of society, an integral property of its original culture, a sign of the cultural distinctiveness of ethnic communities [10, p.278].

Summary. 1. The limited use of the Tatar language in Tatarstan multiethnic society, which is manifested primarily in the capital of the republic, city of Kazan, indicates an ambiguous vector of its development: there is the preservation of function of the Tatar language as the language of everyday communication of the Tatar people, however, there is a gradual process of turning into a simple symbol of ethno-cultural identity.

2. However, we must note the presence of contradictions between regional and national expectations and global trends. The education concept of the twenty-first century sets the task of creating intercultural environment associated with the study of the world cultures and languages, as the future society appears to be multilingual and multicultural. International languages rather than regional-ethnic languages become especially relevant in the globalizing world.

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