

# Mass Media as a Source for the Study of Language Issues<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The article is devoted to the linguistic situation in the Republic of Tatarstan reflected in mass media. Adoption of the Law “On languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan” in 1992 facilitated the developed of a legal basis for implementing the language policy aimed at parity progress of the state languages. Given the importance of preserving the native language in Tatarstan, the conditions for maintenance and versatile development of the Tatar language are being created. It is well known that mass media, including the regional ones, have been acquiring the role of a public opinion moderator, thus becoming a rich source of empirical material for monitoring various ethno-political processes. It can be relevant to consider the regional mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan in order to find out the attitudes towards the language policy implemented at both regional (Republic) and federal levels. In general, the analysis of the Republic informational space shows that the language policy of the Republic of Tatarstan government, the issues of preservation and development of the Tatar language are still topical. Despite the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adoption of the Law “On state languages of the Republic of Tatarstan”, the coexistence, functioning and development of the two state languages in the Republic is still not represented in mass media as equal; the Russian language continues to prevail in all aspects of “statehood”.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism; Mass Media; State Language; Russian.

## **1. Introduction**

Democratization of the society implies the necessity to study the language issues in the general context of national problems. Due to the adoption of laws on languages in the Russian Republics, the functions of the languages are being discussed not in the scientific sphere only, but also in the media space, as it became necessary to attract the public attention to the language issues.

The laws on languages adopted in the Russian Republics demonstrate the society’s wish to consciously influence the functions of the languages in the sphere

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of organized communication; this testifies to the necessity to plan and implement a well thought-out system of measures to achieve an equal, parity functioning of the languages which had been declared the state ones.

In this regard, Tatarstan is especially interesting as a poly-ethnic republic where the culture of interethnic communication has been being formed for centuries.

Adoption of the Declaration on State Sovereignty in August 1990, the Law “On languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan” in July 1992, state Programs on preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan (1992–2003; 2004–2013; 2014–2020), the draft Conception of the language policy of the Republic of Tatarstan in 1999 – all this testifies to the large-scale language policy implemented at state level, which purposefully influences the linguistic situation in the Republic of Tatarstan (Языковая политика в Республике Татарстан, 2006).

Since the beginning of implementation of the Law “On languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan” and the state Program on preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan, researchers determined the factors positively and negatively influencing the development of the Tatar language as a state one.

The positive factors are:

- the wish of the Tatar-speaking population to broaden the functions of the Tatar language;
- the broadening of the social functions of the Tatar language (publishing textbooks, teaching aids, reference books, encyclopedias, fictions books, etc. in the Tatar language);
- the social perspective for using the Tatar language in various spheres of communication, etc.
- The negative factors are:
- insufficient compliance with the requirements for functioning of the Tatar language in the sphere of state governance, social-political activity, and mass communication;
- poor knowledge and lack of interest towards the Tatar language due to its “lack of social prestige”, i.e., the Russian language is preferred to the native one;
- the wish to expand the Tatar language onto a different language community by declaring it a state one (see (Шарьпова, 2004)).

Thus, the harmonious development of bilingualism in Tatarstan depends on a skillful, balanced policy of the Republic government, aimed both at equal development of the languages and at eliminating the disproportions between the two

state languages – Russian and Tatar. The results of this activity are, as a rule, presented in the regional mass media (Faraji & Poshtdar, 2018)

## 2. Methods

The ethnic images created by mass media are actual subjects of social-political relations with broad opportunities for rational and emotional influence on the attitudes and behavior of the population.

In this regard, it is relevant to consider the regional mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan.

As of 31 July 2016, the Register of mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan comprised 1000 titles. There are 114 (11.5%) printed titles in the Tatar language, of them 80 newspapers and 34 magazines; 15% of the television programs are in the Tatar language, according to Ilshat Aminov, the Tatarstan State Council deputy, Director General of “Novyy Vek” Broadcasting Company. Thus, the majority of informational space in the Republic of Tatarstan is Russian-language. It should be noted, though, that among the population of the Republic of Tatarstan there are 53% Tatars, 40% Russians and 7% ethnic minorities (Гузельбаева, 2013), i.e. the majority of the Republic population are Tatar-speaking (active or passive).

According to the indicators of the results of State Program “Preservation, study and development of the state languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and other languages in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014–2020”, the share of the Tatar-language mass media by the final year (2020) must amount to 25%; this value was to be achieved by 2016. According to our data, the share of Tatar-language mass media is currently 13%. At that, as the periodicals note, the number of newspapers and magazines in the Tatar language steadily decreases: the total circulation of the national press fell from 1.5 mln to 100,000. According to the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskonnadzor), there are Editorial Boards of 963 mass media in the Republic. Among them, 561 printed editions, published in the Tatar, Russian, Udmurt and Chuvash languages, are registered in this region. Besides, there are correspondents’ offices of four federal television channels and regional offices of five information agencies and five federal editions (Маврин, 2018; Simamora et al., 2019).

## 3. Results and Discussion

Informational space of Russia, including the Republic of Tatarstan, being somewhat lagging behind the Western world as to the use of internet-technologies, on the one hand, creates conditions for the printed periodicals to preserve their leading positions, and on the other hand, complicates the access to information. For example, the digital version of newspapers and magazines started functioning comparatively recently (those studied by us – mainly between 2008 and 2011); accordingly, the

digital archive of most Tatarstan periodicals is rather limited and includes mainly the publications since 2007.

Mass media react rather promptly and objectively to the language policy implemented in the Republic. The articles either describe the results of measures within the State Program, or explain a particular measure (as a task of the Program); in other words, the material presented in them is of introductory character.

Actualization of the issue of the Russian language and culture in Tatarstan is, as a rule, associated with important, momentous events and dates (Day of Cyrillic writing, Days of Russian culture in the Republic of Tatarstan, birthday of A. S. Pushkin, etc.). Around these dates, interviews with the Tatarstan government representatives are published, which highlight the importance of mastering and quality teaching of the Russian language, and emphasize the “pro-Russian” policy implemented in the Republic. The achievements of Tatarstan schoolchildren at various competitions related to the Russian language are headlined in the Republic mass media.

In the Tatar-language informational space, for example, the idea is propagated that it is necessary to compile academic reference books of the Tatar language as a means to promote its significance in the Republic of Tatarstan; a number of articles, especially in 2009, were devoted to publishing a new series of textbooks for the Tatar-language schools. It is important to note that compilation and supplementation of the Tatar language dictionaries, elaboration and publication of new generation textbooks and teaching aids were the tasks of the State Program of 2004–2013 (see Clause 14 in Section “Scientific research” and “Academic-educational work”) (Mardanova Gulnaz, 2018).

In the recent years (2015, 2016), the regional mass media headline various master-classes on teaching the Tatar language, model lessons of the Tatar language in the Tatar-language schools (Khanova et al., 2017), etc., carried out within the State Program of 2014–2020. Such publications specially emphasize the opportunity for everybody to learn the Tatar language free of charge.

A characteristic feature of such articles is a rather optimistic view of the current position of the state languages in the Republic; as a rule, they focus on achievements and propagate the idea that the activities implemented for maintenance of the status of the Tatar language are consistent and most successful; at the same time, they emphasize that the legal measures to enhance the level of the Tatar language are applied not at the expense of decreasing the role and status of the Russian language.

The purposefulness of such articles is confirmed by the indicator of the State Program of 2014–2020 – “Number of publications in mass media about the language policy in the Republic of Tatarstan and the course of the Program implementation”;

this indicator must reach 150 publications by 2020 (100 publications in 2012; 120 publications in 2016; 130 publications in 2017).

#### 4. Summary

In the Tatar-language mass media, especially resonant are the events associated with making amendments in a particular law of the Russian Federation which result in reducing the academic hours for studying the native language and literature at schools, budget-funded places at universities at faculties with the Tatar language of teaching, closure of national schools, etc.

One of the most widely discussed issues in the Russian-language mass media of the Republic is the Russian State Exam in the Russian language. Quite often, the articles associate low results of the Russian State Exam in the Russian language with the increased amount of study hours of the Tatar language. However, there are also publications in which this connection is refuted; usually, this is proved by the large number of those who passed the Russian State Exam with maximal score, or by the high average score in the Russian State Exam in Tatarstan (Каримуллина, 2019).

In the Tatar-language mass media, more disputable is the issue of the status of the Tatar language in the educational system of Tatarstan (Firuza, 2016). The issue of the ratio between the Russian and Tatar languages in educational establishments is morbid. Publications reflect the concerns about the reduced number of study hours for the Tatar language as native and non-native, the inefficiency of the used techniques, the lack of quality textbooks, and most important – the lack of motivation for studying the Tatar language (Huijie, 2017). In the Tatar-language information space, the lack of knowledge of the native language and of desire to study it is openly condemned.

For example, it is noted that parents do not want their children to spend their time for studying the Tatar language, considering it to be not demanded, hence unnecessary; this is also confirmed by the fact that the school graduation exams cannot be passed in the Tatar language, etc. consequently, in Kazan, where national schools have the right to decide in which language particular disciplines will be taught, the Russian language is preferred.

Mass media also headlines various meetings (as a result of confrontation) in defense of the Tatar or Russian language.

The printed Tatar-language mass media often negatively characterize the municipal officials who are not able, and sometime, not willing to render a service in the Tatar language. Often the journalists describe such cases as a violation of “Law on the two state languages in the Republic of Tatarstan” (clause 2.8.9 “Organization of information services to the population in the municipal and intercity transport in the two state languages”).

## 5. Conclusions

Currently, the key features of the language sphere in Tatarstan can be described as follows: revival of interest towards the Tatar language and the Tatar culture; broadening of the social functions of the Tatar language in various spheres of communication; revival of the cultural-language traditions of the Tatar people; further development of bilingualism (Albina, 2016).

In general, the comparative analysis of the Republic informational space shows that the language policy of the regional government, the issues of preservation and development of the Tatar language are still topical. The quarter-of-century long reforming of the cultural and language space testifies both to the successes and shifts in achieving the goals, and failures and problems in this sphere. The favorable and negative factors influencing the development of the Tatar language, which had been highlighted at the early stages, are still significant and topical. All this is reflected in the mass media.

The coexistence, functioning and development of the two state languages in the Republic of Tatarstan are ambiguously represented in the regional information space.

The Tatar-language mass media propagate the idea of domination of the Russian language in all aspects of “statehood”. Most of these publications reflect the ideas of the Tatar intelligentsia, and ethnically oriented citizens of the Republic, concerned with the issues of preserving and developing the Tatar language and culture. In the Russian-language media space, the attitude towards the majority of language issues is rather moderate. In the information space, there is no rigorous opposition towards the Republic authorities; in our opinion, the disputable aspects of bilingualism are represented in mass media rather monotonously.

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