



## Bilingualism in Tatarstan: Origins, Current Situation and Perspectives

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### Abstract

The Republic of Tatarstan is one of Russia's regions, situated in its central part. This region is famous for its bilingualism and tolerant language policy. The two main languages of the Republic are equal in importance and rights. In this paper, we decided to study the origins of the bilingualism of the republic, the current language situation in the region, including the state policy and perspectives of both languages. To understand the origins of bilingualism, we studied the history of the region and its relationship with the Russian state. To evaluate the current situation, we studied statistic information from Russian Census 2010 (the newest one), local laws concerning language policy, media sources and relevant researches.

**Keywords:** Linguistics; Language; Words; Bilingualism; Tatar.

### 1. Introduction

Russia has about 160 ethnic groups that speak on about 100 languages. The most widely used languages after Russian are Tatar and Ukrainian.

Though Russian is considered to be the only official language at the national level, at the local level republics and regions are given by the Constitution of the Russian Federation Article 68, §2 the right to establish their own official state languages in addition to Russian: "The Republics shall have the right to establish their own state languages. In the bodies of state authority and local self-government, state institutions of the Republics they shall be used together with the state language of the Russian Federation" (Henderson, 2011; Shashkova, Verlaine, & Kudryashova, 2020). Nowadays, in Russia, there are 35 different languages considered to be official languages in different regions, along with Russian. Tatarstan and the Tatar language are showing how this regional language depends on the political situation, historical period and the feeling of the people themselves (Nadezda Pavlovna, Evgeniya Valerevna, Andrey Georgievich, & Elena Alexandrovna, 2019; Nikolaevna Gilyazeva & Mannurovna Polkina, 2019; R Faezova, M Khabutdinova, R Gaynyllina, & Mashakova, 2019; V Bondarenko & V Nasonkin, 2019a; Valerievna, 2019; Vorobeva, Baksheeva, Imamutdinova, & Plakhova, 2019).

This topic is studied by many scientists in Russia and abroad. Some scholars investigated the language situation in the Russian society at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ageyeva, Vassilyeva, & Galeyeva, 2015). In contrast, the others were concentrating on the comparative analyses of English, Arabic and Tatar corpora (Subich, Mingazova, & Shamsutdinova, 2016). The issue of Russian-Tatar bilingualism is interesting and should definitely be studied more. The results of this research devoted to the study of the situation of co-existence of two languages in one of the regions of Russia can be implemented for the study of similar bilingual examples in other Russian regions and some other countries.



### 1.1. Research objective

The goal is to research the origins of the republic's bilingualism, the current situation of languages in the country, including state policy, and the perspectives of both languages.

## 2. Material and Methods

To study the issue of bilingualism in Tatarstan, several different methods were used. First of all, it was the method of the theoretical study of different sources about the history of the region and the development of Tatar language. Using this method, the authors studied several types of research devoted to the topic. In addition to the researches, to study the current legal status of the two languages (Russian and Tatar), several Federal and local normative legal acts were studied (M Plankina, S Pestova, H Tarasova, & M Yakhina, 2019; M Zhetibay, R Zamaletdinov, F Zamaletdinova, & H Gabdrakhmanova, 2019; Nurutdinovna Karimullina & Grigorevna Gavrilova, 2019a; Ravilevna Abulhanova, Ihsanovna Mingazova, Faridovna Kayumova, & Tarbinovna Ibrayeva, 2019; Sharapova, R Salakhova, & Y Astakhina, 2019a). To show the current situation with bilingualism in the Republic of Tatarstan the results of the Russian Census 2010, the newest one was analyzed.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The Tatar language is the second largest language in Russia according to the number of speakers (approximately 5 million people). It belongs to the Volga-Kipchak subgroup of Kipchak group of the family of Turkic languages (Bermisheva, Tambets, Villems, & Khusnutdinova, 2002; Evseeva et al., 2002; Kiseleva, Robustova, Bessmertny, Zakharova, & Avdeev, 2014; Korytina, Kochetova, Akhmadishina, Viktorova, & Victorova, 2012; Zinchenko, El'chinova, Baryshnikova, Polyakov, & Ginter, 2007).

The Tatar language is not homogeneous. There are three main dialects: western (Mishar), middle (Kazan), and eastern (Siberian) which all have subdivisions. Tatar, like other Turkic languages, is agglutinative.

In 2001 in the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing composed by UNESCO Tatar language was marked as a "Potentially endangered language: decreasing numbers of children learn the language" (Wurm, 2001). In 2011 Tatar language was not included in the Atlas at all (Moseley, 2010). It shows that the position of Tatar language significantly improved. Later in our research, we will see what helped the Tatar language to leave the list of potentially endangered languages.

It is interesting that the Tatar language has a long history of use with different alphabets (Khatipovna Kuzmina, Kamilovna Khadieva, Raisovna Galiullina, & Ramilevna Akhuzhyanova, 2019; M Zhetibay et al., 2019). Before 1928 Tatar language used the Arabic alphabet called Janalif. After 1928 the Latin alphabet was adopted and used till 1939. Since 1939 in all parts of the Soviet Union all local languages started to use the Cyrillic alphabet for writing. It was done to give linguistic minorities the opportunity to write both Russian and their native languages. At the same time in the Soviet Union, there was not such a term as "official language". All languages were considered to be equal.

In 1999 the Republic of Tatarstan passed a law "returning" Latin alphabet. There were several reasons for that (Sinenko & Mayburov, 2017; Sultanova, 2017):

- Latin characters better depict (represent) Tatar sounds;
- all other Turkic languages use the Latin alphabet and its better for Tatars to use Latin to integrate into this Turkic world;
- Latin alphabet is better because it is the alphabet of mass communication technologies;

The first region to introduce the Latin alphabet after the Soviet Union was dissolved was Chechnya, next was Tatarstan and Karelia. Soon after that, Russian media announced the beginning of the "war of the alphabets" between the national regions and federal centre (Kobiakova, Suntsova, Raemguzhina, Tumanova, & Fatkullina, 2015).

But in 2002 Russian State Duma revised the Federal Law "On the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation". Now according to Article 3 § 6 "In the Russian Federation alphabets of the state language of the Russian Federation and state languages of the republics should be based on the graphical base of the Cyrillic. Other graphical

bases of the state language of the Russian Federation and the state languages of the republics can be established by the federal law” (Chernyaeva, 2020; Chevalier, 2005, 2006; V Bondarenko & V Nasonkin, 2019b). Since that time the Tatar language uses Cyrillic.

The development of bilingualism in the Republic of Tatarstan went hand in hand with historical changes. To study the origins of bilingualism, we need to look deep into the history of the region.

The first period Volga Bulgaria (700 c.-1240s). Volga Bulgaria was an independent state in the Volga region. In 922 population of Volga Bulgaria accepted Islam as an official religion. At that period people used old Tatar language. Unfortunately, no written evidence remained. There was found only one written epitaph created between XIII-XIV c. with the use of the Arab alphabet. There is a hypothesis about the coexistence of two Turkic languages at the same time at that period.

During the next period, Bulgaria was a part of the Golden Horde (1240-s-1430). In 1240-s Volga Bulgaria was captured by Mongols and this territory became a part of the Golden Horde. Little is known about the language of Volga Bulgaria at that period. Later in 1430-s, the Khanate of Kazan was formed.

Khanate of Kazan (1430-1552). After the decline of the Golden Horde Khanate of Kazan was formed. The main city and capital were Kazan. From 1430 Khanate of Kazan was a very developed and strong state. During that time, Khanate had a tense relationship with the Russian state called at that time Moskovy. All this resulted in the conquering of the Khanate of Kazan by Russian tsar Ivan IV the Terrible. In Kazan Khanate there were a lot of literate people, educational institutions and national poets. At that time, people used the language that was left from the Bulgar period with the writing system based on Arab graphics.

Khanate of Kazan under Moscovy rule (1552-1708). After the fall of Kazan in 1552, there was mass russification of the population in the region. After 1552 Kazan kingdom was formed. It was the formally independent state (until 1708), being in union with the Russian State. 1552 can be considered the starting point of the development of bilingualism in the region.

Kazan Governorate (1708-1920). From the second half of the XIX century, the modern literature Tatar language began to form on the basis of middle (Kazan) dialect. The main role in this process belongs to Tatar poet and writer Kayum Nasiri. The process was finished by the beginning of the XX century.

In 1897 there was Census in Kazan Governate. According to this census, 38,4 % of the population spoke the Russian language, 31,1% spoke Tatar (Results of the Russian Imperial Census of 1897). There is no evidence about bilingualism of the Governate at that period.

Soviet era. Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) (1920-1990). During the Soviet period, Tatar language switched its alphabet twice: from Arab to Latin and then to Cyrillic. The early policy of equality of all languages on the territory of the USSR was replaced by the Russian as a lingua franca policy (1938).

From 1930-s till 1950-s there was a sharp decline in the number of Tatar language newspapers, cultural institutions, school, etc. Education was required to be conducted only in the Russian language due to the language policy of the USSR.

In 1980-s Tatar language in education began to exist only in rural schools. But Tatar-speaking pupils had problems with higher education. It was offered only in the Russian language.

Modern Tatarstan. In 1990 Tatarstan declared its sovereignty. In 1992 people of Tatarstan voted for the new Constitution. Republic became an independent state on the territory of the Russian Federation. But Russian Constitutional Court declared this referendum unconstitutional. There was a sharp rise in the nationalists’ movement at that period. Special attention was paid to the Tatar language as a part of Tatar national identity.

Since 2000 Tatarstan is a part of Russia again. In 2002 the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan was adopted. According to it, Tatarstan is a subject of the Russian Federation. There was a decrease of nationalists’ movement at that period. But attention to the language and to the language policy in the Republic of Tatarstan preserved.

Tatar is frequently spoken in some other Russian regions with a big Tatar population: the Bashkir Republic and Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast. But it shouldn't be confused with Crimean Tatars' language. These languages are only remotely related.

All over the world, around 7 million people speak Tatar (including 5.3 million people in Russia).

Present-day Tatar language state can be seen from the Russian census 2010 (Official website with the results of the Russian Census 2010). In Russia, there are 5310649 Tatars. In the Republic of Tatarstan, there are 3780436 people, among them 2005937 (53%) Tatars, 1501332 (40%) Russians and (7%) others. Among them, 52 % speak Tatar (92% Tatars and 3.6% Russians), and 97.4% speak Russian (96% Tatars and 99.9% Russians)

The number of bilingual people in the republic can be better seen in Figure 1.

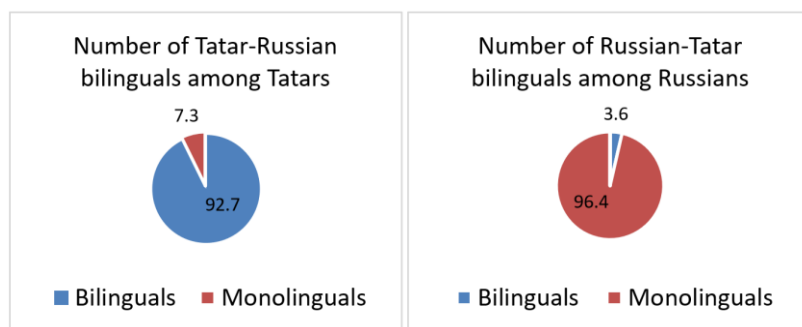


Figure 1. Number of bilinguals among Russians and Tatars

Among Tatars who answered about their ability to speak (2005937) about 92,7% (1860294) people are Tatar-Russian bilinguals (1922683 indicated that they speak Russian, 1860294 indicated that they speak Tatar).

Among Russians who answered about their ability to speak (1501332) about 3,6% (53669) people are Russian-Tatar bilinguals (1500115 indicated that they speak Russian, 53669 indicated that they speak Tatar).

As we can see from the diagram, the majority of Tatars who live in Tatarstan are bilinguals. Among Russians, the number of bilinguals is very low. This phenomenon is especially interesting because it contradicts everything that is done in the Republic for the creation of bilingualism. There can be several explanations of this phenomenon:

- Tatar language is still a “family language”.
- Young people are aimed at getting a higher education. All the Universities in Tatarstan offer education only in the Russian language. It devalues the role and importance of Tatar.
- Position of the Republic in the centre of Russia, the influence of Russian media, culture. There are several media sources in the Tatar language, but they mainly offer news and are oriented on the adult audience.

As for the official status of Tatar language according to the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan that was adopted 6 of November 1992 Article 8 (Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan on the official website of the Republic):

1. The Tatar and Russian languages shall be the state languages in the Republic of Tatarstan.
2. The official languages of the Republic of Tatarstan shall be used on equal terms in all governmental bodies, self-government entities and official institutions.

Another interesting phenomenon studied by local linguists is Tatar-Russian code-switching. As we can see from the Diagram №1, there are much more bilinguals among Tatars [93%] than among Russians [4%]. This creates more opportunities for code-switching among bilingual Tatars. This phenomenon is more common in cities than in small villages because in cities people have to use two languages at the same time more often.

Tatar-Russian code-switching is asymmetrical due to historical events. Up to 1990, the role of the Russian language was dominant. Since 1990 knowledge of Tatar language by the Russian population is increasing. But still, it is in the form of in-class conversation without real-life implementation.

There are several cases of Tatar-Russian code-switching:

1. People, whose first language is Tatar very often begin the sentence in Russian and continue it in Tatar if they feel that everybody will understand them.
2. Interference of Russian grammar into the Tatar language.
3. Interference of Russian vocabulary. Sometimes these words have Tatar equivalents, but speakers continue to use Russian variants due to the shortness of the Russian words or due to some historical traditions (Example: instead of Tatar “because” that is “чөнки”, Tatars use Russian “потому что”).
4. Use of Russian words with Tatar suffixes. (Example: книгалар. The Russian word “book” is connected with a Tatar suffix –лар denoting the plural form).
5. Unique Russian phraseology that has no equivalents in Tatar.
6. Tendency to use Russian terms if they are shorter.
7. Young generation use slang, modern words.
8. New terms and phenomena. They come to the Tatar language through the Russian language.

If we are speaking about Russian speakers living in Tatarstan, they also experience code-switching, but it is not so intense as code-switching of Tatars. Mainly Russians use Tatar vocabulary in several cases:

1. When there is no proper translation in the Russian language for this phenomenon (Tatar “Allabirsa” has the meaning of “let the God help it happen”).
2. When there is a need to add the national “Tatar” colour to the sentence (Tatar “uchpuchmak” instead of Russian “triangular”, which is the name of Tatar traditional food).

A very important issue is the balance of Tatar and Russian in the sphere of education. In Tatarstan, according to the law, Tatar and Russian languages should be used on equal terms.

Among the kindergartens of the Russian Federation according to the Russian federal state statistics service, there were 1544 kindergartens where the education was provided in the Tatar language (in 2011). Now the average kindergarten in the Republic of Tatarstan offers education either in Russian with Tatar as a special subject or in a Tatar group with a large number of Russian lessons.

Equality of languages dictates that at schools there should be an equal amount of Russian and Tatar language lessons a week. From 1995 to 2003 there was a decrease in the number of schools that provide education only in the Tatar language. This coincides with the end of the movement for independence in the Republic of Tatarstan. At the same time, there was an insignificant rise of schools that have the Tatar language as a subject.

But this equality of languages raised questions and even causes anger among parents of the pupils. Since 2009 there is an obligatory United States exam in the Russian language, that every Russian school graduate must pass. Parents think that pupils from Tatarstan are in a worse position than pupils from other regions because there are fewer classes in Russian at school. The Tatar language, on the other hand, is unnecessary at the universities not only in other Russian regions but also in Tatarstan itself.

In 2004 in 22 State universities in the Republic of Tatarstan, there was an education in the Tatar language on some faculties (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002). Education entirely in Tatar was offered only in the faculties of Tatar philology. Nowadays, there is a tendency to the reduction of the number of faculties that offer education in Tatar.

These people who feel endangered by current language policy created a movement “for a full study of the Russian language in Russian-speaking secondary schools” (National language in the schools of the Republic of Tatarstan: for and against, 2015). They asked the president of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minikhanov to change the language policy of the Republic (Pospíšil, 2017; Safina, 2020; Sergeev, 2018).

But there is an opposite movement in Tatarstan. This organization is called the World Forum of Tatar youth. Their idea is to make the Tatar language second official language of Russia. They also collected signatures and send their



proposal to the presidential administration of Russia. But they received no reaction (National language in the schools of the Republic of Tatarstan: for and against, 2015).

In 2017 the first group won, and the Parliament of Tatarstan supported the voluntary study of Tatar at schools. Nowadays school pupils can study Tatar with the written permission of their parents and no more than 2 hours a week.

In 2013 Government of the Republic of Tatarstan approved the state program “Preservation, study and development of the official languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and other languages in the Republic of Tatarstan for 2014 – 2020 years” (Khusnutdinov et al., 2019; Nurutdinovna Karimullina & Grigorevna Gavrilova, 2019b).

The price of the Program is 1084,20mln. Rubles (17.235.712 US dollars). The money is provided by the budget of the Republic of Tatarstan.

According to this program by 2020:

-the proportion of audio and visual information in Tatar and in Russian in the sphere of state management and service will be 50 / 50;

- there will be 25 % of media sources in the Tatar language in the Republic;

- implementation of Russian and Tatar language proficiency tests (people with the certificates will have employment benefit);

- implementation of Tatar language in the sphere of Higher education.

#### 4. Summary

If we are speaking about future of the two languages, it is more important to speak about future of Tatar language, because it has a possibility to become a rare language or disappear, the possibility that cannot happen to the Russian language due to its dominant role.

With the implementation of the law “About languages of the people of RT”, there were identified factors which have a positive and negative influence on the development of Tatar language.

To the positive factors belong (Sharapova, R Salakhova, & Y Astakhina, 2019b):

- desire of Tatar population to broaden the function of Tatar language;

- rich tradition of teaching the Tatar language as well as the use of it as the language of education;

- possibility of making social functions of Tatar language more diverse (literature in Tatar language, textbooks, dictionaries).

- possibility of using it in different spheres of communication that is promoted by its official status of a state language;

Negative factors that influence the language and can lead to the decrease of its role (Sharapova et al., 2019b):

- not enough Tatar language in the sphere of state management, education etc.

- absence of the desire among Tatars to know the native language because of its social insignificance. Many Tatars prefer to speak Russian.

- rise of social tension with the promotion of Tatar language. Many Russians do not support the idea of the official status of the Tatar language.

It is very difficult to speak about the perspectives of Tatar language because they totally depend on the language policy of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Russian Federation. As can be seen from the historical review, the role of the local language can strengthen and weaken due to many factors. But nevertheless, any language is a priceless part of the cultural identity of any nation. That’s why any language should be preserved by the speaking community.

## 5. Conclusions

At the end of our investigation, we can make several conclusions:

1. Language policy heavily depends on the political situation in the region because language is tightly connected with the national identity of people. The rise of separatism leads to the rise of interest to the national language.
2. In bilingual regions, there is always a threat that one language will become dominant, and it will lead to the loss of another language, especially the national one.
3. In a bilingual region there is a tendency to have more bilinguals among indigenous peoples (like Tatars in Tatarstan) than among the dominant population of the country (Russians).

### 5.1. Contribution

Russian Census 2010 (newest) statistical statistics, local laws relating to language regulation, media outlets and related studies are analysed.

### Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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