

PUBLIC OPINION IN TATARSTAN ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENTS AND BILINGUALISM

OPINIÃO PÚBLICA NO TARTARISTÃO SOBRE O DESENVOLVIMENTO DA LINGUAGEM E BILINGUISTO

OPINIÓN PÚBLICA EN TARTARISTÁN SOBRE LA EVOLUCIÓN DEL LENGUAJE Y EL BILINGÜISMO

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ABSTRACT: Based on the materials of a representative sociological survey of 2000 residents of the Republic of Tatarstan, a subunit of the Russian Federation, language attitudes and practices are revealed in a multicultural, predominantly bilingual, territory in conditions of the new stage of the linguistic and ethnocultural policy of the federal center. The data was obtained as part of an international scientific project supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. The Republican policy of reviving the Tatar language (the language of the titular nationality of the region and the national minority of Russia) and promoting parity Tatar-Russian bilingualism is evaluated through the prism of public opinion of the population, including Tatars, Russians and representatives of other ethnic groups. The characteristics of similarities and differences in the positions of representatives of the two main ethnic groups are shown. In contrast to the research based on the data, relating only to the predominantly Russian-speaking city of Kazan with an approximately equal number of Tatars and Russians, the subject of this study includes the attitudes of residents of provincial cities and villages of Tatarstan, along with opinions of Kazan residents. The results obtained complement and clarify expert assessments of the success rate of regional language policy and the potential for ethnocultural conflict in Tatarstan.

KEYWORDS: Language policy. Public opinion. Russian language. Tatar language. Bilingualism. Russia. Tatarstan

RESUMO: *Com base nos materiais de uma pesquisa sociológica representativa de 2.000 residentes da República do Tartaristão, uma subunidade da Federação Russa, as atitudes e práticas linguísticas são reveladas em um território multicultural, predominantemente bilingüe, nas condições da nova fase da linguagem linguística e política etnocultural do centro federal. Os dados foram obtidos no âmbito de um projeto científico internacional apoiado pela Fundação Volkswagen. A política republicana de reviver a língua tártara (a língua da nacionalidade titular da região e da minoria nacional da Rússia) e promover a paridade do bilinguismo tártaro-russo é avaliada pelo prisma da opinião pública da população, incluindo tártaros, russos e representantes de outros grupos étnicos. São apresentadas as características das semelhanças e diferenças nas posições dos representantes dos dois principais grupos étnicos. Em contraste com a pesquisa com base nos dados, relativos apenas à cidade predominantemente de língua russa de Kazan, com um*

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número aproximadamente igual de tártaros e russos, o assunto deste estudo inclui as atitudes dos residentes de cidades e vilarejos provinciais do Tartaristão, ao longo com opiniões de residentes de Kazan. Os resultados obtidos complementam e esclarecem as avaliações de especialistas sobre a taxa de sucesso da política linguística regional e o potencial para conflito etnocultural no Tartaristão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Política linguística. Opinião pública. Língua russa. Língua tártara. Bilinguismo. Rússia. Tartaristão

RESUMEN: Basado en los materiales de una encuesta sociológica representativa de 2000 residentes de la República de Tartaristán, una subunidad de la Federación de Rusia, las actitudes y prácticas lingüísticas se revelan en un territorio multicultural, predominantemente bilingüe, en las condiciones de la nueva etapa de la lingüística y política etnocultural del centro federal. Los datos se obtuvieron como parte de un proyecto científico internacional apoyado por la Fundación Volkswagen. La política republicana de revivir el idioma tártaro (el idioma de la nacionalidad titular de la región y la minoría nacional de Rusia) y promover la paridad del bilingüismo tártaro-ruso se evalúa a través del prisma de la opinión pública de la población, incluidos tártaros, rusos y representantes de otros grupos étnicos. Se muestran las características de similitudes y diferencias en las posiciones de los representantes de los dos principales grupos étnicos. En contraste con la investigación basada en los datos, que se relaciona solo con la ciudad predominantemente de habla rusa de Kazán con un número aproximadamente igual de tártaros y rusos, el tema de este estudio incluye las actitudes de los residentes de ciudades y pueblos provinciales de Tartaristán, junto con con opiniones de los residentes de Kazán. Los resultados obtenidos complementan y aclaran las evaluaciones de los expertos sobre la tasa de éxito de la política lingüística regional y el potencial de conflicto etnocultural en Tartaristán.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Política lingüística. Opinión pública. Lengua rusa. Lengua tártara. Bilingüismo. Rusia. Tartaristán

Introduction

In the post-Soviet era, the content of language processes in Tatarstan, one of the national republics of the Russian Federation, have changed markedly. The growth of national consciousness after the collapse of the USSR was accompanied by demands for greater independence and the revival of minority languages, which were titular nationalities with their own territorial autonomy. These processes were most noticeable in the early 1990s, when the Republic of Tatarstan legalized the policy of revitalization and promotion of the Tatar language along with encouragement of Russian-Tatar bilingualism. Achieving symmetrical bilingualism assumed reversing a “language shift” (SMOKOTIN, 2010), i.e. the transition of minority ethnic groups from their native language to the use of the dominant Russian language with the gradual loss of ethnocultural heritage, that had developed in the Soviet era. The acquisition of equal bilingualism, excluding the language hierarchy,

presupposed a new language shift, strengthening the position of the regional language in the public sphere. It was not occasional that among 126 paragraphs of the State program for the development of the languages of the Republic of Tatarstan (1994) 67 were devoted to the Tatar language, another 26 paragraphs did not directly mention, but assumed the titular language, next 33 related to all the languages of the Republic, but no one specifically was dedicated to the Russian language (GORENBURG, 2005).

The policy of the regional leadership to support the Tatar language as the native language of the most numerous title group in the territory and one of the two state languages of the Republic continued in the 2000s against the background of increasing centripetal trends and the concentration of power by the federal center. Until the mid-2010s, the federal authorities were generally inclined to maintain the status quo in the field of inter-ethnic and language relations. This was greatly facilitated by the federative structure of the country and the legal right of the republics to maintain the titular language (Cashaback, 2008). In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation on the division of subjects of competence, the powers of the authorities of Tatarstan, including on language issues, were not disputed, furthermore, compromise inter-ethnic and inter-religious policies of a peaceful and dynamically developing region have been widely recognized (GRANEY, 2007; DROBIZHEVA & RYZHOVA, 2016).

The second half of the 2010s was a time of new approaches in Russia's domestic and foreign policy. In the summer of 2017 President of the Russian Federation made a significant statement on the language issue. V.Putin strongly condemned the reduction of the amount of classes of Russian language as a nationwide language and forcing students to learn a language that is not their native language (PUTIN, 2017). The subsequent inspections of the Prosecutor's office and supervisory authorities in schools of Tatarstan led to an increase in the amount of Russian language learning, introduction of a new school subject - "Native language" (it is chosen annually on the basis of a written application from a parent) and cancellation of previously mandatory Tatar language lessons.

Methods

The purpose of the article is to reveal a quantitative regularities of the mass consciousness of residents of the Republic of Tatarstan in the perception of trends in the language development of the region in the last 30 years and the current period. In particular, it includes assessing the compliance of the use of the Russian and Tatar languages with their

state status in the Republic, bilingualism and the neighborhood of languages in the territory, former and current trends in a language shift, and desirable images of language development in the future.

The article is based on data from a mass sociological survey of residents of the Republic of Tatarstan aged 18 years and older, conducted by a group of sociologists of the Kazan Federal University (L.R. NIZAMOVA, A.N. NURUTDINOVA, A.M. GARAYEVA) in July 2018 with the support of the Volkswagen Foundation. The sample of a representative formalized survey was 2000 respondents living in urban and rural areas. It represented a micromodel of the Republic's population by key socio-demographic parameters (ethnicity, gender, age, education, territory of residence). Among the respondents, 1057 were ethnic Tatars, 813 were Russians, and 130 were representatives of the other ethnic groups. We used a multistage territorial sample with proportional representation of the number of inhabitants of settlements of different types (the capital of the Republic – Kazan city, peripheral cities and villages of Tatarstan).

Results

The wide prevalence of public bilingualism in Tatarstan is confirmed by the answers to the question about the language(s) spoken by the majority of the population in the place of residence of the respondent: more than half (53%) noted that communication in both Tatar and Russian is most common, while another 24% stated that the majority of people speak Russian, and almost 20% replied that mostly Tatar language is spoken. Other languages and other forms of bilingualism are significantly less common. However, the question about the respondent's communication languages in everyday life, concerning individual bilingualism, indicates the predominant role of the Russian language: almost 56% speak only (or in most cases) in Russian, at least 27% – in both languages, and another 16% – in most cases or exclusively in Tatar. The data draw attention to the discrepancy in the use of Russian and Tatar languages at the level of an individual and a community.

In describing the language changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union in recent decades, the most common point of view was almost 39% of Tatarstani residents who noted that the use of Tatar has expanded (one out of five firmly believe this). At the same time, at least a quarter assume that “nothing has changed”, and a relative minority (at least 17%) see a more or less confident reduction in the use of the Tatar language. Approximately equal shares of Tatars and Russians recognized the expansion of the use of the Tatar language or the

reproduction of the late Soviet language order, but among those who noted a reduction in its use, Tatars predominated. A similar question about the Russian language showed that almost half (48%) of respondents do not see any changes in the practices of its use in the post-Soviet era (among them Tatars and Russians are represented by almost equal shares). Another 29% note an increase in its use, and only 9% of respondents, on the contrary, see a reduction in the use of the Russian language in the post-Soviet period. It is noteworthy that in this case Tatars tend to mention an increase in the use of the Russian language in recent decades, while Russians are more likely to note a slight decrease in its use.

A key trend in the 1990s and 2000s in Tatarstan was to raise the political status of the Tatar language and promote it as one of the two official languages of the Republic. In this regard, a mass survey in 2018 allowed us to find out “whether the current state of the use of the Tatar language in all areas of its functioning corresponds to its status as the “state” in the Republic”. The most common was the recognition that it is used to the extent appropriate to its status (at least 45% of respondents), however, almost a third (32%) objected, believing that the Tatar language is used to a lesser extent than its status requires. Only 9% noted that the titular language exceeds its official status in terms of usage, while another 13% found it difficult to answer the question. These data indicate that there is a potential for conflict between those who are satisfied with the status of the Tatar language and those who believe that it is not fully implemented – is still used to a lesser extent than they would like.

At the same time, a direct question about agreement or disagreement with the statement about the existence of a language-based conflict in Tatarstan showed that the vast majority of respondents (66%) do not see signs of ethnolinguistic cleavage in the region. Moreover, almost 40% hold a confident position on this issue, and the share of Tatars and Russians among those who take an optimistic point of view is approximately equal. It is important that 26% more or less strongly agreed (the sum of the answers “I completely agree” and “I agree rather than disagree”) with the statement about the language-based conflict in Tatarstan, while almost 8% found it difficult to answer this question. Tatars more often than Russians chose a negative opinion with the wording “I agree rather than disagree”.

It is widely recognized that a person’s identity and ethnicity are closely linked to the right to use their language in different spheres of life (FILIPOVIĆ & PÜTZ, 2016). The emergence of language conflict is associated with language as a marker of ethnic identity and difficulties in meeting language needs (CHRÍOST, 2003). In this regard, to measure social well-being, the survey participants were asked to assess, how “the language situation in Tatarstan provides opportunities for the Russian-speaking and Tatar-speaking population to

meet their needs". More than 86% of respondents more or less confidently noted that the opportunities to meet the needs of the Russian-speaking population in the Republic are provided, only 4% did not agree with this. The distribution of answers to the question about the opportunities of the Tatar-speaking population looked different. The view that language situation "more likely to provide" the needs of the population speaking the titular language was prevailing (41%), in addition at least 26% mentioned "complete provision" of needs, - it means that in general, two-thirds of respondents positively assess the opportunities created for Tatars in Tatarstan. In addition, the significant share of the Republic's residents found it difficult to answer this question (almost 15% and Russians prevail among them). Among the 17% who believe that language opportunities for Tatar-speakers are not provided, the share of Tatars is 3 times higher than that of Russians.

Representatives of both ethnic groups in Tatarstan – Tatars and Russians – believe that the model of neighborhood and co-existence of languages, which assumes the equality of Russian and Tatar languages, is the most approved (almost 70%). Another 12 % would prefer Russian to be the only state language in the Republic and the country (only 3% of Republic's population expect Tatar to acquire a similar status in Tatarstan). Next 12 % believe that "in the subjects of Russia as a multi-ethnic state with many languages, none of them should claim a special status".

Discussion

The language policy of the Republic of Tatarstan constantly attracts the attention of experts, but it is evaluated differently in various segments of public discourse. Polar judgments range from recognizing Tatarstan as a positive model of "peaceful cultural pluralism in Russia" (GRANEY, 2007) to sharply condemning it for nationalism, language discrimination, and even separatism (<https://yandex.ru>). In the first case, the non-confrontational and compromise-oriented strategy of the Tatarstan authorities is emphasized. Comparative regional study do not confirm and confidently refute accusations of discrimination based on the ethno-linguistic principle. For example, in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan the level of xenophobia in the labor market is lower than in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Scholars made a special note of the fact that ethnic groups in the above mentioned republics "do not consider each other a potential threat", and ethnic Russians do not perceive Kazan and Ufa "as an autochthonous Russian territory" (SHIRSHOVA, 2018).

In certain cases, the policy of revitalizing the Tatar language with simultaneous support for public bilingualism is considered unsuccessful and even unacceptable. In the context of Western discourse, D. Gorenburg concludes that the program of the Republican authorities had moderate achievements in expanding the use of the Tatar language in the public sphere, but it was unsuccessful in changing the general downward trend in learning and practicing the native language by Tatars in the region. Besides, the statement made in 2005: «Increasing knowledge of Tatar among the republic's Russian population was a secondary goal that did not receive nearly as much attention» (GORENBURG, 2005) – it is no longer applicable to the language policy of the 2010s. In the last decade it had been focused on the mandatory study of the two official languages of the Republic with parity of the amount of teaching hours in Russian-language schools that covered the majority of pupils.

The inspiring results of language reforms in some of regions in Europe are associated with the activity of cultural production leaders capable to raise the status of a minority language (GORENBURG, 2005). However, as the events in Tatarstan in the summer and autumn of 2017 have shown, it is precisely similar activity and systematic actions of the Republic's leadership in the field of education and culture, as well as orientation for the language inclusion of Russian-speaking citizens, that caused the negative reaction of the federal authorities and the subsequent cancellation of the compulsory study of the Tatar language by schoolchildren in the region. Such obstacles on the way to the revival of the titular language as the belonging of two Republican languages to different language groups and, accordingly, the complexity of learning the Tatar language for the Russian population, as well as its insufficient motivation, are mentioned by scientists, but are not sufficiently considered as the reasons influencing language reforms. In addition, the language attitudes and social expectations of residents of a multicultural Republic – representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, living next to each other, – are not always taken into account. Achieving an optimal balance of interests of different segments of the regional community and defining the ratio of what is desired and what is possible in practice involves analyzing the results of the public opinion monitoring.

Conclusions

In the last 30 years, Russia has not experienced a fundamental change in the language trend of the XX century, which has ensured the predominance of the Russian language and the narrowing of the scope and activity of the use of languages of national and ethnic

minorities. Preserving the Tatar language and ensuring equitable public bilingualism, as well as active individual bilingualism, remains an important goal and component of the Republican agenda. However, the degree of success of the language policy in Tatarstan should be assessed in close connection with the national and language policy of the federal center, as well as in comparison with the language processes in other regions and national republics of the country. Against the background of other “national” territories and taking into account the public opinion of Tatarstan residents, the language policy cannot be called unsuccessful; on the contrary, the Republic of Tatarstan sets the upper level of possible claims for other Russian regions.

Research data shows that the majority of Tatarstan residents deny the existence of a language conflict, and consider the current use of the Tatar language as corresponding to the status of “state language” in the Republic. The use of the Tatar language has expanded in recent decades, and this contributes to meeting the language needs of Tatars. The future of the region is associated with bilingualism, not language assimilation. A full picture of the opinions and attitudes of the language communities and ethnic groups in the region, revealing both similarities and differences of opinion on significant issues of language development, helps to determine practical goals in the name of implementing the key social values.

Difficult search for a compromise and balance of diverging interests in Tatarstan in the current political conditions has led to the fact that the way to consent implies the mandatory study of the subject “Russian language and literature” (the state language of the Russian Federation), compulsory study of the subject “Native language and literature” from among the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, including Russian as a native language (by voluntary choice of language), and compulsory study of the subject “State language of the Republic” (particular state language of the national Republic should be chosen voluntarily, if there are more than one of them). “In total, native languages and literature, as well as the state languages of the republics, will be studied less than Russian language and literature” (<https://kazanfirst.ru>). Accordingly, the Republican policy of the language parity has been adjusted by the federal authorities in the interests of sustainable preservation of the language trend of the past century.

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