

LANGUAGE POLICY IN MODERN RUSSIA: LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND THE LINGUISTIC UNITY

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Abstract

The article gives an overview of the language policy that is currently enforced in the Russian Federation. The authors consider and evaluate the laws on languages and other legislative acts affecting the status of languages in the republics of Russian Federation where they are state languages, as well as other languages that do not have such a high status.

The article reviews the works of the Research Center on Ethnic and Language Relations at the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The area of study focuses on the scientific analysis of language situations which led to the development of a typology of language policy in the considered republics within a given time period.

There have been identified five models of language policy. The selected models take into account the existence of functional dominants in the territorial-state entities (republics). These dominants in combination with non-dominant languages, that are spoken by other linguistic communities, constitute the core, the basis of the language situation – its socio-communicative system. Therefore, the demographic power of each component of the socio-communicative system can be determined.

The article proves that the language diversity and the linguistic unity, which are achieved through the wide functioning of the language of unity (the Russian language), are two aspects of life of the peoples living in the Russian Federation.

The subject of the study was a three-component (trilingual) model of language policy that is characterized by the parallel functioning of three languages: the national Russian language and two variants of one literary language or two literary languages which received the status of the state languages of the republic (Mari El, Mordovia, Kabardino-Balkaria). With that in mind, there are analyzed the sociolinguistic factors that prevented the unification of these forms of language existence into a single literary language, and the presence or absence of tendencies towards their unification.

The analysis made it possible to draw conclusions about the reasons for the lack of noticeable changes in the functional load of national languages in various areas of communication especially in the most important one, the area of education. That gave an opportunity to outline the prospects for further progress in the implementation of different models of language policy.

Keywords: language policy, functionally dominant languages, socio-communicative system, Mari languages (Meadow dialect and Mountain (Hill) dialect), Mordovian (Moksha and Erzya) languages.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Russian Federation is a polyethnic state with 130-135 peoples, according to different estimates, 84 of which are indigenous, as their speakers live in their ancestral territories, and have no historical homeland or state education at the level of a subject of international law. It should be considered that all the other nations are national minorities, as the states that are their historic homeland may guarantee their rights. The examples are numerous, to name just a few: the Germans, Koreans, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Latvians, etc.

The Research Center on Ethnic and Language Relations developed the systemic attitude to the languages of Russia, which takes into account 3 major groups of languages: the majoritarian languages of the peoples of Russia, the minority languages of the peoples of Russia and the languages of national minorities (diasporas). The majoritarian language is the one of a numerically dominant ethnic group, which most often has the status of an official language of the state, region or territorial-administrative entity within a federative state. The minority language typically performs significantly fewer social functions than the majoritarian language, and does not function in the most prestigious spheres of communication (public administration, international activity, science, higher education, etc.).

2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CURRENT SITUATION

During the perestroika period, a course was taken towards the legal regulation of the language life of the country, therefore, each of the language group has its own laws:

- A whole system of republican laws on languages was adopted for the languages of the majority indigenous peoples,
- The law on minority indigenous peoples was introduced for the minority languages of Russia, and the language life of Diasporas is governed by the law on cultural autonomy.

The system of laws on languages establishes the rules for the functioning of languages in the main territories inhabited by speakers of a given language. All laws in the aggregate serve the rational structure of the language life of the Russian Federation, consisting of 22 national-state formations – republics, as well as other subjects of the Federation – territories, regions, autonomous districts, cities. In a polyethnic state, the rights of ethnic groups are respected with an aim to the development of their cultures and languages in accordance with social needs, which ensures the preservation of linguistic diversity in the country.

3 METHODOLOGY

The linguistic unity of the country is achieved by the means of wide functioning of the unity language – the Russian language as the national language of the Russian Federation. Linguistic diversity and linguistic unity are the two aspects of the life of the peoples of the Russian Federation. This approach allows to take into account the specifics of linguistic situations in different regions of the country and to build models of language policy that do not contradict the basic sociolinguistic pattern, i.e. the correspondence of the language policy to a particular language situation in order to satisfy the linguistic preferences of peoples. Moreover, it can help avoid language conflicts, i.e. clashes between communities of people, which are based on various problems related to language.

There are 5 such models in polyethnic Russia. In their principles they represent the linguistic situation in different regions of the country (see also table 1):

1. **One-component model of language policy:** it is a language policy with different forms of the existence of the Russian language.
2. **Two-component model of language policy:** it is a language policy with two dominants (Russian language + republican state language).
3. **Three-component model of language policy:** it is a language policy with three dominants (Russian + two republican state languages or two versions of the state language).
4. **Multicomponent language policy model:** language policy with 4, 5 or more dominants (for example, Russian + Dagestan languages).
5. **Differential model of language policy:** language policy in the field of functioning of minority languages.

The use of regional state languages is limited in comparison with the federal state Russian language. For

example, some state languages are practically not used in the fields of science or of higher education; others have restricted use in the humanitarian fields of knowledge, etc. Within the same model, regional state languages can be implemented differently due to the existence of the different numbers of spheres of communication and with varying degrees of intensity. For example, the number of speakers and intensity of use of the functionally developed Tatar language will significantly exceed the level of functioning of the Karelian or Komi languages.

Functional dominants are considered to be part of the core, the fundamentals of the linguistic situation, its social-communicative system (SCS). Socio-communicative system is perceived as the totality of linguistic systems and subsystems used by one or another linguistic / speech community; there can also be different languages and forms of their existence in conditions of bilingualism and multilingualism, different forms of language existence in conditions of monolingualism. This system is closely connected with the public functions of the language, i.e. the functioning of the language in various spheres of communication, corresponding to the spheres of human activity, for example, in the sphere of science, mass communication of production, transport, legal proceedings, etc.

Table 1. Regional models of language policy in the Russian Federation

Models of language policy	Subject of the Russian Federation	Dominant components of a socio-communicative system
One-component model (monolingual)	Regions of the Russian Federation	Russian language, all forms of its existence [literary language, dialects, vernacular, etc.].
Two-component model (bilingual)	Republic of the Russian Federation: Altai, Adygea, Buryatia, Bashkortostan, Kalmykia, Karelia; Komi, Ingushetia. North Ossetia. Tatarstan. Udmurtia, Khakassia, Chechnya, Chuvashia, Tuva, Sakha-Yakutia.	Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation and the republican state language.
Three-component model (trilingual)	Mordovia, Mari El, Kabardino-Balkaria, Republic of Crimea	Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation and 2 varieties of one literary language or 2 literary languages that received the status of the official languages of the Republics.
Multicomponent model (multilingual)	Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia	Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation and other written languages that have the status of the state languages of the Republics.
Differential model (extraterritorial model)	Different subjects of the Russian Federation	Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation, languages of small peoples in co-operation with the languages of neighboring large nations.

The selected models of language policy take into account the presence of functional dominants in the republics, which, in combination with non-dominant languages, spoken by the other language communities, constitute the core, the basis of the language situation, its social-communicative system (SCS). Such a classification corresponds to the modern language policy in the Russian Federation and notes ways for the further expanding of the social functions of status languages, although this requires the unidirectional positive impact of many factors (economic well-being, ethnic self-awareness, value orientations of native speakers, etc.).

4 SUBJECT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

One of the objectives of the study is the need to show the features of these models of language policy, ways of co-functioning of different languages in one socio-communicative system, their functional distribution, development trends, i.e. language shift, i.e. the process and result of the loss of the ethnic language by the ethnos, or positive development, as well as foresee the perspective of their further development.

It should be noted that in this respect the three-component (trilingual) model received the status of the state language. In this model the national language, Russian, functions parallel with two the variants of one literary language or two literary languages, e.g. in Mari El Republic, Mordovia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Republic of Crimea. The subject of the research is the language situation of the Mari El Republic and Mordovia.

Here, comparing the components of the SCS of the two republics, the following problems should be clarified, which in turn are also the objectives of the study:

- Why were there formed two versions of the literary language or two literary languages? Are there any tendencies to unite these forms of language existence into one language?
- Another important question is how these SCS components function? In which areas are they applied?

5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Mari El Republic. Mari residents, living within the Republic of Mari El are divided into Meadow and Mountain Mari. Linguists believe that these ethnographic groups were formed in the XIV century. The Meadow group occupies the territory of the Vetluzhsko-Vyatka interfluvial area, numerically they prevail. Mountain Mari settled on the right bank of the Volga, as well as on the left bank in the Kilemara region, adjacent to the Gorno-Mari district. The centre of the Mountain-Mari district is the city of Kozmodemyansk.

The literary norm of the Meadow Mari language is based on the Morki-Sernur dialect, the Mountain Mari language is based on the dialect of the population living around the city of Kozmodemyansk. The writing of both languages is based on Cyrillic alphabet, the only difference is in the number of letters (Mountain variety – 37 letters, Meadow – 36). The difference lies in the number of Meadow Mari (approximately 2/3 of all Mari people of the republic) and this explains the fact that Meadow Mari variety is more widespread and functions in a bigger number of spheres.

The lack of a single literary language prevented the expansion of areas that it could serve. Discussion of this issue began in the time of language construction in around 1925. That was the period when a set of government measures was aimed at a positive change in the functional status of the languages in it: there were introduced: the creation of writing, the application of languages in the education system, mass communication, and so on. The process continued intermittently for many years until the adoption of the law "On languages in the Republic of Mari El" in 1995, which ruled that the state languages of the republic are Mari language (Mountain and Meadow varieties) and Russian. Thus, the existence of the Mari language in its two literary forms is legally fixed. Studies by Mari scholars proved that there are many more grammatical phenomena between Mountain and Meadow varieties than differences, in their general grammar, the main part of the lexical composition, differences can be found only in phonetics. According to Mari scientist I. Ivanov, it is all referred just to a psychological barrier. Mountain Mari believe that when two varieties get combined into one language, they will lose their ethnic identity and distinctive character.

When comparing the functional power of the Mountain and Meadow varieties, we note that the Meadow variety is used in a bigger number of spheres, since its speakers numerically dominate. Both languages function in the education system, the media, folk culture, fiction, interpersonal communication, commerce. Most often they co-function in these areas along with the Russian language. In the field of education, the Meadow Mari language is studied in only 2 rural primary schools. In all other educational institutions, the language is studied as a subject from 2 to 4 hours per week.

The law on languages does not specify where and when to use Mountain or Meadow varieties. Therefore, the main criterion for using a language is still the place of residence of its speakers, i.e. the Mountain Mari study the Mountain variety, and the Meadow Mari – the Meadow variety. Russian is used for communication within the community and with the representatives of other ethnic groups, especially since according to the 2010 census, most people have good command of it, e.g. 98.2% of Mari people, 97.9% of Tatars, 99.8% of Chuvashes in the Republic of Mari El, while Mari language is spoken by 75.6% of Mari, 3.49% of Tatars and 4,515 Chuvash people speak Mountain and Meadow varieties. The Russians remain monolingual and only 1.46% of Russians speak the Mari language.

The Republic of Mordovia. There are two main ethnic groups - Moksha and Erzya, who speak close but different varieties. In the ancient Russian sources, the ethnonym 'Mordvah' was first mentioned in the 11th century. But the ethnonyms Erzya and Moksha appeared much later, because Russians perceived them as one ethnos. Moksha Mordva speakers reside mainly in the western and southern regions of the republic (in the valley of the Moksha River), Mordva Erzya live in the eastern and northeast (in the valley of the Sura River).

Each Mordovian sub-ethnic group has their own variety: Mokshan – Moksha variety, Erzyans – Erzya variety, both of them belong to the Finno-Volga group of the Ural family of languages and have the status of literary languages. The existence of the once unified Mordovian proto-language, which existed only in the middle of the 1st millennium BC, is considered to be recognized. Later it split into Moksha and Erzya varieties. Linguists note that borrowings from Russian prevail in the Erzya language, whereas Moksha variety shows the borrowings from Turkic languages (Tatar and Chuvash). The alphabets of both languages are based on Cyrillic and fully coincide with the Russian alphabet.

The number of speakers of Moksha and Erzya varieties is currently unknown, as in the censuses of the population they are united into a single group – the Mordvinians. According to some unofficial data for 2000, the number of Moksha people was 296.9 thousand, the number of Erzyans - 517.5 thousand people. It is not possible to determine the functional capacity of each language, since in official sources the Mordovian language appears as one.

The law “On state languages in the Republic of Mordovia”, which was adopted in May 1998, Russian and Mordovian languages (Moksha and Erzya) were declared the state languages. Despite the proclamation of the Mordovian languages as state languages, the law allows them to be used ‘if necessary’ in some areas, for example, article 11 of the third section states: “in Russian and, if necessary, also in Mordovian (Moksha or Erzya) languages”. The same wording can be found in Article 17 of the fourth section, which deals with the clerical work and correspondence in institutions and organizations, and Article 20 of the same section, which deals with labels, standards and nomenclature lists of goods produced in Mordovia. Thus, instead of legislatively defining the spheres for using Mordovian languages, the clause is states “if necessary”, which makes the law optional for implementation.

The dominant areas of communication in which national languages operate are usually referred to as education, media, and folk art. There is one school in the Mordovian Erzya language in the city, in the countryside there are 29 schools in the Erzya variety and 42 schools in the Moksha variety. In other educational institutions languages are studied as subjects. In all areas where Mordovian languages are used, they co-function with the Russian language. According to the 2010 census, 99.5% of the Mordovian population speaks Russian, 57.4% speak Mordovian.

6 CONCLUSION

The study led to the following conclusions:

- There are currently no tendencies to unite the two languages into a single literary language in the Republics of Mari El or in Mordovia;
- Language policy should be aimed, first and foremost, at the functioning of languages in school education, i.e. to preserve and maintain the existing language. Moreover, it is necessary to gradually transform the study of school subjects into the teaching in native languages;
- It is vitally important to develop programs in order to improve the prestige of native languages among local population.

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