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**NEW CONTOURS OF ETHNIC LANGUAGES POLICY IN THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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***Abstract***

The paper is dedicated to the sociolinguistic problem of language policy. This problem is considered in the context of measures undertaken by the authorities of the Russian Federation during the recent years in order to preserve and develop languages of the multi-ethnic Russia. Ethnic language policy in our country, formerly in the USSR and now in the Russian Federation has been a subject of research in a number of works. Studies of the Soviet period contained only positive characteristics of the problem. A number of works written in the post-Soviet period contain objective characteristics of language policy throughout the Soviet period with breakdown for periods, results and different constituent republics. Naturally, the language policy was not isolated from other aspects of nationalities policy of the state – workforce, educational, regional, etc. The main decisions on ethnic language question were only accompanying larger-scale provisions, decisions and goals of the national authorities in construction of Communism. The most tragic consequences of the policy were named “excesses”. There were such “excesses” in language aspects of the policy as well. However, it should be noted that during the Soviet period there were also great achievement in this (language development) direction, which become obvious when considering the language policy differentially for periods and results.

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## 1. Introduction

The problems of linguistic situation and language policy are current issues in the sociolinguistics. It is necessary to identify such issues within the framework of language policy as legal status of languages, their actual status and functions of different languages. State language policy in a multi-ethnic country is linked to a number of other aspects of nationalities policy: educational, workforce, etc. Resolving these questions at a national level determines the inter-ethnic climate in the country and in the end even its fate. The scale of the problem is evident from the fact that in the modern Russia there are currently living representatives of 193 ethnicities speaking 277 languages and dialects.

Material for the research was formed by the above-noted documents: List of Commissions of the President of the Russian Federation, dated July 4, 2015; Recommendations from Parliamentary hearings on the topic of “Linguistic variety in the Russian Federation: Current state and prospects”, dated October, 29, 2018, as well as studies and publications dedicated to the problems of language policy.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the fact that the problem of language policy at its current state in the Russian Federation is understudied.

Theoretical significance of the problem is in presentation of active steps that the country's authorities have recently made in resolving the issues in improvement of the language policy, similar to the period of language building of 1920-1930s, significant for strengthening the state, as well as for sociolinguistic theory as a science.

The practical significance of the research is in possible application of its materials in practical implementation of the language policy in various federal subjects of the Russian Federation, as well as in the practice of teaching sociolinguistics in tertiary schools.

## 2. Problem Statement

Specialist literature includes a periodization of language policy in the country, which by its goals and results may be divided into the following stages:

1. 1917 – 1925
2. 1925 – 1937–38.
3. 1939 – 1956.
4. 1956 – 1991.
5. 1991 – present. (Modern Ideological Fights and Problems of Language, 1984; Ovkhadov, 2000; Ovkhadov, Iakhiaeva, & Shamileva, 2016).

The period of language development in 1925-1938 stands out. The sheer scope of measures undertaken to resolve ethnic-language issues of the illiterate country is impressive even today: 50 languages of USSR nationalities had got writing, the abolition of illiteracy was well underway; the problem of ethnic workforce training was being solved. With respect to the linguistic situation in the country as a whole as well as in the territory of the Chechen Republic, this period has been sufficiently detailed in several works (Alpatov, 2000; Ovkhadov, 2000; Ovkhadov et al., 2016 and others). When characterizing the 1925 – 1938 period, the authors here are speaking only about linguistic aspects. Stages of language building related to activities of the All-Union Central Committee of Ethnic Alphabets and latinization ended with switching

recently latinized languages to Russian Cyrillic graphics in 1938. During the later years, no similarly ambitious goals had been set in this field, and starting from 1956, ideological foundation was made to reduce the functions of ethnic languages of various autonomous territories (Alpatov, 2000; Ovkhadov, 2000).

This process continued until the dissolution of the USSR. Its systematic implementation is evident from analyzing the print runs of literature printed in ethnic languages of autonomous territories, which gradually decreased severalfold. For example, printing of literature in Chechen and Ingush languages had been reduced by a factor of 4 from 1940 to 1980: in 1940 there were 154 titles printed, in 1960 – 96, in 1970 – 49, in 1980 r. – 37 (National Economy of the USSR through 70 Years, 1987; Ovkhadov, 2000; Ovkhadov et al., 2016).

«Dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century induced revision of a number of fundamental provisions of social linguistics that touch upon legal and actual status of languages, functions of languages, linguistic situation and language policy, inter-linguistic interactions. At that, non-declared, hidden policy is of no less importance than the declarative part (Ovkhadov et al., 2016).

The last decade of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st century in the post-Soviet Russian Federation were characterized with adopting laws on official status of ethnic languages of various peoples of Russia on par with the Russian language in their respective ethnic republics. However, it is impossible to speak of actual official status of languages other than Russian in the federal subjects, as complete equality with the Russian language is impossible due to objective causes. The status of official with respect to languages of Russia other than Russian is more of some kind of protection against their vanishing in the context of globalization. This is evident from item 3 of Article 68 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation: “The Russian Federation shall guarantee all of its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development”. On their understanding of the situation, the concern was felt primarily by the federal subjects themselves, which is evident in the example of the Chechen Republic.

For example, a number of positive measures with respect to the Chechen language on behalf of the republican authorities may be named, including:

1. Constitutional fixation of its status as an official language, on par with Russian;
2. Development of the Concept for State Ethnic Policy in the Chechen Republic;
3. Adoption of the Law On Languages in the Chechen Republic;
4. Establishing a Chechen Language Day;
5. Development of a Program for Preservation of the Chechen Language.

Other measures were also taken to strengthen the actual status of the Chechen language, including some work on its orthography, preparation of *Grammar of Chechen Language in 3 volumes*, school textbooks, development of an Internet program in Chechen language, etc.

Up until the mid-2010s, there have been no serious steps to protect ethnic languages on behalf of the federal center. However, actions undertaken during several last years, after 2015, are impressive in both their scope and expected positive results. The authors hold an opinion that the country's language policy did not experience such large-scale activities since the language development period in 1925-1938.

The first document aimed in this direction is the List of Commissions of the President of the Russian Federation following the results of a joint meeting of the Presidential Council for Inter-ethnic Relations and the Presidential Council for Russian Language on 19 May 2015 (Pr-1310, dated July 4, 2015) (Ovkhadov et al., 2016). The article of the Constitution of the Russian Federation that regulates the field of ethnic languages of the country has acquired specific, real and operative framework after adoption of this document. The scope of question in the document is current and constructive not only in the context of language policy, but also in the context of nationalities policy as a whole (Ovkhadov et al., 2016).

List of Commissions of the President of the Russian Federation no. Pr-1310, dated July 4, 2015 is also a specific program for their implementation that involves the highest-level state officials, including the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation, specific ministers, heads of federal subjects.

The content of the List of Commissions of the President of the Russian Federation touches upon many spheres of language use: printed and electronic media;

publishing and translation of imaginative literature into Russian language;

training of translators and interpreters;

Preparation and publishing of course books, methodological and scientific literature in the languages of peoples of Russia;

inclusion of textbooks on languages and literature of peoples of Russia into the Federal List of textbooks recommended for use during implementation of state-certified programs of primary, general and secondary education;

training, retraining and further professional development of teachers of ethnic languages and literatures of peoples of Russia.

The document covers essential spheres of functioning of the languages of various ethnicities of Russia, providing their preservation, learning, study and development, including the media sphere and specifically printed media (newspapers and magazines), TV, the Internet, etc. In preservation and development of a language, written standard language of newspapers and magazines is a reference of speakers. Factor of media specifics primarily that of printed media, is an effective means of development of literary and journalistic style, development and codification of language, terminology formation.

Another objective set in the List of Commissions of the President of Russia is taking additional measures to support translation of literary works from the languages of various ethnicities of Russia into Russian. The translations facilitate interactions between the cultures of the country, strengthening of their unity, mutual enrichment of languages.

An important part of the List of Commission of the President of Russia is publishing of course and scientific literature in the languages of ethnicities of Russia. This measure facilitated removal of stagnant phenomena in courseware that had previously negatively impacted language teaching and learning. For example, inclusion of school textbooks for Chechen language into the federal list as per Federal Educational Standards facilitated removal of multiple discrepancies in textbooks of Chechen language for 5-9th grades by various authors. Despite the fact that during the Soviet times these textbooks were reprinted multiple times, they had significant differences, primarily of theoretical nature. The main cause of such differences was insufficient theoretical knowledge of the Chechen language that was significantly influenced by social-

political factors, including deportation of 1944-1957 and complete removal of the Chechen language from all the spheres where its written form had been previously employed.

A consequence of this factor is a significantly lower rate of linguists among the Chechen people: A proportion of ethnically Chechen scientists throughout the Soviet period and even on the eve of dissolution of the USSR was on average 5 times lower than for other ethnicities with their own autonomous territories (Ovkhadov, 2000). In practice, Chechen linguistics started to form only in 1960s, thus the quality of the textbooks was not always in congruence with scientific theory.

Due to these causes, the same aspects received different interpretation in different grades. For example, in Chechen textbooks for 5-8th grades there were 2 main sentence parts, while in the textbooks for the 8-9th grades there were 3. There were also deviations from general and particular theory of the Chechen language (for example, in the Phonetics, Word Formation, Phraseology, Morphology sections), which could be found in Explanatory notes to the textbooks (Explanatory note to textbooks in the subject area of Philology of Chechen Language, 2017, pp. 56-64). New requirements to school textbooks facilitated rectification of the above-mentioned discrepancies in Chechen textbooks for 5-7 forms printed in 2017.

The measures provided by the List of Commissions of the President of Russia strengthen the actual status of languages, fill their functions with real scope, however there are not provisions for quantitative increase of functions of the official languages of federal subjects.

Quite unexpected was a proposal from a group of deputies of the State Duma of Russia (April 2018) that was found in a bill no. 438 863 – 7 “On introducing changes into the Federal Law On Education in the Russian Federation (in the part considering studying a native language among the languages of peoples of the Russian Federation and official languages of republics within the Russian Federation)”.

The bill has demonstrated that there is still willingness to use the Soviet experience to formalize unpopular decisions in the area of language policy as being made ‘at request of parents’. Its consequence was gradual reduction in the functional volume of the languages of autonomous territories down to decorative ones.

The authors of the bill did not take into account the negative experience of the Soviet language policy and its consequences for the country.

A well-known Russian scientist Neroznak (2002) notes:

*In the area of language policy it (a policy for merging ethnicities – M.O.) has manifested as depreciation of level and quality of functioning of each language of the Soviet peoples in comparison to the Russian language. It leads to such a negative phenomenon as ethnic-cultural nihilism in relation to one's ethnic culture and native language. In the modern sociolinguistic literature such or similar policy is defined as linguistic imperialism and its consistent implementation is characterized as linguistic genocide or linguicide. (p.11)*

Chelyshev (2003), a member of the Academy of Sciences also wrote that ethnic-language relations resulted in various conflicts whose consequences had negative influence over all aspects of life of the Russian society.

Against the background of this bill, very positive impression in both content and general idea is induced by the Recommendations from Parliamentary hearings on the topic of “Linguistic variety in the Russian Federation: Current state and prospects” dated October 29, 2018, Moscow.

The importance of this document for strengthening inter-ethnic agreement and integrity of the State is comparable to that of the List of Commissions of the President of Russia PR – 1310, dated 04.07.2015.

The narrative recitals demonstrate an in-depth study of the question of linguistic situation and language policy in the country and understanding its importance for the Russian Federation.

The in-depth nature of the study is evident from account of and giving due credit to the great success that the USSR had in language development during 1920-1930s (Desheriev, 1976).

Analyzing the current state of the language question in the Russian Federation, “the participants of the Parliamentary hearings express their disquiet with the state of workforce, scientific, courseware provision of studying native languages among the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation. Currently, the federal list of textbooks includes 103 in 7 natural languages (Tatar, Bashkir, Altai, Khakass, Yakut, Chechen and Greek...).

The participants of the hearings planned a number of measures aimed at solving the pressing issues in the linguistic life of the country, in correspondence with the content of the List of Commissions of the President.

There is also a recommendation for holding annual All-Russia Olympics in official languages of the Russian Federation with corresponding incentives for prospective students (Isaev, 1979).

The spirit of the parliamentary hearings of October 29, 2018, their positive attitude and commitment to resolving the pressing issues in the ethnic and language policy, deep comprehension of their importance are found in the following words of the Recommendations:

“... deep knowledge of a native language, interest to its study in the modern context are impossible without expanding possibilities for functioning of natural languages at the federal and regional level, creation of relevant information space, without support for and development of printed and electronic mass media, courseware, literary works in the native languages of the peoples of Russia, support of ethnic theaters and creative teams operating in the natural languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation”.

The parliamentary hearings on the topic of “Linguistic variety in the Russian Federation: Current state and prospects” on October 29, 2018 in Moscow resulted in corresponding Recommendations.

Sociolinguistic analysis of the Recommendations allows drawing the following conclusions:

The Recommendations:

- touch upon all the main spheres of use of languages of the peoples of Russia;
- are addressed to all state and public organizations involved in the fate of the natural languages of the Russian Federation;
- are aimed at increasing the volume of regulated functions of the languages;
- are aimed at studying and development of the languages of the peoples of Russia;
- facilitate exposure to the natural languages and their acquisition starting from pre-school years;
- facilitate creating conditions for learning, teaching, studying of the ethnic languages of Russia;
- are directed towards extending the volume of using the ethnic languages in the cultural sphere: theater, cinema, literature, etc.;

The Recommendations intend:

development of organizational and legal devices to stimulate learning the languages of the Russian Federation;

release of additional funds;

creation of the All-Russia Association of Native Language Teachers;

development of the Concept for preservation and development of languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the paper is materials characterizing nationalities and language policy in the modern Russian Federation.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify the main directions in the language policy in the modern multi-ethnic Russian Federation.

### **5. Research Methods**

The work applied sociolinguistic method of analysis to the issues in language policy.

### **6. Findings**

Sociolinguistic problem of the language policy in the multi-ethnic Russian Federation in light of recent governmental decisions have not been enough analyzed in the scientific literature. Besides, the authors believe that it is necessary to give scientific currency to the Recommendations from Parliamentary hearings on the topic of “Linguistic variety in the Russian Federation: Current state and prospects”, dated October 29, 2018, Moscow. Scientific presentation of the problem is getting a significant importance due to the 18th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to be take place in New York on 22.04 – 03.05.2019.

### **7. Conclusion**

As a result of the conducted research it has been found that the language policy in the modern multi-ethnic Russian Federation is aimed at preservation and development of the country's natural languages, as it is evident from analysis of the documents and creation of a Fund for preservation and study of natural languages of the Russian Federation with the Decree of the President of Russia no. 611, dated October 26, 2018. It is also evident form measures taken by federal subjects of the Russian Federation, such as the Chechen Republic and other republics of the RF, as noted in the Recommendations from the parliamentary hearings of October 29, 2018.

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