

## Tatar Education from 1920-1930

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### Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.07.49>

This work considers the history of the formation and functioning of the Tatar language as official in the Tatar republic of 1920-1930s. To this end, we analyzed the first documents of the young Soviet state concerning language policy. The activity of the Central Commission for the implementation of the Tatar language and Academic Center was studied; we reviewed the work of Central courses for training Tatar professionals and clubs for teaching the Tatar language to Russians, and the main goals and objectives to use the Tatar language as the official one were determined. We also considered the use of official languages in various educational institutions of Tatarstan, and also pointed to major challenges which arose in this case. As a result of the Tatar language implementation as the state language, Tatar began to be used in many areas of public life, including in the national education of the Tatar Republic. On the one hand, language policy of 1920-1930 was aimed at the maximum growth of the national languages, and, on the other hand, it boosted the progress of the Russian language for international communication and led to a reduction in the use of the Tatar language in 1940-1980s.

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**Keywords:** The Tatar language, state language, language education, language policy, language situation.

### 1. Introduction

After the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, great changes happened in the spiritual life of the peoples of Russia that led to the changes in the language policy of the new state as well. “Declaration of the Rights of Peoples”, adopted on 2 November 1917, proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of all “big and small nations and nationalities of the country, the abolition of any and all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions” (Soviet policy, 1928: 1).

Renouncing Russification that was kept in the Russian Empire was based on the Bolsheviks’ idea of internationalism who headed the Soviet state and aimed to build socialism on the world scale.

Recognizing that national differences between peoples “will stay for a very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale”, the Bolsheviks believed that the international strategy “does not require the elimination of variety, or the abolition of national differences (this is a foolish dream at the present moment), but demands such an application of the fundamental principles of communism ... that would correctly modify these principles in certain details, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences”. This ideology was the basis of the language policy of the new state (Bayramova, 2001: 144-145).

## **2. Methods**

The paper used descriptive method, document analysis method, the comparative method, observation method and the method of induction.

## **3. Main part**

In October 1918 a decree “On the schools of national minorities” declared the right of national minorities to get education in their native language: “All nationalities inhabiting the RSFSR have the right to provide training in their native language on both levels of the unified labor school and high school”. In December 1919, a decree “On the elimination of illiteracy among the RSFSR population” was adopted, according to which the entire population of 8-50-years old who could not read and write, was required to learn to read and write in their native language or Russian as desired.

The strategy for the development of education, training and culture in the multinational country was defined as a number of tasks to be fulfilled, which included:

“... to cover the country with a rich network of schools in the native language, providing them with teaching staff who know the native language;

... to make national, in composition, all the government machinery, from party and trade union to state and economic;

... to promote development of press, theaters, cinemas and other cultural institutions in their own language ... because millions of people can be successful in cultural, political and economic development only in their mother tongue, in their national language” (Stalin, 1949).

As it is seen, the functional development of the national language in all spheres of life was put on the level of government responsibilities. Therefore, a year after the establishment of the Tatar Autonomous Republic by the decree of June 25, 1921, the Tatar language along with Russian was recognized as the official one. In the introductory part of the decree it is stated: “Taking into account that for the first time an opportunity of peaceful cultural development for the Tatar Republic is created after many years of civil war, Tatar Central Executive Committee and Council of People’s Commissars decide to make the Tatar language mandatory in all public Soviet institutions” (Language Policy, 1998: 20).

Parity of the Tatar and Russian languages and bilingualism was further affirmed by the decision of the Central Committee of the Tatar Republic of 8 May 1922 which states that Russian and

Tatar are considered the official languages in all meetings within TASSR “on equal terms” (Language Policy, 1998: 18). Although the statehood of the Tatar and Russian languages was finally secured by the Constitution of TASSR adopted in 1926 (Article 22 states that the Tatar and Russian languages are declared official languages of the Tatar Republic), realization of the Decree of 1921 began in the same year. It implied mass teaching of the Russian and Tatar languages and implementing the policy of “realization of the Tatar language”. To this end, in September 1921, the permanent Central Commission for the implementation of the Tatar language was set up, which defined the following strategic objectives: 1) legal and practical equality of the Tatar and Russian languages in all state and public institutions of the republic; 2) active clerical correspondence in the Tatar language in all the institutions and enterprises, where the majority of the population served is Tatar, while maintaining passive correspondence in Russian, i.e., also ensuring written and oral intercourse in Russian for the Russian minority; 3) establishment of a passive implementation of the Tatar language in all those institutions where the population served is mostly Russian, but there is Tatar minority; 4) providing minorities with oral intercourse in their native language, as well as the written relations in one of the two official languages of the Tatar Republic, which they feel more comfortable to use; 5) primary providing written and oral intercourse in their native language in the Soviet administration, village councils, volost executive committees, factory committees, local committees, primary cooperatives, judicial and investigative areas, police, etc., and only to gradually cover the relevant superior bodies.

In order to achieve these objectives measures were developed and defined, including: 1) increased involvement of Tatars in the establishments and institutions; 2) training new employees from the Tatar population through short-time courses in relevant specialties, as well as enhanced admission of Tatars to educational establishments; 3) teaching the Tatar language to Russian officials and Russian students in advanced schools; 4) making all cultural and economic offices (schools, libraries, hospitals, agronomic and veterinary stations, communications agencies, cooperative associations, etc.) available to the Tatar working people; 5) technical adaptation of the Tatar language to perform the functions of the state language (designing terminology and correspondence forms, publishing work, ensuring typewriters, etc.) (Over 5 years, 1925: 40; Kirillova, 2000: 10-11).

A major role in the implementation of the Tatar language as the state one was played by the Central courses for training Tatar professionals and clubs for teaching the Tatar language to Russians. At first, courses were temporary and short-term, then they became regularly working two-year organizations. The courses trained specialists for 15 professions: co-operators, financiers, accountants, tax, insurance and statistical agents, volost workers, secretaries of village councils, clerks working in the Russian and Tatar languages, secretaries-typists, postal, clerical and union workers, court workers and others (Kirillova, 2000: 22). First of all, courses were to serve the “decision-makers”, secondly, the “Soviet officials”, and thirdly, “everyone who wishes” (Language Policy, 1998: 17). Particular attention was paid to employees of the government machinery, because there were only 7-8% Tatars in the central institutions of Tatarstan. The courses covered a large group of employees. For example, in 1925, 800 people attended the courses (Bayramova, 2001: 147).

In 1921 study groups for Russian officials started to work. Training covered 400 hours teaching program (200 hours - for free reading and writing in Tatar, learning colloquial speech. 200

hours - for free registration of various business papers and reports) (Fatkhullova, 2014: 508). Course attendance implied financial incentives. The decree of the Presidium of the Tatar central executive Committee of October 1924 provided for a 10% increase in salaries as well as bonuses for employees who are proficient in both official languages; in case of lay-offs, those who spoke only one official language were the first to be laid off (Language Policy, 1998: 21).

In addition to courses, school and higher education systems participated in the process. In 1925 the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR adopted a regulation on the preparation of teachers for non-Russian schools, and in accordance with it, a number of universities and educational institutions organized national faculties (e.g., Mari, Udmurt, Chuvash faculties opened at the Kazan Pedagogical Institute). Creation of textbooks in the national languages also started. In the Tatar Republic this job involved more than a hundred of teacher-scientists, linguists, teachers, textbook authors; from 1921 it was overseen by the Academic Centre for the People's Commissariat of Education of the Tatar Republic.

Academic Centre of Tatarstan that supervised the research, educational and pedagogical work and literary activities, did a great deal of work to develop national education. Its work touched mainly three areas: scientific and pedagogical, publishing, and regional natural history. Scientific Society of Tatar studies that worked at the Academic Center in 1923-1927s made a great contribution to study the language of the Tatar people, its history and culture, and gathered prominent scholars including experts from the Tatars around itself (Kirillova, Z., 2014: 292-293).

In 1920-1930s great attention was paid to textbooks on the Tatar language and literature and textbooks on the Russian language for Tatar schools. During these years, the Tatar language textbooks for Russian schools and non-Tatars studying the Tatar language were created by well-known teachers such as M.Kurbangaliev, R.Gazizov, H.Badighi, Z.Badigullin, Z.Badamshin, M.Mustafina and others. Minimums in the Tatar language for the Tatar students and non-Tatars were composed; this work was led by Tatar language faculties and academic departments that opened in the universities in 1930s (Bayramova, 2001: 148). They created textbooks for different specialties, as well as numerous terminological dictionaries for different areas. For example, until 1927, 15 thousand Tatar terms were created and they formed the basis for terminological dictionaries (Kirillova, 2000: 20).

The successes of ongoing language policy could be seen especially in the field of education. From 1922/23 academic year People's Commissariat for Education was instructed to introduce teaching of the Tatar language in all secondary and vocational schools of Tatarstan, and in 1925-26 academic year 2118 primary and secondary schools already operated in Tatarstan, of which 1048 (49.5%) were Tatar; 76200 of those enrolled were Tatars (out of 162 200 people in total) (The history of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, 1956). The number of Tatars that studied at universities in 1922-1931 increased by 18.8%. In 1920-1925s 6 technical schools, 1 worker's faculty for Tatars opened to facilitate the admission of the Tatars in the universities, where teaching was in Russian (Kirillova, 2000: 18; Kirillova, Z., 2014: 292).

In the Tatar republic a lot of work was done to provide multifunctionality of the Tatar language, which, along with the Russian language began to be used: 1) in the government machinery,

police, finance, postal, telegraph and other organizations; 2) clerical correspondence; 3) in law; 4) in the education; 5) health care; 6) in cooperation; 7) in the press, etc.

By the end of 1930s proper functioning of the Tatar language was provided by the Tatar staff, prepared to work in different areas. For example, in 1936 the number of Tatars working in the central institutions and commissariats amounted to 38.5%, and among the leaders the number of Tatars reached even to 47.4% (Kirillova, Zoya, 2014: 998).

#### **4. Conclusions**

Thus, the state language policy in the 1920-1930s contributed to a fuller functioning of the Tatar language, the development of symmetric (Tatar-Russian and Russian-Tatar) bilingualism and favorable attitude of the society to it (Bayramova, 2001: 151-152). However, government decisions relating to language policy were not consistently implemented. One can specify some reasons for the difficulties the implementation of the Tatar language and the development of national education. These are: the conditions and consequences of the Civil War; hunger of 1921; limited financial resources; lack of special teaching staff and good technical base (special textbooks, teaching aids, interpreters, typewriters with Arabic script, poor technical conditions in the Tatar publishing houses, etc.); certain negative role was played by psychological factors (reluctance of some non-Tatar population to study Tatar due its uselessness) and technical factors (difficulty in mastering non-Cyrillic Arabic script), and others.

#### **Summary**

Summarizing this study, we can conclude that in the 1920-1930s much work was done to use the Tatar language in various spheres of social life, for the development of national education in the Tatar Republic. In our view, it is due to this process in the history of our republic that it became possible again to grant the Tatar language the status of the state language in 1992 after a long period and to develop national education which continues to this day.

#### **Acknowledgments**

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

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