

The Ethno-Linguistic Behavior of Kazan's Young Residents (Based on Materials from Half-Formalized Interviews)



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Abstract. This article examines how the change in the Tatar language's status (which occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union), together with the introduction of its mandatory study in the republic's schools, effects the ethno-linguistic behavior of youths living in Kazan. It is based on texts from 20 half-formalized interviews (with biographical elements) with Tatars and Russians aged 18–29. Three groups were selected among those interviewed, based on their attitude towards the Tatar language, which can be nominally designated as such: “oriented towards the language”, “moderately oriented” and “nihilists”. The conducted analysis shows that Russian has been and still remains the dominant language in Tatarstan's capitol when communicating at work. The exception being people whose professional activity is directly connected with Tatarstan's language and culture. In a number of fields – for example, politics, civil service – the Tatar language remains important as a symbolic resource. It is used fragmentarily in fields having to do with working with the population, especially when it comes to visiting rural areas of the republic. Those specialists who work in the technical fields (especially IT) are the ones who use it the least. Kazan youths also tend to use the Russian language for informal communication. However, those who moved from Tatarstan's villages and are studying at urban Tatar schools and gymnasiums use the Tatar language as well as Russian. Other members of the younger generation (both Tatars and Russians) usually tend to limit themselves to using individual phrases and expressions. Meanwhile Tatars often use their native language at home. Lots of people choose one tactic or another for teaching it to their children, since they see it as a means for conserving their ethnic identity. Most Russians encourage the study of the Tatar language in schools, as a display of tolerance towards their neighboring ethnos, and respect for the ethno-cultural specificity of the region that they live in.

Keywords: ethno-linguistic behavior, linguistic practices, Russian language, Tatar language, youths

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The past few decades have been characterized by a number of profound changes in the ethnic and cultural development of Tatarstan. When the republic was declared a sovereign entity in 1990, its government began to pursue a relatively independent language policy, aimed primarily at preserving and promoting the Tatar language. The local legislation sets two official languages for the region: Russian and Tatar [Law..., 1992]. New ethnic Tatar schools and gymnasiums began to actively emerge (the 1990s also saw the rise of Tatar-Turkish lyceums, where, apart from Russian and Tatar, the curriculum also included Turkish and Arabic). The Tatar language was made compulsory in all of the republic's school, becoming just as advanced as subject as Russian. This was very much in the vein of the shared tendency towards the revival of local languages, encouraged by the ethnic elites all across Russia in the 1990s.

As the former Soviet Union opened its administrative and ideological borders, part of the Tatar (and overall) population started exhibiting interest in embracing the West, which prompted a spread of global cultural practices and values. As a result, foreign languages, especially English, kept growing more and more popular, among the younger generation in particular. Employers started giving more preference to applicants who knew foreign languages. Foreign language learning was also boosted by the transformation of the education, media, and leisure systems, as well as by the development of tourism.

It was in these conditions that the formative years of the new Tatar generation's socialization took place. That said, it is important to analyze how the aforementioned changes affected language practices as compared to the latter Soviet period, when the Russian language served as a key means of communication for the republic's population (except for rural areas, where the Tatar language still continued to perform the same function). Which languages do today's young Tatars use for business communication and domestic interactions (with their family members, neighbors, or friends)? And which languages do they intend to teach their (sometimes prospective) children?

It bears mentioning that the ethnic and language journey of the Republic of Tatarstan has already been covered in a number of studies, conducted by: Ya.Z. Garipov, A.F. Valeeva, Z.A. Iskhakova, L.M. Mukharyamova, and D.N. Mustafina; as well as by a team of researchers from the Institute of History, named after Shihabuddin Marjani, of The Tatarstan Academy of Sciences (G.F. Gabdrakhmanov, G.I. Makarov, R.N. Musin, and L.V. Sagitov) [Garipov 2017; Mukharyamova 2003; Iskhakova, 2002]. All of these issues still remain relevant, as affirmed in President Putin's address to the Council for Inter-Ethnic Relations in the city of Yoshkar-Ola on July 20, 2017 [Council Meeting..., 2017].

We shall now approach the subject by analyzing 20 half-formalized interviews (with biographic elements), involving young people (aged 18 to 29) residing in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan. The interviews – ten among young Russians and ten among young Tatars – were conducted in 2016. The selection of interviewees was governed by their attitudes to the Tatar language and to the matters of its preservation and development¹. In other words, we split them into three groups, which, for the purposes of this study, we shall be referring to as “language-positive”, “language-neutral” (or “moderate”), and “nihilist” (the groups were represented in roughly equal shares). Depending on the respondent’s preferences, the interviews were offered in Russian or in Tatar.

The study reveals the Tatar language fluency of the Tatars from the group that is positive towards the development of the language and the improvement of its status in the republic. Most of the interviewees from this category either spent their childhood and went to school (no matter how briefly) in rural areas, or were born in the city and went to a specialized Tatar school or gymnasium. Their families spoke Tatar either exclusively or predominantly. Among Russians, the group that is positive towards supporting the Tatar language and using it in daily practice includes those who grew up in rural areas, or, as a few exceptions, those who were encouraged to learn Tatar by specific circumstances (mostly the insistence of their parents or other members of the older generation).

The “nihilists” are primarily represented by the Russians and Tatars that grew up outside Tatarstan, or have parents from other Russian regions (quite naturally, this means that Tatars in this group were raised in Russian-speaking families). Due to their background, they have continuously been experiencing certain difficulties with Tatar language study and comprehension.

And finally, the interviews show that the Tatar respondents from the “moderate” group generally have some grasp of their language and can express themselves in it, but are not perfectly fluent. Their families would typically speak Russian and Tatar, and they generally studied at Russian-language schools in Kazan. “Moderate” Russians, in turn, are capable of getting the general idea of what is being said when someone speaks Tatar, but do not use the language themselves. They tend to retain the basics of Tatar back from their days at school.

We must emphasize that the distinctions between these groups are arbitrary, and that in real life, there are countless specific variations in the way young people from Kazan view the

¹ The survey was conducted by a group of researchers from the Institute of History, named after Shihabuddin Marjani, of The Tatarstan Academy of Sciences (headed by G.F. Gabdrakhmanov), as part of the republic’s state program aimed at preserving, studying, and developing the official languages of Tatarstan, as well as other languages spoken in the republic, from 2014 to 2020.

matters of ethnicity and language. Nevertheless, the most vital part of this study was to single out and review the subjective emotional and value-driven aspects of language use among the most typical respondent group (the “moderates”), on the one hand, and among the more “outlandish” representatives of the population (the “nihilists” and the “language-positive” individuals supporting the development of the Tatar language),¹ on the other hand.

Languages in the workplace

The textual analysis of our interviews shows that, when doing their jobs, young people from Kazan mostly rely on Russian (exclusively or predominantly). There are some exceptions, usually in cases when the very nature of the profession dictates that employees perform their duties and interact with each other in Tatar, first and foremost (such exceptions include reporting for Tatar-language mass media). There have also been some cases when people in specific fields actively rely on the English language.

The young people of Kazan believe that, apart from the examples mentioned above, knowledge of the Tatar language is absolutely necessary only for representatives of the republic's state authorities, such as members of the local legislative body and officials of various levels, even though there were no such representatives among the actual respondents: “... *the only thing... that I know of... if you are in the parliament... or just in power... you will need to know Tatar. In Tatarstan, that is*” (male, Russian, “moderate”). It may also be interesting to look at a larger fragment from another interview.

I. (Interviewer): *So there's no such need to know the Tatar language in Tatarstan? You can just communicate in Russian?*

R. (Respondent): *Unless you wanna be, like, an official or something. [...] With them... language is like a sort of tool for improving your status* (female, Russian, “moderate”).

Some respondents have also admitted that a certain capacity to communicate in the Tatar language is important for professionals who engage with the population, for instance notaries: “*She (the respondent's Tatar wife – G.M.) is working as a notary consultant. And in her office... people come there, and they talk in Tatar. [...] They come in and, like, straight off the bat, start asking all kinds of questions in Tatar. So knowing the Tatar language only gives her an advantage here. Because she*

¹ As we quote our respondents further in the paper, we will identify them in parenthesis as follows: “moderate”, “nihilist”, and “positive”.

does not need to ask them to repeat themselves. She can tell them what they need, in Russian or however. And most importantly, she can understand what they are trying to say. Which is a good thing” (male, Russian, “positive”). Tatar fluency also proves useful for those who have to go on business trips to various towns and regions across Tatarstan. And even though much of the republic’s modern population can speak Russian, in many cases, people find it more convenient to use the Tatar language in communication, especially in rural areas. Consequently, knowing the latter language makes mutual understanding easier: “It’s when you are working that you begin to realize that you do need Tatar. Especially in Tatarstan, because, like, we come to a site (the respondent works in construction – G.M.). And we see that the security staff are all Tatar men in their sixties. [...] And one security guard says to her (to the respondent’s colleague – G.M.), ‘Tatar kyzy?’ (‘Are you Tatar?’ – G.M.). ‘Yes’. And then he looks at me and says, ‘And you?’, and I say, ‘No’. And he is like, ‘Oh, I see’, like, oh, so Russian then. And I say to him, ‘Actually, I can understand you’. He turns to the other guard and explains something in Tatar. And that other guard’s respect for me really improves, ‘Oh, she knows Tatar. It means she’s one of us” (female, Russian, “moderate”).

In addition, Tatar fluency has a positive impact on trade, specifically on interactions with Tatar-speaking customers, as attested by those interviewees who work as sales managers and staff assistants at major malls in Kazan: “Customers come up and say to me, ‘Aydar?’. ‘Aydar’. ‘Tatar?’. ‘Tatar’. And then they switch to Tatar, because that’s easier for them. This makes them feel welcome. They begin to smile” (male, Tatar, “positive”). Certain respondents have also admitted that knowing Tatar helps them win the trust of their Tatar bosses, who exhibit elements of ethnic preference in their behavior.

R.: Well, obviously, our CEO is Tatar. So he kind of becomes more sympathetic when an employee is Tatar and speaks the language.

I.: Did your boss ever speak to you in Tatar?

R.: Oh, for sure. If he was in the mood for it. Sometimes he’d call me ‘kyzym’ (‘little daughter’ – G.M.) in Tatar, which is a kindly term of address. Or he could say goodbye in Tatar or give you some well-wishes in Tatar (female, Tatar, “moderate”).

When interviewed, quite a few young Tatars would admit to using the Tatar language to a certain extent when addressing their colleagues: “We speak Tatar to our Tatar coworkers” (female, Tatar, “positive”); “We can always use Tatar to say a couple of words in private” (male, Tatar, “moderate”). Russians, in turn, claim that they are not opposed to such language use, mentioning that they can grasp the general meaning of the

conversation. Which, as our study has revealed, is largely due to the language teaching policy applied in the republic over the past few decades. Let us consider a sample interview to prove this statement.

R.: Actually talking – no, I can't do that. Because I will never have the vocabulary for it. So if they address me in Tatar, I respond in Russian. Meaning that they are perfectly aware that I, uh...

I.: Understand?

R.: Yes, that I understand them. At first, they assumed that I didn't know the language, and they kept like, joking, fooling around. And then one time, my friend... she's sitting there... and she's like, 'Watch it'. Meaning like, mind what you are saying. 'She can actually understand every word'. 'No way!... You know Tatar?!' (female, Tatar, "moderate").

Today, after more than 25 years of language and education reform in Tatarstan, young people can no longer use Tatar as a language for "secret", private communication [Burykin 2004]. That said, some Russians did admit that sometimes they fail to understand the meaning of the conversation, and they ask Tatars to explain what they are talking about: *"I just smile and say, 'Please translate this. I do not understand you'"* (male, Russian, "moderate"). And only a scarce few individuals, whom we have grouped under the "nihilist label", expressed dissatisfaction with such language use, *"I have always assumed that since Russian is our official language, everyone has to know Russian. So if I want someone to talk to me, they ought to use the shared language of all the people in Russia"* (female, Russian, "nihilist").

Our interview analysis has also prompted a conclusion that there are some jobs where employees do not use the Tatar language in the workplace, or use it very sparingly. Statements in this vein were made, first and foremost, by those respondents whose jobs are related to modern information technology or the technical sector in general (interestingly enough, this group did include those who actually know the Tatar language and are very positive towards efforts in its preservation and development): *"IT guys, they are special that way... You know that English is actually a must in IT. If you don't know the language, they don't even need you. Even though we talk in Russian, we do not translate the terminology. Or even we do translate it, we use words like... Well, for example, the Russian for 'container' is still 'container'. Or, I don't know, 'deploy', things like that... I am not even sure if Russian has another word for 'deploy', yeah? So we use that word, and we are used to it. That's how we talk. And an IT guy usually has this really garbled, anglicized Russian. So Tatar does not even come close! Plus, the Tatar language does not have any blocks of specialized vocabulary, like IT, professional*

vocabulary” (male, Tatar, “nihilist”). Below is a similar excerpt from a different interview: *“Those who are into science: physics, mathematics, all the STEM stuff – they have to read a lot of academic papers. So I had to brush up my English here, because it became really relevant. [...] Then [...] I went into IT, into programming, where any kind of data, all of it, comes from sources in a foreign language, in the English language. [...] So all our in-house correspondence was in English. We Skyped in English too. Mostly with Indians, sometimes with Americans”* (male, Russian, “positive”).

As a result, the respondents mostly associate the Tatar language with day-to-day interactions, especially with the older generation: *“I could count the situations when I actually needed it (Tatar proficiency – G.M.) with the fingers of one hand... For example, like, when my grandma had some childhood friends over, or someone else of the sort [...]. But not for passing on any crucial information, no. It never worked out like that. Not for as long as I can remember. And frankly, that’s a bit of a shame”* (male, Russian, “positive”). Another respondent, a student from the Innopolis, exclusively associates the Tatar language with the day-to-day rural life and traditional hospitality: *“...Everything Tatar... – I tend to associate it with a Tatar village. Because it’s in villages that I have most contact with Tatar speakers. [...] Our culture, Tatar culture, it’s all about hospitality. I remember that when we went to the country, we would just try to ask for directions, and in every house we entered, the people would say, yeah, this place is here and that place is there, but why don’t you just come over for tea. Complete strangers, all of them. And also, a Tatar home is a cozy home. With a modest and caring wife that tends the hearth. This is all part of our community, our Tatar values”* (male, Tatar, “nihilist”).

The importance of English and other foreign languages as professional communication tools was also highlighted by respondents motivated to find employment in various international companies. When asked which languages he will need to use when executing his business plans related to cooperation with Western countries, one of the respondents explained, *“Russian and English. I did tell you: no matter what you ask me about languages, my answer will be the same. Russian and English. Russian because it’s my mother tongue and I enjoy speaking it, and English because it’s a global language. It’s like a master key that will fit almost any lock”* (male, Russian, “moderate”). Another interview ample goes as follows, *“My job, for example, involves working with Turkish partners... and you can only do business with them if you can talk to them. Meaning that I use the Turkish language. English comes second... For example, we hosted a Young Entrepreneurs’ Forum here not too long ago, and if we did not know English, our project would not have made it to the top five. We submitted our*

accreditation papers in English, and then we made it, and showed our project to the president. So yeah, in all, you do need English” (male, Tatar, “positive”).

Thus, as revealed by the analysis of the interview fragments provided, the choice of workplace language (including the choice between using or not using the Tatar language at work) is determined not as much by personal preferences of the youth as by their job and specific field. At the same time, employees from a single field, despite belonging to different groups in terms of perceiving the Tatar language, generally have overlapping opinions and attitudes. Furthermore, almost all our respondents have proved to be unanimous on the lack of a dire need to master the Tatar language in the overwhelming majority of professional fields within Kazan. Knowledge of the Tatar language is rarely required from those seeking employment¹. It is quite feasible to manage without it. That said, Tatar proficiency may help score extra points in certain workplace situations and successfully resolve specific challenges.

Some young respondents also made general statements about the usefulness of knowing the Tatar language (or lack thereof). They often made a connection with the regional specifics. Certain other respondents, in turn, justified the importance of learning Tatar as homage to the republic's unique culture: “... *Tatar culture implies being part of the Tatarstan community. [...]. I am not sure if I, personally, have use for this. I am not sure how much I NEED (emphasis mine – G.M.) to know Tatar. [...]. But at the same time I am aware that this is important for me”* (female, Russian, “moderate”). Some respondents tie the significance of Tatar learning with the region's achievements: “*Tatarstan is going ahead in the world [...]. The one thing that it so great about Tatarstan is that a lot of foreign business projects, they start right here [...]. Looking at this, you might figure that one day, the Tatar language will mean so much more than now. But, again, the main stumbling block is that Tatarstan is just a small part of the greater Russia [...]. But as long as there is Tatarstan, there is the Tatar language”* (male, Russian, “moderate”).

Nevertheless, there have been some respondents, mostly those planning to leave the region or even the country in the future, who insisted that the Tatar language is purely local. Its speakers live on a very limited territory, and it has few prospects. Therefore, according to these respondents, learning Tatar is not worth their time. For example, one of the respondents told the interviewer that, while the English language, once mastered,

¹ For instance, this is the response given by one of the interviewees when she was asked, “What do you think could encourage young people to improve their Tatar fluency?”: “*I guess making it a priority of some sort. Like when... when you are job-hunting. Since we live in Tatarstan, applicants who know Tatar could be given priority. In that case, it could have been a way of encouraging people... But it's a bit discriminatory, I guess* (laughs – G.M.)” (female, Tatar, moderate).

grants you access to a tremendous “*swathe of culture*”, “*this will never be true of the Tatar language. Because the culture [...] is limited to one small region...*” (male, Russian, “nihilist”).

Regarding the use of languages in education, we must note the following. Today, Russian is still the main language that both students and faculty from the Tatarstan capital use to learn, teach, and interact. “*It (using the Tatar language) was by no means crucial. I have been engaged in community work, various projects, grassroots organizations,*” notes one of the respondents, a male Tatar. “*And even there, there have never been any instances when we absolutely needed the Tatar language or anything like that*” (male, Tatar, “moderate”).

At the same time, the use of the national language in education is somewhat stimulated by the arrival of Tatar-speaking Tatars from other cities and especially from rural areas. As practically every department of every educational facility in Kazan has such students, it is highly unlikely to go without hearing the Tatar language being spoken, one way or another. Meanwhile, Kazan-born students who have a certain grasp of the Tatar language try to support their fellow Tatar speakers: “*Sometimes you have people from the Tatar class... you have to speak to them in Tatar. [...] There's this one student... Tatar country boy... people use the Tatar language to talk to him...*” (male, Tatar, “moderate”).

Others have a generally reasonable attitude towards encountering such “islands” of Tatar-language communication and even manage to learn a few phrases themselves, “*People come to our university... from different cities. Me, I am the only guy from Kazan in our group... And I can hear other students talk in Tatar among themselves. You hear them say some phrases, and pick them up for yourself*” (male, Russian, “moderate”). Conversely, some respondents listed strikingly different examples.

R.: *Some people react to it (the Tatar language) very negatively. As soon as I say something in Tatar, they, like, you know...*

I.: *Snap at you?*

R.: *Yeah... Like, what's that you're saying?! Why are you speaking Tatar, not Russian?*” (female, Tatar, “nihilist”).

We must clarify, however, that as the interview progresses, it becomes clear that such attacks mostly come from students that are originally from other Russian regions.

Languages in day-to-day communication

The trends discovered when analyzing how young people from Kazan talk to their friends are rather similar to the above. Although those respondents who grew up mostly in the

republic's capital use the Tatar language in daily life even more rarely than at work: *"All the same... I don't really meet people... who... speak Tatar. The main language that we use is Russian (female, Russian, "moderate"); "Kazan is not a small town, and in general, I think more people speak Russian" (male, Tatar, "moderate")*. Tatar-speaking Tatars tend to be upset by this: *"Really few people speak Tatar these days; you can't find anyone to talk to you, unless you travel to the country" (male, Tatar, "moderate")*.

At the same time, a certain share of young Tatars tries to keep communicating either in Tatar, or both in Tatar and in Russian (referred to by the respondents as a "mixed language"): *"What's the main thing here? Let's say I ask a question in Tatar, then the answer I get will also be in Tatar. And if someone asks me a question in a specific language, I'll give them an answer in that same language. They're really interchangeable... basically depending on where the conversation is going. Meaning that we always speak this mixed language" (male, Tatar, "positive")*. The study also shows that the Tatar language is mostly used by those young people from Kazan who attended a Tatar school/gymnasium (at least for a few years) or a Tatar-focused daycare.

Other respondents, despite coming from families with Tatar parents that use their native language (exclusively or mixed in with Russian) at home, rely on Tatar only in certain specific cases, when they do not want other people to understand the conversation. This, as the respondents themselves admit, is mostly done as a joke. *"We may only talk in it when there some really specific words, you know, words that are fun to say in Tatar. [...] Like, when you are hanging out with people who know Tatar, and then there are other people standing next to you, people who don't know Tatar really well. So if you say something in Tatar, they won't understand you. It's basically really funny to watch these people" (female, Tatar, "moderate")*.

The majority of today's young Russians with a certain grasp of the Tatar language are not really offended when, to use the youth slang, their Tatar friends "mess with them": *"Some of my friends chat in Tatar sometimes, and I can understand a couple of words. But, like, I will reply to them in Russian, because basically, our main language is Russian. But they can talk in Tatar if they want to. Some may also talk in Russian, or in English. This is like, banter of sorts..." (male, Russian, "moderate")*. Just as Tatars, those Russians who are fluent in the language are amused by the situation, and they can even contribute to the banter: *"A buddy of mine – one of my best friends – is a Tatar that has converted to Christianity. He is perfectly fluent in the Tatar language. [...] And he is a hilarious guy. Sometimes he just has this wish to up and start talking in Tatar among people who don't know the language at all. That's his*

way of pulling their leg... But as for using the language seriously, communicating with someone in Tatar, no, he doesn't do that" (male, Russian, "positive").

All things considered, we cannot say that the Tatar language can never be heard among the young people of Kazan. Most people who grew up in Tatarstan are neither annoyed by the language nor opposed to its use. *In fact, peppering the speech with some Tatar expressions even comes in vogue: "I often use all of these Tatar phrases... like... they usually say 'Alla birsä' (God willing), or 'tizrök' (faster – G.M.)... I use these words a lot"* (male, Russian, "moderate"). None of this means that young people rely on Tatar as their main communication tool, however.

All the same, the Tatar language and Tatar culture have not been expunged from the social and linguistic practices of the young people living in the republic's capital, which is affirmed by the fact that half of our respondents, Russians and Tatars alike, mention going to Tatar theatres (primarily the Ğdliǰsǰar Kamal Theater)¹ as a way of passing their free time. And even though the majority of Russian respondents stated that they use headphones to hear the Russian translation, the very atmosphere encourages a natural and positive attitude towards the Tatar language, as proved by various observations [Makarova, 2016]. These observations have also been confirmed by the findings of a number of sociolinguists [Gumperz 1982; Appel, 1987], including those from Russia [Verbal communication ... 2000; Salikhova, Iskuzhina, 2013], who have concluded that the choice of language in communication is significantly impacted by the external circumstances. It is no coincidence that Tatar speakers, especially Tatars that come to Kazan from the country, mention that this national theater is one of the few places in the city where they can hear Tatar speech, turning into a manner of "sanctuary" in the predominantly Russian-speaking surroundings: *"Kamal teatrı ezenđ kilep kergđz, min, zıñki Kamal teatrı ul beznec üzen nđrsđ bulıp qaldı Kazand. Berenze min anda kilep kergđz, ızemne rđxđt xis itđ torǰan urın, zıñki anda kemgđ dđ barıp tatarza dđşđrgđ bula. Hđm sin belđsec, keşe sica tatarza cavap qaytara ikđnen. (When I enter the Kamal Theatre, it is the first thing for me in Kazan. When I go there, I feel comfortable, because I can approach anyone I want and talk to them in Tatar. Knowing that they will respond the same way)"* (female, Tatar, "positive").

Finally, we cannot ignore that the interactions of today's young people with their peers are greatly facilitated by the Internet. So far, only a select few Tatars use their language online. And when they do use it, their language preference often turns into a way of showcasing their ethnic identity: *"Me, for*

¹ Some representatives of the Tatar youth have also admitted to going to Tatar concerts and listening to songs in Tatar.

example, I use Tatar on purpose when I hang out in WhatsApp, Viber, or Vkontakte, or send texts. I know that I am talking to a Tatar who speaks Russian most of the time. I ask him a question in grammatically correct Tatar and wait how he'll answer back. ... I had a conversation like this not long ago. This guy, he talks to his friends in Russian, though I don't know how he talks to his parents. He generally lives in a Russian-language environment, and then, suddenly, he relies to me in perfect Tatar. It was such a joy to read, he really made me smile... (female, Tatar, "positive"). Some of the Russian respondents have, once again, noted that they have no objections against the use of the Tatar language in this environment: *"By my fifth uni year, we started having these situations when... even in chatrooms... they type in Tatar, and you sit there and think: what was that you said? And they use Cyrillic letters too. And deep down in your brain, you begin to wonder: how would they spell it in Tatar letters?... But I don't interfere. I just sit and read their chat"* (female, Russian, "moderate").

Languages in family life

When analyzing the ethnic and linguistic behavior of young people from Kazan, it is important to focus on which languages they choose to talk within their new families, or to interact with prospective partners. When reviewing the issue, we must also attempt to determine the way this choice reflects the various background factors, from the languages in which the respondents were socialized and received their school education, to the impact of the city's overall language environment.

Let us begin by analyzing the interviews with Tatar respondents. Those among them who are positive towards supporting and developing the Tatar language in the republic would assure the interviewers that they were ready to promote the same message in their own family. *"I want to spend my life with a man who has a good grasp of the Tatar language,"* says a female Tatar informant who grew up in a rural area and only heard the Tatar language being spoken in her family. *"Because, first of all, otherwise he will find it hard to talk to my parents and grandparents. I am not implying that my parents don't know Russian. They do, but we all talk in Tatar to our relatives, to grandmas and granddads. They will be uncomfortable talking in Russian, they will need a translator"* (female, Tatar, "positive"). The respondent later goes on to talk about her future child, *"(The child will need to learn Tatar – G.M.) from the very infancy, maybe not from the cradle, but as soon as they begin to speak. After all, a child learns to speak by listening to what their parents say and repeating their words. You have to teach your kids as a family, first and foremost"*.

Another female Tatar respondent, who also grew up in a rural area and went to a Tatar-language school, justifies her own belief that the Tatar language should be supported as a means of communicating within the family by appealing to the need for preserving the Tatar identity and sustaining the Tatar-language environment even as it keeps shrinking¹: *“Telne belergö kirötk dip sanıym. Rus telen dö belergö kirötk, ölböttö. Tege min balalarımğa anda rus telen üyrötmim digön sız tögel. Alar anı irken aralaşsınnar. ömma lökin bez nec özebez üzen, tatar xalqı üzen, min sanıym [...] tatar telen saqlap qalu kirötk. Bez nec moxıt kezeröygönnöñ kezeröya bara. Höm şuca körö ul moxıtne üydö bulsa da buldırırğa kirötk. Höm qayda tağın buldırı alasıc balağa? [...] Alarnıc telgö, millötkö tartılı şul özraqta ğına bula. (I think that we should know our language. And also the Russian language, of course. I am not saying that my children will never learn Russian. Let them talk in Russian freely. But for us, for the Tatar people, I think it is important [...] to preserve the Tatar language. Our language community grows smaller and smaller. So we could create such a community at least at home. Where also can you make a favorable environment for your child? [...] They can only become involved with their language, with their people, if you encourage them to do that since childhood”* (female, Tatar, “positive”)². As the respondent goes on speaking, she elaborates on her point of view, noting that the preservation of the Tatar language depends, first and foremost, on their own sense of identity: *“Mıca qalsa, bezgö ul sitwatsidne özgörtkönze, milli özac buldırırğa kirötk. Keşelörnec aklı röveştö özlörenec telen aclaw, millöten aclaw kirötk. (It seems to me that, in order to change the situation, we ought to have a national identity. Our people must consciously embrace their language, their nation)”*.

Even those Tatar-language-positive young men whose girlfriends (future wives) do not know the language perfectly are aiming to use it to communicate within their family. *“All in all, we speak Tatar to each other more... this initiative... to speak Tatar... it's mostly mine”* (male, Tatar, “positive”), confesses the same male Tatar who lived in the country until the age of 4 and then attended a Tatar gymnasium in the city.

The Tatars that we have classed as “moderate” (mostly city-born, without perfect language fluency) are also more inclined to state that they would love their children to learn their

¹ I.V. Nam, E.I. Klementyev, L.V. Namruyeva, and other authors describe similar trends in other Russian regions [Nam, 2005; Klementyev, 2005; Namruyeva, 2014].

² Let us consider another similar statement. This time, the respondent is male – a young Tatar who lived in the country until he was four and attended a Tatar gymnasium: *“...the Tatar language, it is going extinct little by little. Every year, we forget a word. [...] Yes, it is going extinct, that's a fact for me... Personally, I associate the Tatar language with family, first and foremost”*. (male, Tatar, “positive”).

language. Although these statements are never categorical. For instance, below are the musings of a female respondent who was born in Kazan and attended a Russian-language school, *“I am Tatar at the end of the day, and I want my child to know and understand our language. But quite naturally, I won't force it on them”* (female, Tatar, “moderate”).

Some respondents even said that they are ready to give their child away to Tatar-language daycare because they only speak Russian at home: *“I fully support this. We were planning to send her to another, Tatar daycare in the first place. That was my intention, to have her learn the language there. We could not get in, though. So we switched to a different daycare. I assumed she'd go to a Russian-language group. But then we found out that it's actually a Tatar-language group, I was only too happy, and all our grandparents are also happy. Even though they do not speak Tatar themselves, they are very insistent that our Aliya get to know, to learn Tatar* (female, Tatar, “moderate”). There have also been cases of respondents planning to speak both Russian and Tatar in their family. *“We're gonna make it 50/50. So like, let's say, we can have some convos in Tatar, and add some pet names both in Tatar and in Russian. [...] But the one thing I do believe is that, in any case, the Tatar language should be their staple [...] It's their mother tongue. But still, knowing Russian is also great”* (male, Tatar, “moderate”).

Our study has revealed no Tatar respondents who may have been outspoken against any form of speaking Tatar or teaching children to speak the language (either at home or at school). Though there have been those who claimed that knowing Tatar is not necessary.

Among the Russians, this attitude has also been a rarity. Furthermore, almost no-one seemed to object against Tatars themselves speaking the language. The only form of objection was a few scarce remarks against the format in which the Tatar language is being taught at the republic's schools: *“I don't think that my child is going to need this language. But if he himself expresses a wish to learn Tatar, I will support him. Let him learn. After all, a language – any language – is always useful. But all in all, I think it's really important to make the rules of teaching Tatar a little less strict. Either cut down the number of classes for Russians, or make it an elective”* (female, Russian, “nihilist”).

As for interacting at home, the overwhelming majority of Russian respondents stated that they do not use the Tatar language either in their parents' families (even though some of their parents do understand it) or in their own. That said, they are generally not opposed to their children (current or future) getting acquainted with the Tatar language to some extent. *“I would love them to learn English, and to learn it really actively, right from first grade,”* says one respondent. *“And*

Tatar, too, naturally; I'd love them to learn it at school" (male, Russian, "moderate"). Some Russians base their viewpoint on the Tatar language on the importance of keeping the peace between various ethnicities and cultures in Tatarstan: *"Actually, I think that this (language and cultural diversity – G.M.) is a thing that influences the people living in the republic, among others. It promotes tolerance and makes us [...] more open-minded" (female, Russian, "moderate").*

Last but not least, certain Russian individuals not only speak Tatar but also prefer to use it (or a mix of Tatar and Russian) when interacting with other people, particularly with their Tatar family members. For instance, one Russian respondent recollects how his Tatar wife built language bridges between him and his in-laws. *"There were some situations, during my first few meetings with her relatives, when they would tell a story and then say to my wife Karina, 'Translate it to him'. And she'd say, 'What for? He can understand you perfectly as it is'" (male, Russian, "positive").* Furthermore, the respondent claims that each time, communicating in Tatar came easier and easier to him, as he revived the skills he had picked up as a child when talking to his peers from the Rybno-Slobodsky District. The same respondent remarks on his plans to teach languages to his future children as follows: *"... if my wife decides to teach our child the Tatar language, or if the child's grandmother, for example, thinks it's a good idea, I am all for it. The more languages my kid knows, the better".*

Consider another example. When asked "Which language would you like your children to learn?", a male Russian respondent that grew up in Kazan (in the Staro-Tatarskaya Sloboda community) and was encouraged to study Tatar by his parents and grandmother gives the following answer, *"Since we all know all three languages to some extent, would like the kids to learn Russian, Tatar, and English. Let our family be like Lenin's family..." (male, Russian, "positive").* Before making this statement, the respondent shared what he had learned at the Lenin Museum: Lenin's family had designated days when they would speak one specific language.

Conclusion

By analyzing the interviews with young people from Kazan, we have managed to determine how they use Tatar, Russian, and other languages in the workplace and at home.

It has become apparent that Russian remains the dominant workplace language in Tatarstan's capital for the vast majority of job fields. The jobs that are directly related to the Tatar language and culture are an exception. In some fields (primarily politics and public service) the Tatar language is an important status

symbol. Young people working in other areas use it sporadically, for instance when engaging with customers (the interviews features such examples as passport processing clerks, notaries, mall managers, etc.) or when going on business trips to rural areas and other cities outside Kazan.

Coworkers, mostly Tatars, also use the Tatar language to talk among themselves. These conversations are generally understood by Russians who were born in Tatarstan and studied at the local schools. And, unlike the latter Soviet and the early post-Soviet period, modern Russians are no longer offended when people do not speak Russian in their presence.

Furthermore, our research has allowed us to single out a few job fields where the Tatar language is used extremely rarely. According to the interviews, in Kazan, these fields are mostly IT and technical jobs in general. What is more, the Tatar language is practically absent from the work-related communication of foreign company managers. In both cases, English (and Russian) is in far greater demand.

Thus, the use of Tatar language in workplace interactions, or lack thereof, is governed not as much by the young professional's knowledge or the language and desire to speak it, as by their chosen job. In a few select cases, however, knowledge of the Tatar language is actually an obligatory job requirement.

When casually interacting with their friends, the young people of Kazan mostly use Russian. At the same time, there are certain respondent categories (such as young people who come to Kazan from Tatar villages or who studied at Tatar-language city schools and gymnasiums) who use both Russian and Tatar. In certain instances, these categories also include people for whom Tatar was the exclusive or dominant family language. Other young people (both Tatars and Russians) generally limit themselves to a few basic phrases and expressions.

When at home, however, especially when talking to their elders, young Tatars often rely on their native language. Many of them make specific plans to have their own children learn Tatar. They see it as a way of preserving their ethnic identity. Most Russians, in turn, support Tatar lessons at school as a way of promoting diversity, encouraging tolerance to their Tatar neighbors, and celebrating the unique ethnic and cultural features of the region where they live.

Thus, the past two and a half decades of reform in Tatarstan have not had any radical impact on the way the Tatar language functions in the region. The Tatar language still does not equal Russian as a tool of youth communication in the workplace, in class, or among friends, although it does remain an important tool for ensuring family interactions and promoting the Tatar identity. That said, the fact that the national language is not viewed by most young people from the capital as alien,

nor is it associated exclusively with rural lifestyle and culture, is a positive development in its own right. Today, we may even encounter a few Russians who have a fairly good grasp of the Tatar language and speak it at work and in their family circle, which is a great achievement of the Tatar schools' language teaching system.

And finally, the use of some Tatar words and phrases by the city youth also signifies that the Tatar language is becoming fashionable to a degree. We believe that this is prompted not only by the republic's language policy but also by the improvement of Tatarstan's status among other Russian regions, ensured by the local authorities' efforts to build a regional brand and identity.

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