

CHECHEN-RUSSIAN BILINGUALISM: THE SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ÖZET

Raporda Çeçen-Rus toplumunda çift dil bilme (taşımaya) problemleri inceleniyor. İdare, bilim ve eğitim sektörlerinde Çeçen ve Rus dillerin eşitsiz kullanımına dikkat çekiliyor. Çeçen dili bilme ve onu hayatın değişik bölümlerinde kullanım ihtiyaçları gözönüne getiriliyor. Aynı zamanda Rus dili iyi bilip, Çeçenceyi unutmaya başlayanların sayısında Rusça lehine eğimin olduğu anlatılıyor. Öncelikle şehirde, Çeçence konuşulurken Rusça katma alışkanlığın büyüdüğü göz önüne delillerle getiriliyor. İki dilden oluşan bir dilin ortaya çıkması yada Çeçenlerin artık başka dil kullanmaya geçebilme olasılıkları tartışılıyor. İlk okullarda Çeçencenin eğitim dili olup Rusçanın ders olarak okutulmasına dair Çeçen toplumunda olan tartışma ve görüşlerine yer veriliyor. Sonuç olarak genellemeler ve kesin çözüm teklifleri yapılıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çift dil bilme, dil hakları, dil fonksiyonları, dil eğitimi ve karışık şive.

ABSTRACT

Bilingualism in the Chechen Republic, as well as in other regions, develops in conditions of transformational changes in the country and globalizational processes in the world. It imposes the peculiarities on functioning of the Chechen and Russian languages in republic. On results of census of 2002 97,8 % of Chechens know the Chechen language, Russian - 82,9 %. These parameters reflect the growth of number of the Chechen population, knowing Russian on 9,5 % in comparison with 1989. At the same time there was a reduction of amount of Chechens knowing the Chechen language on - 2 %. These externally safe parameters do not open the real language situation. According to expert estimations of experts of linguistics significant easing among the population of the standard of speech, knowledge of the Chechen and Russian languages is observed. And the wide circulation is received with the mixed Chechen-Russian speech. It began to penetrate even into the family - household sphere. The observable language picture actualizes the problem of harmonization of the various sides of development and functioning of official and Chechen language, expediency of turning of learning, say, in initial classes, on the Chechen language. In various layers of the population the preference of this or that language of learning depends on many parameters: age, an educational level, etc. So, the least

number of those interested in turning of initial classes on the Chechen language of learning in an age category of 18-24, and the greatest amount in the age of 60 and of more senior years. So, those who support turning of learning in initial classes on the Chechen language show historical fears for destiny of the language and ethno cultural self-identification, and preferring Russian - a pragmatism and social self-identification. The coordination of different language needs, is called to become one of basic elements of post-war reconstruction in the region.

Key Words: bilingualism, language rights, language functions, the language training, the mixed speech.

Complicated linguistic processes are going on in the world. In various countries they have their own peculiarities caused by a language policy and objective tendencies of globalization. There are more than 100 languages in the Russian Federation. During the initial stage of formation of the Soviet state the basis of development of national languages was established in the Russian republic and other union republics of the USSR. However, in succeeding years, their use is limited to a family, living environment, a relatively favorable situation existed in Baltic republics, in Georgia and Armenia.

Contemporary Russia was formed in 1991 and has small democratic experience in the state and language formation. 21 republics of Russian Federation have a diverse language environment, it brings specificity to the development of regional bilingualism. 93,5 %¹ of Chechens live in the Chechen Republic, according to outward signs a homogeneous language environment has formed here, but Russian is a dominating language in state institutions, when holding public events, and frequently in interethnic communication of many people of middle and young age.

The languages of ethnic minorities such as Kumyk, Nogai, that belong to the Turkic language group; Avar of the Nakh-Daghestanian language group of the Ibero-Caucasian language family are functioning on the territory of the ChR as well. These languages are studied as a subject at school and are a means of interethnic communication in densely populated localities of ethnic minorities, they are used by the local government. In the given article the attempt has been taken to throw light upon some sociological aspects of functioning of the Chechen-Russian bilingualism and the social status of the Chechen language.

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Methods – the methodological basis of the research was the functional approach that allowed to reveal the functional role of the Chechen and Russian languages in various spheres of social life. The methods of the quantitative and qualitative analysis were applied; the social statistics was also used. Besides, the following aspects were singled out: the level of knowledge of the language, the level of functioning of the language, the level of requirements for the expansion of functions of the Chechen language. A set of questions on a language situation has been included in the research carried out in 1991: «Interests of multinational groups of the employed population», and also in the public opinion poll «Interests, norms, values», held in 2003. In 2004 expert enquiry of public figures, such as journalists, writers, researchers in linguistics and so on took place. Questionnaires on the theme of languages «The teaching language» were used to interrogate teachers of the Chechen language and elementary school in the year 2005 and 2006. On the whole the sociological findings give an idea on the language situation and language preferences of various socio-demographic groups of the CHR.

Results of research. Judging from the results of the census carried out in 2002 in the Chechen Republic, 97,8 % of the Chechen know the Chechen language (in the Russian Federation it is 95,9%), 82,9 % know the Russian language. These figures reflect in the Chechen population the growth of those who know Russian by 9,5 % in comparison with 1989. At the same time there was an insignificant reduction in the number of the Chechen that know the Chechen language by 2 %.²

According to the results of the sociological research, the respondents highly estimate the knowledge of the Chechen language.³

² See. Yusupov, M. M., “Chechen-Russian bilingualism: A condition, problems”. - **theses of the V11 congress of ethnologists and anthropologists of Russia**. Saransk. 2007.

³ Sociological research «Interests, norms, values». Sampling- 1060 people. 2003.

Tab. 1	
Knowledge of the language (in %).	
	The Chechen
1. Think and speak fluently.	77,0
2. Speak fluently	18,4
3. Speak with some difficulties	4,4
4. Speak with great difficulties	0,2
5. Do not speak at all.	

However behind these figures of the All-Russian census and public opinion poll, that seem favorable on the surface, there lies in a rather complicated linguistic image. Self-estimations, as the opinion polls in other regions show are, as a rule, overestimated. Therefore it is necessary to address also to the figures of external findings. A group of teachers of the Chechen language of different areas and localities was offered to evaluate the level of knowledge of the Chechen language by pupils' parents according to a 10 points scale. The cumulative figure of these scores looks as follows: excellent - 4,6 %, good – 4,6, fair (knowledge) – 38,7, below medium – 31,8, low – 20,5 %.⁴

Expert conclusions of those who specialize in linguistics are even more critical, there was a considerable decrease in speech culture of the Chechen population, knowledge of the Chechen and Russian languages. Numerals are less frequently used in the Chechen speech, the vocabulary of many people decreases from generation to generation as well. So, we offered a group of students to write the names of herbs, trees and wild birds using the Chechen language at first, and then the Russian one. The results show that the students wrote approximately two times more names in Russian than in the Chechen language, and some couldn't recollect anything in their memory at all. The psychologist A. Mankiev offered a test to students and adults: they were asked to write a text of the same size in Chechen and Russian. It took the testees much more time to write the text in the Chechen language.

However, the most essential among all the negative consequences is that over decades the language has not been developing as a national one and does not reflect adequately the social practice. Thus, they speak the Chechen language in a family, living environment and in public places of countryside and towns. In the management, educational sphere, the domain of scientific knowledge, business, the Russian language is used for communication.

⁴ Social survey «Teaching language». Respondent teachers of the Chechen language – 50 people.

Two contradictory tendencies have formed in the Chechen-Russian bilingualism: the ascending tendency of knowledge of Russian and the descending tendency of knowledge of the Chechen language. In case these tendencies remain for 20 years the whole Chechen population (100 %) will know Russian, and those who know the Chechen language will decrease and will make up approximately 90 %. Such a situation can create precondition and thus speed up the language shift in the future. Linguists define the language shift as a change of constant usage of one language over another.⁵ For the next three generations there is no threat of dying-out of the Chechen language, but the following two generations may experience the process of development of a mixed language on the basis of the Chechen and Russian language substratum, or a speeded up change over another language. Such a fear is caused by the distribution of the mixed speech, the proportion of Chechen and Russian words in it makes up 80 %: 20 % in the countryside. Some believe that it makes-70 %: 30 % in Grozny, the capital, others say it is 60 %: 40 %.⁶

In this sense the Chechen people are undergoing a mild variant of a language shift process. It is caused by the existence of script and literature, studying of the native language as a subject at schools and institutions of higher education, the constitutional guarantees, residing of a considerable part of the Chechen in the countryside. Thus, if we classify languages on the basis of stability according to M. Krauss: as dying, being in danger, being safe⁷, – the Chechen language refers to the languages being in danger.

By the way, a mixed speech is not just a Chechen or Russian phenomenon, but a common one, typical to all polyethnic countries and regions. In multilingual countries they try to strengthen the status of the core, official language by means of restriction of the language space and rights of ethnic groups. Meanwhile languages of larger size in turn can also be subjected to language assimilation in interaction with one or several world languages. The perspective of preservation of these languages is seen as the preservation of a language variety in each country and region, in other words, it is understood as the preservation of the multilevel architectonics of a linguistic image.

The problem of functioning of languages that are not equal in rights exists not only in the Chechen Republic. They try to solve it also in other subjects of the Russian Federation.

In the ChR everybody realizes today the necessity of bilingualism, the increase of the level of knowledge of both Chechen, and Russian. At the same time, the

⁵ New in linguistics. Release IV. Language contacts. Compilation, edition and V. J. **Rozentsvejga's Comments.** (P. 49) 530 p.

⁶ The given interviews to experts of linguistics. Grozny. 2005

⁷ Vahtin N.B., Golovko E.V. Sociolinguistics and language sociology. SPb. 2004. P. 123.

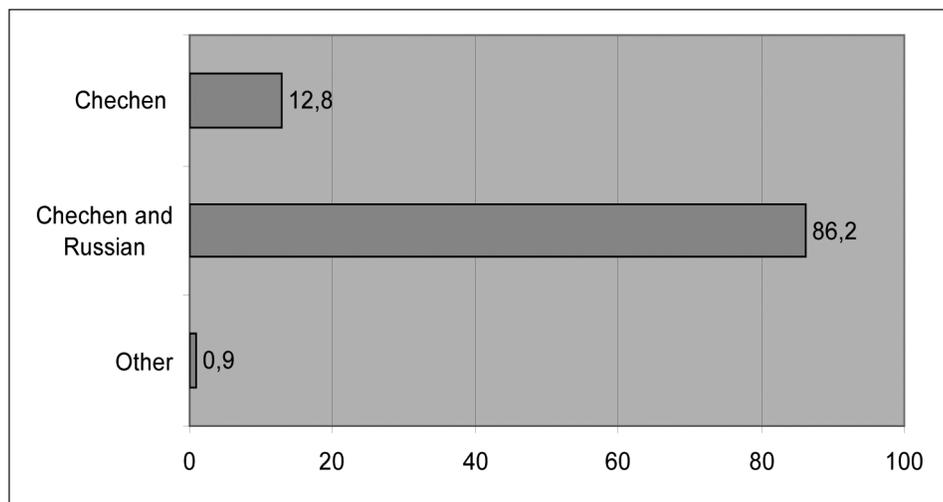
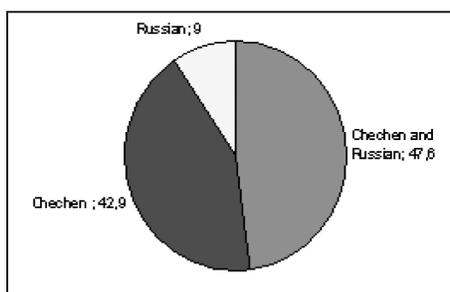
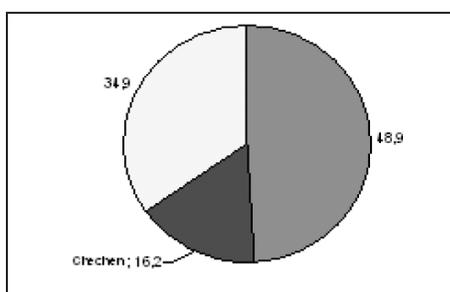
existing language practice limits potential possibilities of the Chechen language. The intelligence that specializes in linguistics sees a way out of the language crisis in switching over using the Chechen language for teaching all the subjects at elementary school and teaching Russian as a subject. In the future they offer to use Russian for teaching all the subjects from the 5th form and teach the Chechen language as a subject. Adygea, Dagestan, Tatarstan have got such an experience. Opponents advance arguments in favor of this or that point of view in the course of the unfolded discussion.⁸

The prospective educational “reform” at elementary school, according to some, will make the educational process at elementary school effective; will contribute to the improvement of the level of knowledge of pupils, development of analytical thinking, and also preservation of the language and ethno-cultural identity. Others consider that the present low educational level at schools will become even lower, pupils of senior forms will not be able to assimilate the material of classroom disciplines because of the weak knowledge of Russian, enter higher educational institutions and study outside the CHR.

Meanwhile according to the findings of the public opinion poll there are about 2.5 times less Chechen people that want their children to be taught in Russian at elementary schools in a post conflict situation in comparison with 1991. **See table 2.** The appendix.⁹ There is a considerable reduction in the number of people interested in giving the status of the official language only to the Chechen one, carrying out sessions of parliament and court, republican meetings in the Chechen language. However, representatives of humanitarian intelligence are still for the wide use of the native language in state institutions. **Fig. 1 and 2.** The appendix. The decrease in the number of those who feel a need for reading newspapers, books, magazines in the Chechen language is observed. These manifestations shouldn't be considered just as indicators of the attitude towards the mother tongue, but also as a deeper process of de-ethnization.

⁸ **See:** Publications in newspapers of CHR (2005-2006): «Daymohk», “Vesty Respubliki”, “Molodezhnaya smena”, – M. Halidova, M.Ovhadova, V. Jangulbaeva, R. Dadasheva, L. Dadaeva and others.

⁹ Sociological research «Interests of multinational groups of the occupied population». Volume of representative sample – 1575 people 1991. Sociological research «Interests, norms, values». Volume of sample – 1060 people 2003.

Fig.1 State status of Language**Fig.2 Language of sittings of Parliament****Experts opinion (%)****Respondents opinion (%)**

In various strata of the population the preference of this or that language depends on many factors: age, educational level, etc. Thus, the least number of people who are willing the Chechen language to be used for teaching at elementary school belongs to the age category of 18-24, and the greatest quantity is at the age of 60 and older. This percentage is high among illiterate people and those who have an elementary education.¹⁰

The choice of a teaching language correlates to a certain degree with the attitude of respondents to the status of the Chechen Republic, traditions and customs. For example, among the supporters of teaching in the Chechen language at elementary

¹⁰ Sociological research «Interests, norms, values». Volume of sample - 1060 2003.

school, 61 % of respondents believe that: a person should follow the traditions, and 37 % think that one must follow civil norms and it is enough to have the national consciousness.¹¹ Migration spirit is also expressed to a different degree among various groups of the population depending on their language “positions”. So, among those who prefer the Chechen language 78.8 percent are not going to leave the republic, and 65.2 % are in favour of the Russian language.¹²

The attitude to the discussed idea in the system of education is also controversial. For example, in 2005 a questionnaire survey of elementary school teachers showed that 70,8 % of respondents disapproved of the change over the Chechen teaching language at elementary school. At the same time half of them agree to change over to such teaching in case some necessary preparatory measures are taken.¹³

Undoubtedly, the language life is influenced by the modern tendencies of globalization, social and cultural universalization. These factors are objective and determine inevitable tendencies. However some language problems are a consequence of the language policy inadequate to public needs. According to 40,9 % of respondent teachers of the Chechen language, the administration of the ChR pays very little attention to the development of the Chechen language, according to 31.8 % it pays little attention.¹⁴

It is hardly possible to explain the decrease of the interest in the Chechen language, expansion of its educational and social functions only by the influence of consequences of the armed conflict. Probably, it is necessary to consider the general context in the Russian space. In 1986-1994 it was characterized by the development of public and national movements, involvement of various social strata into the reorganization process, and then the process of sovereignization of the subjects of Russian Federation. During this period a keen interest in history, the development of national and ethnic culture, the language is observed. However, a tendency of new centralization of the vertical of power, some restriction of the independence of subjects of the Russian Federation have been developing since 2000.

The social crisis in the country, the situation when a lot of strata of population are on the verge of survival, the overall social fatigue, and a military situation in the Chechen Republic overshadowed ethno-cultural and language problems. Values of social self-esteem and prosperity have become a priority for many in

¹¹ Sociological research «Interests, norms, values».

¹² Sociological research «Interests, norms, values».

¹³ Sociological interrogation «Teaching language». Respondent teachers at elementary school-people.

¹⁴ Sociological interrogation «Teaching language». Respondent teachers at elementary school-people.

a new market environment. Such a tendency, according to various researches, is observed on the whole Russian territory, including the Volga region and the North Caucasus.

Meanwhile the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Article 68, point 2, stipulates the right to establish their own state languages for the republics. Their use is declared in public authorities and local government along with the state language of the Russian Federation. In point 3 of this article the right for native language preservation, creation of conditions for its studying and development is guaranteed to all the peoples.¹⁵ Language rights are defined also in constitutions of republics, and many of them have adopted laws on languages. For example, in the year 2006 the Day of the Chechen language – the 23 of April was introduced and it is widely celebrated, the Law on languages in the Chechen Republic was adopted in April, 2007.

As we can see, the level of rights in contemporary Russia meets democratic legal standards, but the level of their ensuring is low. Rules of law only define the space of actions. The problem consists in the inconsistency between the level of the declared rights and level of social and language practice. It demands the development of an optimum model of the language policy that will ensure the combination of various language needs and interests.

The expansion of educational as well as other functions of the Chechen language, will contribute to the further social and cultural progress of the people, prevention or minimization of the threat of language assimilation. However, the educational measure alone is insufficient, it is necessary to ensure the performance of the state status by the Chechen language in full, its transformation into the language of scientific knowledge, political, administrative, business and daily practice. In other words, it is necessary to create gradually such conditions when the knowledge of the Chechen language will be advantageous for every resident of the CHR irrespective of his ethnic background.

CONCLUSION

The Chechen-Russian bilingualism is one of the major factors of ensuring the revival and prosperity of the Chechen Republic, its integration in the Russian and world community. However in the past decades appropriate conditions were not created for the establishment of functioning of the Chechen and Russian languages on the equal basis in various spheres of a life.

There are different perceptions of the condition and role of bilingualism in public opinion, determined by the educational level, undergone experience, demographic features of representatives of various social groups of the population of the CHR. Those people who support teaching different subjects at elementary

¹⁵ The constitution of the Russian Federation. M. 2007. P. 29.

school in the Chechen language more often demonstrate historical fears for the destiny of the language and ethno-cultural self-identification, and those who prefer Russian demonstrate pragmatism and social self-identification.

The coordination of language needs, harmonization of functional sides of the official and “territorial” (“state”) language are to become some of the basic elements for creating conditions for the development of originally equal in rights Chechen-Russian bilingualism and postmilitary (post war) reconstruction of the Chechen Republic.

Offers. Creation of international and regional commissions, the centres specializing in studying a condition and rendering assistance in the development and functioning of languages of ethnic groups.

The organization monitoring periodically the observance of language rights of ethnic minorities in polyethnic countries.

Working out the concept of development of Chechen and other languages of the CHR, and also the state language program created for the nearest and remote period.

Carrying out a sociolinguistic and sociological analysis of the development of the language situation in the CHR on a regular basis.

When teaching at elementary school of the CHR, the ethnic ratio of pupils should be taken into account, ethnic groups should be granted the opportunity to choose a teaching language.

Creation of conditions of equal functioning of the Chechen and Russian languages in all basic spheres of social life in the CHR.

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13. **Sociological Interrogation** «Teaching language». Respondent teachers at elementary school-50 people.

14. **Sociological Interrogation** «Teaching language». Respondent teachers at elementary school -50 people.

15. **The Constitution of the Russian Federation**. M. 2007. P. 29.

The Appendix		
Tab. 2		
what school would you choose for your children? (In %).		
	1991	2003
School where teaching is characterized at elementary school by:		
1. the usage of the Chechen language in class, and Russian is studied as a subject, with the further change over Russian as a teaching language and the mother tongue studied as a subject	65,6	27,0
2. Studying Russian, and the Chechen language as subjects	30,3	66
3. Using only Russian	2,0	4,0
4. by using another language for teaching	2,2	2,8

