Russian-Tatar bilingualism during the post-Soviet period: a study into Tatar language use and Tatar language competency of the Russian population in Tatarstan

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Introduction

This paper examines issues of language use between Russian and other titular languages within the Russian Federation twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of Communism, Russians have lost their dominant ethnic status to national populations in the independent states and republics.[1] Russians never assimilated into the indigenous societies of these independent states or republics during Communism. They did not learn the titular language and did not identify with the titular population or with the state or republic in which they resided.[2] This has been the cause of many tensions within these societies since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This paper particularly focuses on the Republic of Tatarstan. It is a non-Russian republic which is semi-autonomous within the Russian Federation. It has its own local government and its own language policy. Furthermore the population comprises of

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[1] E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 'Types of Identification among Russians in the "Near Abroad"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, (2001), 771-787 (p. 771).

[2] *Ibid*.

approximately fifty percent Russians and Tatars[3] and Tatar language learning is compulsory in schools for all nationalities.[4] In the Republic of Tatarstan, Tatars and Russians have lived side by side for many centuries: as a result, two kinds of bilingualism have developed; Tatar-Russian bilingualism and Russian-Tatar bilingualism.[5] This study is situated in Kazan, the capital and main urban centre of Tatarstan because more Russians reside here than in any other parts of the republic.

Approaches used in this research are drawn from works by Poppe and Hagendoorn,[6] Brown,[7] Fishman,[8] and Iskhakova.[9] Poppe and Hagendoorn carried out a quantitative study into typologies of identities of ethnic Russians in the independent states. They found that language was an influencing factor of Russian identity. Brown looked primarily at language use in Belarus and the functional hierarchy of Belarusian and Russian in different domains in order to find out which factors contributed to the socio-linguistic environment. The questions he used in his quantitative survey asked the respondents how necessary they believed the Russian and Belarusian languages to be within certain spheres. A similar approach was used in the survey for this research in Tatarstan: the questions asked respondents to decide how useful they thought Russian and Tatar were for certain functions within certain spheres. Fishman's work was used to set this research within a framework which incorporates spheres of language use such as the spheres of home, work and information technology. Iskhakova's quantitative research was carried out during the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Republic of Tatarstan. The focus of her research was on Tatar-Russian bilingualism amongst the Tatar

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[3] According to 2002 census results.

[4] A law was passed in 1998 that made it compulsory for all nationalities in schools in the Republic of Tatarstan to learn the Tatar language within the curriculum.

[5] C.f. Z. A. Iskhakova, *Dvuiazychie v gorodakh Tatarstana (1980-90-e gody).* (Kazan: Fiker, 2001).

[6] C.f. E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 'Types of Identification among Russians in the "Near Abroad"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, (2001), 57-71; E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 'Titular Identification of Russians in Former Soviet Republics', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55, (2003), 771-787.

[7] C.f. Anthony N. Brown, 'Self-Reported Russian and Belarusian Language Utilization in Key Economic, Political and Social Domains in Belarus', *Russian Language Journal,* 57, (2007).

[8] C.f. Joshua Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages.* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991).

[9] Z. A. Iskhakova, 2001.

population. Many of her ideas influenced the research design methodology used for this study.

Although there has been a lot of research about Tatar-Russian bilingualism, especially amongst scholars from within the Republic of Tatarstan, not a lot has been carried out into Russian-Tatar bilingualism. What is more, most research focuses on the spoken language amongst the Tatar population. Therefore the aim of this research is to examine Russian-Tatar bilingualism. In particular this study examines if there has been a shift in *written* Tatar language use amongst the Russian population and their attitude towards it. The information for this study is the result of a field trip to Kazan in October 2010.

This paper is split into three parts: the first part describes the methods used to collect the data and the hypothesis; the second part looks at the results of one language test which measured the levels of reading and writing proficiency for Russian and Tatar languages amongst the Russian and Tatar populations. The third part of this paper discusses the results of the second language test of self-reported language use in the spheres of work, the home and information technology to examine how often Russians feel they use the written Russian and Tatar languages to see if there is any language asymmetry.

1. Methods

Kazan was chosen because it is the urban centre of the republic and more Russians live here than in other areas of the republic. Two hundred surveys were distributed amongst staff and students at Kazan Federal University and the response rate was 88%. 90% of the respondents were in the 17-24 age group, so it was decided to analyse the results from this age range only due to the fact that there were not enough respondents from the other age groups. Another reason for choosing this age group was because this generation of students would be the first to have undergone their education with Tatar compulsory language learning. The respondents comprised of 104 Russians and 71 Tatars. The gender of the respondents was 60% females and 40% males.

The surveys were carried out in the faculties of Law, History, Mathematics, Computer Programming and Sociology. These faculties were chosen to get a wide variety of subjects which may reflect the various professions which the respondents would enter after graduating. The hypothesis for this study is:

> *Russians are using Tatar in everyday communications. Therefore education is having*
> *an effect on Russians' level of Tatar and their ability to at least passively understand it.*

2. Language Test 1: Russian and Tatar reading and writing proficiency levels

The aim of this language test was to measure the Russian and Tatar reading and writing proficiency levels for both populations using written evidence gathered from the respondents. This exercise was developed in order to take an objective view of written language competence rather than using the subjectivity of opinions and language preferences.

The respondents were asked to read two short texts and summarize the contents of each in a short paragraph. One text was in Russian and the summary had to be written in Russian and the other text was in Tatar and had to be written in Tatar. The texts were about everyday news and were not politically orientated.

The marking system of this particular analysis is as follows: a score of 1 means 'fail', 2 'unsatisfactory', 3 'satisfactory', 4 'good' and 5 'excellent'. Each answer was marked firstly for grammatical accuracy and style, and secondly for understanding of the text. The criteria were applied to each of these aspects and then a total was given out of 10 by adding the two together. This means that a score of 6 was considered as 'satisfactory' and anything below this would be 'unsatisfactory'. Zero was given for either non-ability or for people who identified themselves as non-performers in Tatar or Russian. In addition, the scores were grouped into two subgroups. The first included all scores from 1 to 5 and represented incomplete acquisition of written language because of the ability to understand the text. The second subgroup included all the scores from 6 to 10 and represented more complete acquisition of written language because of the ability to write grammatically correct language and use an appropriate style.

2.1 Descriptive Statistics

The results in table 1 below suggest both nationalities have similar levels of proficiency for Russian reading and writing demonstrating that they had a good ability to communicate ideas in an appropriate style and with infrequent errors in written Russian. The mean and median scores confirm that both populations have complete acquisition of the Russian language, which was expected.

Table 1: Russian and Tatar levels of reading and writing proficiency according to population

	Russian reading and writing		Tatar reading and writing	
	Russian population	Tatar population	Russian population	Tatar population
Mean	8.52	8.08	2.86	6.13
Median	9.00	9.00	0.00	8.00

On the other hand, the results show a significant difference in means and medians between the Russian population and the Tatar population for levels of proficiency of Tatar reading and writing; the results for the Tatar population show that they have satisfactory levels of reading and writing proficiency for Tatar. However, the results suggest that Russians are not as proficient in Tatar as the Tatar population.

However, if we examine the results of the Russian population more closely we can see that 30% of the Russian respondents scored between 6-10 marks for this test.
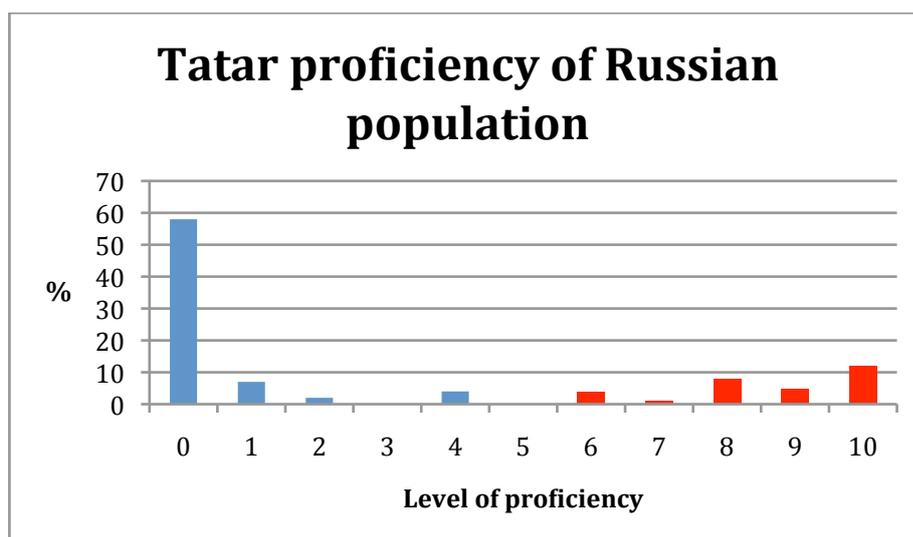

Figure 1: Levels of Tatar reading and writing proficiency of the Russian population

A within-groups analysis revealed that the results for the Russian high scorers were the same as for the Tatar high scorers, which confirms that these particular respondents have a more complete acquisition of the Tatar language.

Table 2: Results of Russian respondents who scored 6-10 marks in the reading and writing test

	Tatar reading and writing	
	Russian high scorers	Tatar high scorers
Mean	8.67	8.83
Median	9.00	9.00

These results suggest that there could be a difference in exposure to the Tatar language between the Russian and Tatar populations. However, the next part of the presentation examines other influencing factors which may have affected these levels of Russian and Tatar reading and writing proficiency with particular focus on the Russian high scorers.

2.2 Non-parametric tests

In order to examine the factors which affected these levels of written proficiency between the Russian and Tatar populations, non-parametric tests were carried out with particular focus on the Russian population. These tests were used to analyse influencing factors on the levels of proficiency. The tests chosen were the Mann Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests. The Kruskal-Wallis test is an extension of the Mann Whitney U test and both are used to compare the medians of two independent variables for any significant differences. The independent variables of language of instruction in primary and secondary schools, higher educational institutes, and which languages the respondents had studied were examined with the dependent variables of Tatar and Russian levels of proficiency.

The Kruskal-Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests were conducted and did not reveal anything significant for either population for the variables of language of instruction in primary school, secondary schools and in further/higher educational institutes, which was expected because 80% of the respondents in the study showed that Russian was the language of instruction throughout all of their education.

However, a marked difference across *languages studied* and Tatar levels of proficiency amongst the Russian population for reading and writing was revealed using the Mann-Whitney U test. The test revealed a significant difference between the medians for levels of Tatar proficiency of Tatar language studied and English proficiency of English language studied: the median for Tatar was 2 and for English it was 0. The median for Tatar language is higher due to Russians' earlier exposure to the Tatar language than other

languages in school. Tatar language learning is first introduced into the school curriculum from the first class and other languages, such as English, are taught in the third or fourth class.

Therefore this suggests that the only possible factor which affects Tatar levels of proficiency amongst the Russian population is related to the compulsory Tatar language learning in schools. This result was expected. All students in schools in the Republic of Tatarstan have an equal number of hours of Russian and Tatar language and literature training. The students are streamed in these language classes according to ability. Tatar students are often in a higher level class for Tatar language and literature than the Russian students.

After examining the influencing factors on Russian and Tatar levels of reading and writing proficiency, we can see that if Russians have frequent exposure to Tatar such as in school, then they will acquire the language with some degree of proficiency. There could be many factors which influence the level of Tatar proficiency amongst Tatars, for example, nationality, nationality of parents and the language of upbringing.

3. Language test 2: Self-reported language use within the spheres of work, the home and information technology

In this section tests of self-reported language use within the spheres of work, the home and information technology are examined. Russians and Tatars were asked to fill in a form where they reported the frequency with which they *felt* they used languages in particular settings and for particular purposes. Therefore the results may have some limitations due to over or under-reporting on the part of the respondents.

These tests examined whether Russian and Tatar were being used equally or whether there was asymmetry between the languages in spheres where both populations have the same experiences within society. Their experiences within these spheres pertain primarily to written language. Everybody has the same opportunity to use Russian or Tatar for activities such as form filling and the Internet, but the choice of language from the respondents could also reflect attitudes towards language use.

3.1 Language Use in the Sphere of Work

Different situations were presented to the respondents and comprised of form filling, official documentation, legal documentation, public notices and technology. These situations were chosen because it was felt that a person working in the public sector or an administrative post would have to deal with these kinds of situations on a daily basis.

Table 3: Language use in the sphere of work

Spheres of language Use	Tatar language		Russian language		Other language	
Official documents	T: 17%	R: 8%	T:94%	R:89%	T:4%	R:4%
Form filling	T: 16%	R: 10%	T:94%	R:86%	T:7%	R:5%
Legal sphere	T: 17%	R: 2%	T:81%	R:87%	T:5%	R:3%
Public notices	T: 15%	R: 5%	T:83%	R:86%	T:6%	R:6%
Information technology	T: 13%	R: 4%	T:79%	R:79%	T:6%	R:9%

R = Russian respondents

T = Tatar respondents

Looking at the results for the analyses on the sphere of work in table 3 above, it is clear that Russian is still the language which is used in the situations mentioned for both nationalities in Kazan. The results also reveal that another language is being used at work by both nationalities. One interviewee reported that all government documents exist in both Russian and Tatar because of the language policy, but that the Tatar documents were just translations of the Russian versions.[10] Therefore it seems that although the language policy states that both Russian and Tatar are equal in official spheres and for official documentation, this is only true on the surface. Russian is the only language which is being used predominantly for reading and writing in the sphere of work. The respondents specified English as their other language.

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[10] Qualitative research as well as quantitative research was carried out in Kazan.

3.2 Language use within the home

This test examines how often the respondents felt they used Russian, Tatar or another language for personal correspondence such as reading and writing letters and for reading and responding to Internet sites.

As can be seen in table 4 below, this analysis shows that the Tatar population reported that they used both Tatar and Russian for reading and writing personal communication within the home.

Table 4: Language use in the home

Spheres of language use	Tatar language		Russian language		Other language	
Personal correspondence	T:23%	R:2%	T:64%	R:85%	T:4%	R:5%
Use of internet sites	T:34%	R:8%	T:69%	R:80%	T:60%	R:70%

R = Russian respondents

T = Tatar respondents

The Russian population reported that they used Russian for reading and writing personal communication and hardly used Tatar. The results show that both populations also used another language for reading and writing personal communication.

As far as Internet sites are concerned, the Russian population responded that they did not read or respond to Tatar Internet sites, but they did to Russian sites. The results show that both populations read and responded to foreign Internet sites, but that Russians read and responded to them more than the Tatar population did. This suggests that both populations use websites in a variety of languages, but that Russians find little reason to access websites written in Tatar. The Tatar population reported that they read and responded to Internet sites in Tatar. The results show that the Tatar population read and respond to Russian Internet sites as well. However, these results reveal that only the Tatar population use the Tatar language for both personal correspondence and Internet sites within the home.

The above results reveal that nationality that could be a defining feature of language choice at home for written communications for both nationalities. The relationship between nationality and language choice is also mentioned in Poppe and Hagendoorn's work.[11] The results of other tests carried out for this research also revealed that there was a relationship between the nationality of the respondents and language choice.[12]

3.3 Language Use in the Sphere of Information Technology

This sphere includes situations such as reading online newspapers, Internet searches, online courses, word processing documents, formal emails and personal emails.

Table 5: Language use in the sphere of information technology

Spheres of Language use	Tatar language		Russian language		Other language	
Electronic newspapers, magazines, books etc.	T:40%	R:9%	T:75%	R:84%	T:68%	R:75%
Internet searches	T:32%	R:8%	T:77%	R:80%	T:65%	R:74%
Word processing	T:21%	R:12%	T:80%	R:83%	T:50%	R:45%
Formal emails	T:13%	R:8%	T:73%	R:84%	T:38%	R:40%
Personal emails	T:33%	R:8%	T:67%	R:84%	T:51%	R:50%

R = Russian respondents

T = Tatar respondents

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[11] E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 2003.

[12] The first part of the survey asked the respondents for personal details such as year of birth, place of birth, nationality of parents, their own nationality, and native language and whether or not they had attended language courses amongst other such questions. Tests were carried out on this information to examine the relationship between nationality and the other personal details mentioned here.

As far as reading online newspapers, journals and books, online searches and personal emails are concerned, the results in table 5 above show that the Tatar population felt that they used Tatar, Russian and another language; whereas the Russian population felt that they used Russian and another language in these particular situations. It seems that Russians use another language much more than Tatars do except for word processing. This suggests that Russians choose to use another language over Tatar because they consider it more useful[13] and perhaps more information is available in the other language than in Tatar. This could be due to there being more online publications available in Russian and other languages such as English. It could also be due to wider access of information from around the globe. The above results imply that a language choice exists for informal situations within the sphere of information technology.

However, by examining the more formal situations above such as formal emails and word processing, both populations are still choosing to use Russian and some are choosing another language. The other language is used more by the Russian population which implies that they find it has more relevance in their everyday lives than Tatar.[14] The use of Russian seems to be dominant in formal situations within this sphere and it seems to be still associated with technology.

To summarize the major findings from this second language test about how often written language is reported to be used by both populations in the spheres of work, the home and information technology, it seems that Russian is used for formal language use by both populations and Tatar is used for more informal situations by the Tatar population. Therefore language choice seems to be dependent on whether the situation is formal or informal. Formal situations are found in the work sphere and some situations relating to information technology whereas informal situations are more personal. As far as attitudes are concerned, the Russian population perceive their exposure to Tatar as useless and not necessary.[15] Both Russian and Tatar are available to use, but they choose not to use it. This reflects their attitude towards the Tatar language.

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[13] This conclusion is drawn from qualitative data which was carried out in Kazan as part of this study. Several in-depth interviews were given to examine Russian and Tatar attitudes towards language use. The Russian interviewees mentioned how they felt Tatar had no relevance whatsoever in their lived and that it was not useful.

[14] E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 2003.

[15] Both results of this quantitative study and qualitative interviews were used to draw this conclusion. The interviews were used to help qualify the attitudes of both populations in this study.

4. Conclusions

The first language test of this study showed that many Russians are using the Tatar language with varying degrees of acquisition which is the resulting factor of compulsory Tatar language learning at school, which is the only possible reason for the results. Furthermore, it can be concluded from the second language test that Russian is the language of choice for formal situations whereas Tatar is the language of choice for informal situations amongst the Tatar population in the spheres of work, the home and information technology. In addition Russians report that they make very little use of the Tatar language in these spheres. This suggests that there is a gap between the promotion and production of Tatar language at school and the practice of it in everyday situations within spheres such as work, the home and information technology.

Overall the language policy seems to have been successful in the sphere of education due to Tatar language being compulsory in schools. However, it does not seem to have changed attitudes towards the Tatar language. Russian is still considered the language of work and technology. If Tatar language learning within the workplace is not compulsory, then people will choose not to use it because they do not need to use it. The hypothesis for this study can be rejected, but can be restated as:

Education is having an effect on Russians' level of Tatar proficiency and their ability to actively use it, but it has not had an effect on Russians' use of Tatar in everyday situations.

The methodology used in this study could be adapted to other such cases within the Russian Federation or further afield where regional language learning has wider significance, such as for Welsh.