CHAPTER 11

BILINGUALISM IN TATARSTAN AFTER THE 1990S: WILL TATAR SURVIVE IN THE CITY?

1990'LI YILLARDAN SONRA TATARİSTAN'DA İKİ-DİLLİLİK: TATARCA ŞEHİRDE YAŞAYACAK MI?

Alina MINSAFINA[1]

[1]PhD, Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Istanbul, Turkey
e-mail: minsafina@yandex.com

DOI: 10.26650/BS/AA14.2021.001-1.11

ABSTRACT

The national policy of the Soviet government has strengthened the Russian language over the whole territory of the USSR. Until 1990, Russian was the only language of interethnic communication. Tatar had a restricted sphere of usage and a low level of social prestige. As a result of implementing a non-ethnic monolingual society strategy in the USSR, bilingualism in the territory of modern Tatarstan and especially in cities was very asymmetric. From 1992 on, with recognition of Russian and Tatar as equal state languages in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the main goals of the language policy in the republic has been to expand the social and cultural function of the Tatar language, raising its role and increasing the number of speakers. According to the current situation, Tatar-Russian bilingualism with Tatar being the dominant language is widespread in rural areas. In cities, especially large ones, the main medium of communication is Russian. Though almost all rural Tatars consider the Tatar language to be their native language, internal migration from village to city favors the expansion of Russian language usage and localization of the usage of Tatar. Urbanization contributes to the wide use of Russian and leads to the Russification of the significant part of the urban population. Russian monolingualism in cities is especially obvious in science, education, and technologies. Today the entire population of the republic speaks Russian, while only 86% of Tatars and only 7.5% of Russians can speak Tatar. With the process of urbanization, these numbers may change soon, not giving a chance for Tatar to become an equal city language.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Russian, Tatar, city language

ÖZ

Sovyet hükûmetinin ulusal politikaları tüm SSCB topraklarında Rus dilinin kullanımını yaygınlaştırmıştır. 1990 yılına kadar Rusça, farklı etnik grupların başvurdukları tek iletişim diliydi. Tatarca sınırlı alanlarda kullanılıp düşük sosyal prestij seviyesine sahipti. 1992 yılından itibaren Tataristan Cumhuriyeti'nde Rusça ve Tatarcanın eşit devlet dilleri olarak tanımlanmasıyla birlikte, Tataristan'da uygulanan dil politikasının ana hedeflerinden biri, Tatarcanın sosyal ve kültürel işlevini genişletmek ve konuşur sayısını arttırmak olmuştur. Günümüzde Tatarcanın egemen olduğu Rusça-Tatarca iki-dillilik, kırsal bölgelerde yaygındır. Şehirlerde, özellikle büyük olanlarda, temel iletişim aracı Rusçadır. Neredeyse tüm kırsal nüfus ana dil olarak Tatarcayı kullansa da köyden şehre göçler, Rusçanın kullanımını yaygınlaştırıp Tatarcayı ikinci planda bırakmıştır. Kentleşme, Rusçanın geniş kullanımına katkıda bulunup kentsel nüfusun önemli kısmının Ruslaşmasına yol açmıştır. Şehirlerdeki Rusça tek-dillilik özellikle bilim, eğitim ve teknoloji alanlarında yaygındır. Bugün ülkenin tüm nüfusu Rusça konuşurken, Tatarların %86'sı ve Rusların %7.5'i Tatarcayı bilmektedir. Kentleşme süreci ile birlikte bu rakamlar daha da düşecektir. Bu nedenle Tatarca bir şehir dili olma şansını kaybetmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İki-dillilik, Rusça, Tatarca, şehir dili

1. Introduction

Ronald Wardhaugh in his *Introduction to Sociolinguistics* points out that monolingualism (as the ability to use but a single language code) is such a widely accepted norm in many parts of the western world that it is often assumed to be a worldwide phenomenon, so that bilingual (or even multilingual) individuals may seem to be "unusual". However, in many parts of the world, the ability to speak more than one language is a normal requirement of daily life, and acquisition of various languages is natural and done unconsciously, while shifts from one to another are made without hesitation (Wardhaugh, 1992, p. 98).

Bilingualism, in short, is a situation where a person has some functional ability in a second language. This may vary from a limited ability in one or more domains to a very strong command of both languages (Spolsky, 1998, p. 45). The linguistic approach to bilingualism implies perfect command of both languages. In this study, bilingualism is accepted as a social phenomenon. In the sociolinguistic approach, the basic criterion for bilingualism is practice, so knowledge and actual use of two languages effectively in daily life leading to mutual understanding during communication (Guzelbaeva, 2013, p. 44) can be accepted as a definition of bilingualism.

The use of one of two languages by bilinguals is not random. It would be better to say that bilinguals are choosing one of two languages according to context, areas of activity, and communication situations. Bilingual people rarely use both languages for the same purpose. Joshua Fishman (1979) shows four main points that influence the choice of a certain language: Interlocutors, the relationship between interlocutors, the topic of conversation, and circumstances.

Bilingualism sometimes can be analyzed together with diglossia, though bilingualism is not always accompanied by it. Charles Ferguson in 1959 was the first to introduce the term "diglossia" into English-language literature on sociolinguistics to describe societies where two variants of the same language are used in different situations. One variant is used only in formal and public occasions while everybody under normal circumstances uses the other one. For example, Arabic-speaking diglossic communities, where the language used at home is a local version of Arabic and the language used in an official situation is Standard Arabic. As diglossia necessarily involves a strong division in the sphere of language usage, diglossia supposes the functioning of "low" and "high" language variation, where "low" is more likely to be preferred during informal and personal contacts or in a domestic environment while "high" language (which is usually the language of the majority) is used in formal and official

circumstances (e.g., education, media, etc.). The language of the majority can be perceived as a more prestigious and developed one. Knowing it can be accepted as a way to educational and economic success (Hudson, 1996, pp. 49, 50).

Joshua Fishman presented a modification of Ferguson's original concept of diglossia. According to Fishman (1967), diglossia refers to all kinds of language varieties, from stylistic differences within one language or use of separate dialects to the use of (related or unrelated) separate languages. Fishman's approach is more suitable to describe the situation in the Republic of Tatarstan. Here, two separate languages (Russian and Tatar) coexist side by side within the same geographical area. Within the Republic of Tatarstan, both Russian and Tatar are assigned the status of state languages, which therefore excludes the phenomenon of diglossia. However, in reality, the tendency to use Russian in formal situations is observed. Tatar in most cases is preferred during informal conversations.

The population of the Republic of Tatarstan consists of 40% of Russians, 53% of Tatars, and 7% of other ethnic minorities. The main languages of this region are Russian and Tatar. It should be noted that until the 1990s the main language as a language of interethnic communication was Russian. Tatar was not studied at schools, had a small area of usage (mainly in the private sphere), and low level of social prestige.

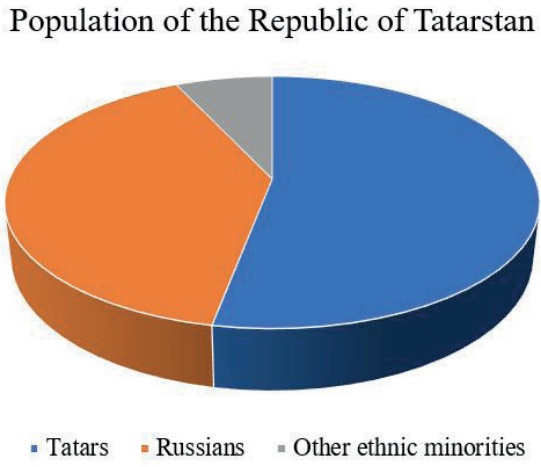


Figure 1: Population of the Republic of Tatarstan

There are several types of bilingualism in Tatarstan. One of the most common and widespread is Tatar-Russian bilingualism. Quite common are Tatar-Chuvash, Chuvash-Tatar, Bashkir-Tatar, Tatar-Bashkir, Tatar-Mari, Mari-Tatar types of bilingualism, which are mainly

spread on border zones of the republic. There is also Russian-Tatar bilingualism as a result of teaching Tatar to the Russian-speaking population. Russian-Tatar bilinguals are usually Russians who have lived in the territory of the republic for a long time or need Tatar as a second language in their activity. This study is devoted only to Tatar-Russian bilingualism, which is bilingualism of Tatars whose mother tongue is supposed to be Tatar (as it is spoken in their families) and they are supposed to know Russian as the official language of the country.

To find out the status of the Tatar language in the republic and show its usage spheres after the 1990s, we referred to the results of sociological researches represented in articles by Tuhvatullin (1997), Valeeva (2002, 2003), Guzelbaeva (2012, 2013), and Minasova (2002).

2. Current Language Situation in the Republic of Tatarstan

The Republic of Tatarstan is a part of the multinational Russian Federation. According to the last census in 2010, there are 180 languages spoken on the territory of the Russian Federation.

During the period of the Soviet Union and its national policy, the government strengthened the Russian language in the whole territory of the country. As a result of the standardization and centralization of the education system, Russian became the language of education in national schools. In this regard, the number of non-Russians who started considering Russian as their native language grew so that in 1959, 24% of the non-Russian population considered Russian to be their mother tongue (Kharisov, 1998, p. 49).

Besides, with the process of industrialization and internationalization in business and official spheres of the life of the country, national languages in cities were gradually limited, so the main areas of their functioning were the home and similar intra-ethnic environments. All official spheres were the domain of Russian. Only in rural areas, people were using their ethnic language in almost all life situations (which remains the same).

With the beginning of Perestroika, in the 1980s, and the democratization of public life, it became possible to start a process of developing and preserving ethnic languages. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, national republics in Russia started being more independent. In the early 1990s, they officially declared their ethnic languages as state languages along with Russian.

Changes in the sociopolitical situation of the Republic of Tatarstan in the 1990s caused changes in the nature of bilingualism and, as a result, in the status of the Tatar language.

In 1992, according to the law *On the nations and languages of the Republic of Tatarstan*[1], Russian and Tatar were recognized as equal state languages. Since then, one of the main tasks of language policy in the republic is to expand the social and cultural functions of the Tatar language, increase its status and its role in the life of the republic and as a result, to maximize the number of its speakers (Guzelbaeva, 2012, p. 35).

Here are some numbers, which show the degree of knowing the Tatar language within the territory of Tatarstan. According to the results of the 2012 sociological survey presented by Guzelbaeva (2012), 61% of all residents of Tatarstan understand the Tatar language well; 53% speak the colloquial language. No doubt, Tatars know their language better than other ethnical groups, but there is an obvious tendency to master Tatar by all nationalities, especially among young people. So, the majority of Tatars, that is 86%, claimed to speak Tatar well; only 4% of Tatars do not speak Tatar at all. Numbers showing the level of understanding of Tatar are even higher: 94% of all Tatars said that they understand their language; only 0.5% of Tatars understand nothing in Tatar. Among the Russians, 18% of them understand Tatar well; 7.5% can speak the colloquial language. It should be mentioned that 18.5% of Russians admitted that they can read Tatar, and 12% can write it. Most probably this is the result of Tatarstan's language policy in education – young people unlike their parents have some commands in the Tatar language, but in most cases these commands are passive. As regards the representatives of ethnic minorities of Tatarstan, numbers show that the level of knowing Tatar among them is higher than among Russians: 35% of them speak Tatar well and 59% of them understand Tatar. It should be pointed out that subjective assessment of language proficiency may differ from real language skills, but these data indicate that there is a tendency to know Tatar rather than not to know it (Guzelbaeva, 2012, p. 36).

The Russian language is considered to be the native language by 49% of all of the republic population, while 48% consider Tatar to be their mother tongue. Three percent of the population named some different languages as their native one.

1 Zakon RT ot 08.07.1992 N 1560-XII "O gosudartsvennih yazikah Respubliki Tatarstan i drugih yazikah v Respublike Tatarstan" (2020, August 11) https://kitaphane.tatarstan.ru/legal_info/zrt/lang.htm

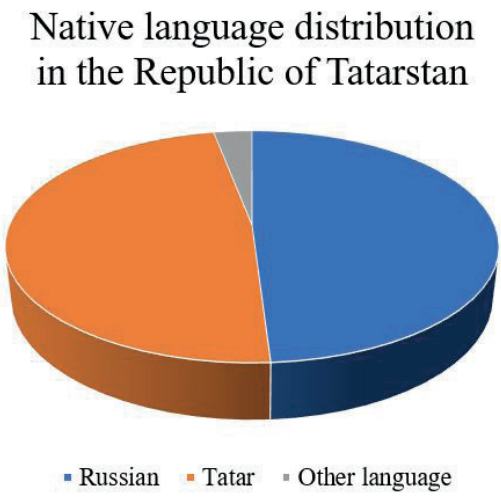


Figure 2: Native language distribution among the residents of Tatarstan

Almost all Russians show Russian as their native language. Among Tatars, 87% of them recognize Tatar, 10% the Russian language, and 2% some other language as their native language. Thus, the number of Tatars whose native language is not Tatar (mostly Russian or some third language) remains the same as it was according to the 1979-year census (Guzelbaeva, 2013, p. 46).

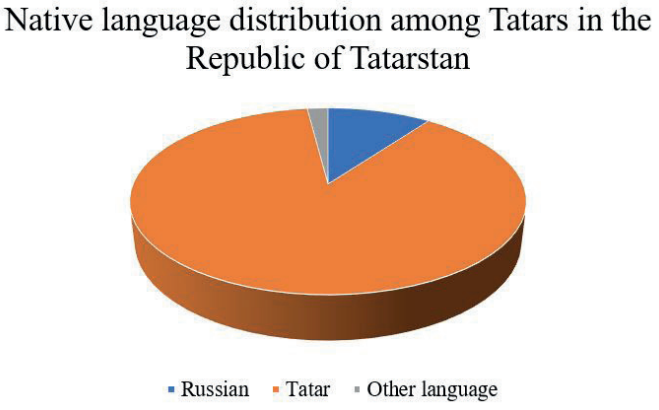


Figure 3: Native language distribution among Tatars in the Republic of Tatarstan

The most noticeable changes are taking place among the young. The results of the Republican Youth Survey show that among the Tatar population the number of those who name two languages (Russian and Tatar) as their native languages has increased (20.3%). Of

the Tatar, 7.7 % expressed Russian to be their sole and first language, while 71.8% of them claimed Tatar to be their only first language; 20.5% of respondents speak Tatar fluently, 42.9% speak both Tatar and Russian fluently (Davis, 2007).

3. Spheres of Language Usage

Family: The level of language proficiency and application of a language in life is greatly influenced by the culture that develops in the family during everyday communication. The family, to a greater extent, influences the transmission of the language to the next generation and ensures linguistic continuity. Almost half of the population of Tatarstan speaks only Russian inside family, more than a third speak Tatar, and 15.5% speak both languages. If Russian families speak Russian naturally, in Tatar families ethnic language is used in 80% cases (almost half of all Tatars speak only Tatar; less than one third uses both languages).

It is important to point out that in Tatarstan even those who know Tatar to some extent but could not learn it properly in the family during their childhood, are passive listeners of the language and particularly do not use Tatar in their active linguistic practice.

Education: The issue of using, preserving, and developing the language is strongly connected with education as well. In the sphere of education, the issue of language usage can be analyzed from two aspects. The first one is the possibility to learn the Tatar language, and the second aspect is the possibility to receive education at any level in the Tatar language.

Learning Tatar in Tatarstan is provided in primary and secondary education and is supported in education such as in language courses, Sunday and evening schools. Besides Tatars, there are Chuvash, Mordovians, Mari, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Azerbaijanis, and other nationalities in the republic. There is a desire to learn Tatar among the representatives of these nationalities as well. In general, among all the Tatarstan residents who do not know Tatar, 43% of them have a desire to learn this state language, 38% do not want to learn it (among them 14% of Tatars and 76% of Russians) (Guzelbaeva, 2013).

The authorities of Tatarstan, along with local media, made significant efforts to develop and expand the use of the Tatar language. Since 1992, Tatar was introduced in the school curriculum of the republic as a compulsory subject to be studied by representatives of all ethnic groups. This has been causing disputes at various levels. There were made suggestions to develop Tatar teaching techniques, to devote much time to developing communicative skills in Tatar, and to reduce the number of hours of this subject in the curriculum. The situation is different nowadays: since 2018, the Tatar language is not a compulsory subject anymore. The

Tatar language classes have become electives, and students can be enrolled in the class upon their parents' written consent.

As regards getting an education in the Tatar language, in the 1990s in Kazan, for example, there was only one school that was giving education in Tatar and one Tatar school for orphans. Tatar schools were functioning only in rural areas. Speaking generally, only 28% of all Tatar children could receive education in the Tatar language.

In 2019-2020 in the Republic of Tatarstan, there are 768 preschool educational institutions where Tatar is used as the language of education and communication, and 679 schools with Tatar as a language of education, while the teaching of the natural sciences and mathematics is in Russian. Professional and higher education in Tatar is not represented in the republic[2].

Media: The biggest media company in the Republic of Tatarstan TATMEDIA has in general 98 newspapers, 14 magazines, 10 television channels, 10 radio channels, 80 Internet sites, and Tatar-Inform information agency included in its company. Television and radio broadcasting are made in both of the state languages of Tatarstan. From printed media, 49 newspapers and 10 magazines are in Tatar, 3 magazines (Shaian, Idel, Tatarstan) are both in Russian and Tatar. The Tatar-Inform information portal provides both Russian and Tatar variants of the site for use[3].

Production: In the field of production, the role of the Russian language is becoming increasingly stronger. The Russian language is extremely important in the life of the Tatar "worker": with the help of Russian, Tatars are involved in industrial life, business, the public life of fabrics, and getting acquainted with scientific and technical literature. At official events in the area of labor activity, paperwork and documentation, the priority is given to the Russian language. So, in general, the enterprises in the republic lead their clerical work in Russian (Sharipova, 2004).

4. Language Usage in Village and City

Up to two-thirds of Tatarstan's rural population are Tatars. Sociologists point out that in rural areas, Tatar-Russian bilingualism with the predominance of the Tatar language is spread (Valeeva, 2002; Iskhakova, 2002; Minasova, 2002). Moreover, almost all Tatars living in villages consider Tatar as their native language, and the practice of using Tatar in all spheres of village life and for communication at the various levels is still maintained.

2 This information was shared by email on personal request of the author to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan (request № М-912/20-1, 19th of February, 2020).

3 http://tatmedia.ru/aotatmedia/ (2020, February 12)

In cities, especially in big ones, the main language of communication is Russian. So, a person from a village coming to a city is forced to speak the language of the majority. As a result, the native language is preserved only during communication with relatives (Tuhvatullin, 1997).

So, A. Valeeva showed that there are differences in the ratio of the use of the Russian and Tatar languages by urban and rural residents. The urbanization process has significantly affected language practices. Internal migration from village to city favors the expansion of areas and situations where the Russian language is used. As a result, the usage of the Tatar language is localized. A city to a lesser extent than a village is focused on the spread of Tatar as a native language. The urbanization process contributes to the promotion of the Russian language and leads to the Russification of a significant part of the urban population. According to A. Valeeva's research in 2002, 76.2% of the urban population knew Russian and considered it to be their native language. In rural areas 17% of residents considered Russian to be their native language and 76.2% of the rural population knew it. As regards Tatar, it can be seen that a city does not favor the spread of Tatar. So, in villages, 70% of the population considered Tatar as a native language and 71.5% of them knew Tatar. In cities, 38.6% of the urban population accepted Tatar as a native language and 44.4% of respondents knew it (Valeeva, 2002, p. 43).

The degree of distribution of the Tatar language in cities is shown in studies by Minasova (2002) and Valeeva (2003). According to data obtained by them in 2002, the use of the Russian language is very wide in those areas of professional activity where modernization processes are especially fast (science, education, information technology). However, the Tatar language is very common among health workers. It can be assumed that this happens because doctors and nurses are aware of the necessary competence in Tatar due to psychological reasons and the need to communicate with patients, especially with elder ones.

The result of another survey conducted by G. Guzelbayeva in 2013 is interesting to be shared. The data collection procedure consisted of the process of applying to various companies and institutions exclusively in the Tatar language. Government entities, educational organizations as well as household facilities were chosen.

During this quasi-experimental study, it was discovered that the process of appealing to government entities entails successful communication between two parties. Appealing to health care facilities was also generally successful. In educational organizations and libraries, there were difficulties in maintaining a conversation in Tatar: the answer in Tatar was either

given reluctantly or not given at all. In consumer services, trade, and public transportation the use of Tatar turned out to be rather uneven, which essentially reflects the linguistic situation in the republic as a whole. It is worth mentioning the positive situation in reference services (e.g., city service 09 and information services of some large companies). As a rule, they have operators who can provide services in Tatar (Guzelbaeva, 2013, p. 49).

5. Conclusion

The use of both the Tatar and Russian languages by Tatars led to bilingualism with differentiation of usage area of these languages. It can be said that in various areas these two languages operate parallelly. However, the Tatar language is more common inside the family (communication with husband and wife, parents, and children), friend relationships, rural areas, and schools with the teaching process in Tatar.

The bilingual situation in cities and rural areas though, has differences. The penetration of Russian into villages has caused orientation to the Russian language, as social success somehow is connected to knowing Russian. But emotionally, the rural population is more attached to Tatar as a native language, which remains the main tool of communication in all spheres of rural life. This happens due to the homogeneity of the ethnic population, their psychology, culture, and traditions.

Among urban Tatars, unlike rural ones, the Tatar language has high importance only in the family and household spheres. The Russian language is preferred in the field of labor, when referring to mass media and reading books.

The highest level of orientation to the Russian language is observed among young people. In the whole territory of the Republic of Tatarstan, in cities, the Tatar language in comparison with Russian has limited distribution and is actually out of demand, though a Tatar-speaking person can generally get information in Tatar in various city services.

In general, after the 1990s, positive changes can be observed in the revival and modernization of the Tatar language. It has started to be used in public administration, education, and the Internet. However, it should be pointed out that the lack of real opportunities to use Tatar in many social areas such as industrial production, science, and IT technologies is observed. In the city, Russian remains the only language of communication in a number of areas, which are associated with general modernization and individual social advancement. In the city, the Tatar language basically remains only as a language for internal communication among Tatars. Speaking generally today, the entire population of the republic speaks Russian,

while only 86% of Tatars and only 7.5% of Russians can speak Tatar. With the process of urbanization, these numbers may change soon, not giving a chance for Tatar to become an equal city language.

References

Davis, H. V. (2007). Building a Tatar Elite: Languages and National Schooling in Kazan. *Ethnicities, 7*(2), 186–207.

Fishman, J. A. (1967). Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues, XXIII*(2)*,* 29–38.

Fishman, J. A. (1979). The Sociology of Language. In P. P. Giglioli (Ed.), *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings* (pp. 45-58). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Guzelbaeva, G. Ya. (2012). Realizatsia yazikovoi politiki i puti viravnivania yazikovoi assimetrii v sovremennom Tatarstane [Implementation of language policy and ways to align the language asymmetry in modern Tatarstan]. *Filology and Culture, 3*(29), 35–41.

Guzelbaeva, G. Ya. (2013). Praktika ispolzovania gosudarstvennih yazikov zhiteliami Tatarstana v situatsii ofitsialnogo dvuyazichia [Practice of using state languages by residents of Tatarstan in the situation of official bilingualism]. *Filology and Culture, 4*(34), 44–51.

Hudson, R. A. (1996). *Sociolinguistics. 2nd edition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Iskhakova, Z. A. (2002). *Sovremennaia etnoyazikovaia situatsia v Respublike Tatarstan* [Current ethnolinguistical situation in the Republic of Tatarstan]. Kazan: Pechatniy Dvor.

Kharisov, F. (1998). Problemi vozrozhdenia i sohranenia yazikov etnosov v polikulturnom obshestve (sostoyanie i perspektivi) [Problems of revival and preserving of ethnic languages in multicultural societies (current situation and prospects)]. *Magarif,* 9*,* 49–51.

Minasova, K. R. (2002). Dvuyazichie kak sposob kulturnoy integratsii etnicheskih menshinstv v mnogonatsionalnom obshestve [Bilingualism as a way of cultural integration of ethnic minorities to a multinational society]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovania*, *8*, 49–56.

Sharipova, N. H. (2004). *Dvuyazichie v Tatarstane: avoreferat diss. ... doktora filol.nauk*. Kazan.

Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tatmedia (2020, February 12). Retrived from http://tatmedia.ru/aotatmedia/

Tuhvatullina, R. M. (1997). Yazik kak natsionalnaia tsennost [Language as national value]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovania*, *8*, 47–49.

Valeeva, A. F. (2002). Vliyanie urbanizatsii na yazikovoie povedenie zhitelei polietnicheskogo regiona [The influence of urbanization on linguistic behavior of residents in poliethnical region]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovania*, *8*, 40–49.

Valeeva, A. F. (2003). Sotsialno-professionalnaia stratifikatsia kak faktor yazikovogo povedenia v polietnicheskom regione [Social and professional stratification as a factor of linguistic behavior in a multi-ethnic region]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovania*, *12*, 126–134.

Vladeniye yazikami naseleniem Rossiyskoy Federatsii (2019, September 14). Retrived from https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-05.pdf .

Wardhaugh, R. (1992). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. 2nd edition*. Blackwell Oxford UK and Cambridge USA.

Zakon RT ot 08.07.1992 N 1560-XII "O gosudartsvennih yazikah Respubliki Tatarstan i drugih yazikah v Respublike Tatarstan" (2020, August 11) Retrived from https://kitaphane.tatarstan.ru/legal_info/zrt/lang.htm.