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**PECULIARITIES OF THE LANGUAGE OF CRIMEAN BULGARIANS
(BASED ON THE POPULATION CENSUS AND INTERVIEWS
OF NATIVE BULGARIAN SPEAKERS IN CRIMEA)**

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Abstract

The problem of preserving the native languages of small peoples in a multicultural region remains a live issue today. The fundamental theoretical basis for solving this problem is the study of linguistic consciousness. It is especially significant when referring to fixing and analyzing the language consciousness of “outgoing” communities. Crimean Bulgarians can be considered such a group. Studying their linguistic consciousness, analyzing features of their linguistic competence today is extremely difficult, since the number of native speakers of the Bulgarian language in Crimea is extremely small, and most native speakers are mostly elderly people.

Keywords

Crimean Bulgarians – Linguistic consciousness – Bulgarian language

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Introduction

The problem of preserving the native languages of small peoples in the multicultural space of Russia remains a live issue today. It leads to an increasing number of studies of their history, culture, and language. The study of the relationship between the linguistic diversity and the extinction of languages is the subject of numerous research at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries. Languages, their current existence and future are the first priority for humanity, since language is the philosophy of the world, a system of knowledge about the world embodied in its linguistic structure and rules. Language is the world itself, and its death will be an irreplaceable loss both for the person and for the world¹.

Representatives of humanitarian and social sciences, classical linguistics, linguoculturology, ethnology, ethnopsychology, ethnoculturology, ethnosociology, ethnopolitology, etc. have studied the problem of preserving the languages of small peoples. The fundamental theoretical basis for this research is the works on linguistic consciousness. Vygotsky², key characteristics and strategies for maintaining ethnic identity³, language policy, dynamics of the ethnic and linguistic structure of the region based on censuses⁴

This task is especially significant when it comes to fixing and analyzing the linguistic consciousness of “outgoing” communities, as linguistic realities and the sociocultural context of these communities disappear. Crimean Bulgarians can be considered such a group. Studying their linguistic consciousness and analyzing features of their linguistic competence today are extremely difficult due to the reasons discussed below.

¹ O. Baykova, “Russian borrowings in the language of ethnic Germans of the Kirov region as a result of linguistic and cultural contact”, *Russian Linguistics* Vol: 41 num 1 (2017): 43–60.

² L. S. Vygotsky, *Thinking and speech* (Moscow: Labyrinth, 1999); A. A. Leontiev, *Fundamentals of psycholinguistics* (Moscow: Smysl, 2003); A. A. Potebnya, *Thought and language. Aesthetics and poetics* (Moscow: Art, 1976); I. A. Sternin, “Linguistic consciousness and levels of its study”, *Vestnik MGLU: Linguistic consciousness and intercultural communication. Series Linguistics* num 483 (2004): 10-15; E. F. Tarasov, *Aktual'nye problemy analiza jazykovogo soznaniya. Jazykovoie soznanie i obraz mira*. Available at: http://www.iling-ran.ru/library/psylingva/sborniki/Book2000/html_204/1-3.htm; ² T. N. Ushakova, *Linguistic consciousness and principles of its research. Linguistic consciousness and the image of the world: Sat coll. of articles* (Moscow: Institute of Linguistics RAS, 2000) y T. A. Fesenko, *Linguistic consciousness: the interaction of mental and cultural reality. Methodology of modern psycholinguistics* (Barnaul: Publishing House of Altai University, 2003).

³ Brubaker, R. *Ethnicity without groups*. Moscow: Publishing. House of the Higher School of Economics. 2012; O. B. Istomina, “The construction of ethnic consciousness in a multicultural environment”, *Bulletin of Moscow State Regional University. Series: Philosophical Sciences* num 2 (2011): 122-126; E. A. Orlova, “Concepts of identity. Identification in social and scientific knowledge”, *Questions of social theory* Vol: 4 (2010): 87-111; S. V. Sokolovsky, *Ethnic identity in Soviet population censuses* (Moscow: INP RAS, 2002); T. G. Stefanenko, *Ethnopsychology* (Moscow: Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, “Academic Project”, 1999) y V. A. Tishkov, *Requiem for ethnicity. Research on socio-cultural anthropology* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003).

⁴ A.G. Manakov; O.A. Chuchenkova, “Ethnic composition of the population in Estonia and Latvia based on the results of pre-revolutionary censuses (1881 and 1897)”, *Bulletin of the Pskov State University. Series: Natural and physical-mathematical sciences* num 9 (2016); D. V. Rudnev, *Language policy in the USSR and Russia: 1940-2000s. State language policy: problems of information and linguistic support* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2007); R. A. Starchenko; V.V. Stepanov, *Language policy in the Republic of Crimea: Language Policy, Conflict and Consent*. Moscow: IEA RAS. 2017 y V. A. Tishkov, “The language situation and language policy in Russia (revision of categories and practices)”, *Polis. Political Studies* Vol: 10 num 24 (2019): 127-144.

Methods

This paper is aimed at identifying peculiarities of the functioning of the Crimean Bulgarians' language at the present stage based on census materials and interviews of native Bulgarian speakers in Crimea. It should be noted that the interviews recorded were given mainly by native speakers of the Bulgarian language who permanently lived in Crimea, but who were immigrants or descendants of immigrants from neighboring regions. Therefore, the authors' findings may be referred not to the sub-ethnic group of Crimean Bulgarians, but rather to native representatives of Bulgarian culture and language in Crimea.

The Bulgarian language belongs to the South Slavic languages. Cyrillic writing combines the Bulgarian language with a number of languages, including East Slavic languages. Information about the Bulgarian population, its structure in Crimea, the level of language proficiency, including their native language, is extremely significant for the research (hereinafter, the authors use the term "native" in the meaning of "ethnic", based on the definitions in the census in the Crimean Federal District of 2014). It should be noted that the methods for collecting and analyzing materials, the list and content of questions asked during the census, significantly differed in the censuses of 1897, 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, 1989 2001, 2014.

The most recent population census (2014) is of greatest interest for this research as the task is to fix the current state of functioning of the Bulgarian language. Some data from previous censuses are also used to monitor the dynamics of some demographic processes that affect the language situation.

Results

The collection "Census Results in the Crimean Federal District" published by the Federal State Statistics Service in 2015 provides the data on the ethnic structure of the Crimean population⁵. According to the census, in 1989 2,186 Bulgarians lived in Crimea, in 2001 – 2,282 Bulgarians, and in 2014 – 1,868 Bulgarians. It is 81.9% of the total number of Bulgarians in 2001. By population, in 2014 Bulgarians were on 16th place⁶. If not taking into account the methodological differences in the approaches to conducting censuses of 2001 and 2014, it should be noted that a significant (almost 20%) decrease in the Bulgarian population in Crimea is connected with three main factors: differences in natural reproduction, transformation of ethnic identity under the influence of mixed marriages and external migration.

When describing the Bulgarians as a separate ethno-cultural group, it should be pointed out that in the structure of the Bulgarian population, the urban population prevails over the rural population (over 60%); there are more women than men, as well as more people of working age than younger and older people. As with the Crimean population in general, the demographic aging of the Bulgarian population can be noted: Bulgarians, Crimeans and Ukrainians are the three demographically oldest groups. If the median age of the Crimean population in 2014 was 40.5 years, for the Bulgarians it was 52 years. Besides,

⁵ Census results in the Crimean Federal District: Federal State Statistics Service (Moscow: IIC "Statistics of Russia", 2015).

⁶ Census results in the Crimean Federal District: Federal State Statistics Service (Moscow: IIC "Statistics of Russia", 2015), 108

there is a high proportion of married Bulgarians, and a relatively low percentage of divorced ones. More than 58% of Bulgarian women have two or more children.

An important indicator in analyzing the dynamics of language processes is the number and size of mono-ethnic households (all members of the family belong to the same nationality). The 2014 census data showed that Bulgarians, along with the Germans, Krymchaks, Karaites, had a relatively low proportion of people living in mono-ethnic households⁷. The presented data can be of great importance for the description and analysis of the generational dynamics of the transferring of the native language.

The 2014 census of the Crimean Federal District included a number of questions directly related to language skills, including the native language. This study doesn't take into account the debatable issue of contextual and semantic differences in the use of the term "native language". 185 Bulgarians of 1,000 called their native language Bulgarian, 806 people - Russian, 9 - another language (Ukrainian, Moldavian, etc.). Thus, only 18.5% of Crimean Bulgarians consider Bulgarian to be their native language. It is a relatively low percentage compared to Russians (99.8%) or Crimean Tatars (74.5%), but relatively high compared to Germans and Karaites (below 6%). Since 1926, many researchers have underlined the domination of the Russian language as a native one for the Crimean population (proved by the data of population censuses of different years).

The census data on language proficiency are of considerable interest for this study. 737 (39.5%) of 1,865 Bulgarians speak Bulgarian, 1,860 (99.5%) Bulgarians speak Russian. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the Krymchaks (2.6%), Karaites (4.9%), Greeks (25.5%) and Germans (22.8%) have a relatively low level of language proficiency corresponding to their nationality. It is necessary to note that the data presented if used in analytics, should take into account the following point: during the survey, respondents are not asked questions that characterize the level of his/her linguistic competence (the term "linguistic competence" means speaking the language correctly and productively in various fields of activity in accordance with linguistic norms). It means that the category of "knowing the language of the nationality" includes not only those who are fluent in the language, but also those whose linguistic competencies are characterized by a small vocabulary (with the predominance of common words and etiquette phrases) and a limited number of morphological forms and syntactic constructions. In addition, the final data of the census do not describe the actual situation of the functioning of dialects, normative language and spoken language, etc.

The 2014 census data are presented in this work in order to characterize the Crimean Bulgarians as an established ethnic and cultural group and to identify the peculiarities of the language situation in which the Bulgarian language is currently functioning.

The special linguistic state of Crimea has serious impact on its current state. The unique language situation of Crimea is characterized by the following features: 1) neighboring languages belong not only to different language groups, but even to different language families;

2) neighboring closely related languages create a situation of linguistic competition (Russian, Ukrainian; Crimean-Tatar, Krymchak languages);

⁷ Census results in the Crimean Federal District: Federal State Statistics Service (Moscow: IIC "Statistics of Russia", 2015), 113

- 3) highly-intensive process of language assimilation;
- 4) multipolarity of borrowing;
- 5) gradually narrowing sphere of functioning of national minorities' languages, possibility of their complete loss (the Krymchak, Karaite languages);
- 6) "conservation" of language norms, expressed in the preservation in oral speech of norms which have been lost in modern language long ago (Greek, Bulgarian).

The Bulgarian language exists in the conditions described above. It should be noted that it's impossible to characterize the languages of national minorities in Crimea as a general concept due to a number of reasons. Firstly, it is the number of native speakers. As shown above, the Bulgarian language in the Crimea has longer prospect of preservation (even within the framework of intrafamily and intragroup communication) than the Krymchak or Karaite languages. Secondly, important indicators are not only the total number of native speakers, but also the average age of the population of a certain ethnic group, the age and gender structure of the population, the average number of children in a family, the number of mono-ethnic households, etc., since these circumstances play significant role in the mechanism of interfamily intergenerational transfer of the mother tongue. Thirdly, the languages of the small peoples of Crimea had a different way (due to historical, political, demographic and other circumstances) during the 19th and 20th centuries. It influenced their current state. A significant contribution to the study of this problem was made by Russian and Bulgarian researchers (T. Balkansky⁸, O.V. Matveev⁹, I. A. Noskova¹⁰, M.Kh. Parzulova^{11,12}, I. A. Stoyanov¹³, S.D. Topalov¹⁴, A.K. Shaposhnikov¹⁵, etc.). In the early 40s of the 20th century, the functioning of the Bulgarian language was already significantly limited. In fact, it mainly was the language of intrafamily and intragroup communication. Having returned to Crimea after deportation, the Bulgarians still spoke their native language, but the degree of language proficiency directly depended on age: each next generation lost significant percentage of their native language proficiency. This situation is not unique. The same can be said about the languages of other Crimean peoples. The situation with the Bulgarian language was worse only because of the small number of Bulgarians.

To achieve the aim of the study, interviews were conducted and native speakers of the Bulgarian language freely switched from Russian (as the language of intercultural, everyday communication in a multicultural environment, including communication with one

⁸ T. Balkanski y M. Parzulova, *Zadkarpatskite Bulgari. Ethnicity. Jesik. Ethnonymy. Onomastics. Prosopography* (Veliko Tarnovo: Znak"94, 1996).

⁹ O. V. Matveev, "Bulgarians of the Temryuk region (based on the materials of the Kuban folklore-ethnographic expedition 2004)", *Synergetics of education* num 1 (2005): 73-80.

¹⁰ I. A. Noskova, *Krymsky Bulgarians in the XIX-early XX centuries: history and culture*. (Simferopol: SONAT, 2002).

¹¹ M. Kh. Parzulova, *Krimskite bulgari: ethnos, hezik, ethnonymy, onomastics, prosopography* (Odessa, 2007).

¹² M. Kh. Parzulova, "About the Bulgarian language space in Ukraine", *Bulletin of the South Ural State University. Series: Linguistics* num 11 (2014): 33-39.

¹³ I. Stoyanov, *Ezikat on the Bulgarite in Ukraine and Moldova in the sociolinguistic aspect. Bulgaria in the Northern Black Sea region: investigations and materials* (Veliko Turnovo, 1994).

¹⁴ S. D. Topalova, *The linguistic situation of Bulgarian villages in the south of Ukraine: notes from foreign linguistics* (Odessa: Astroprint, 2002).

¹⁵ A. K. Shaposhnikov, *Songs of the Bulgarians of Koktebel and Dyautel* (Simferopol: Tavria, 1995).

of the researchers who did not speak Bulgarian) into Bulgarian (mother tongue of the respondent; language understood by one of the interviewers). The topics discussed with native speakers concerned both the personal background of the respondent, his individual strategy for preserving and transferring his native language, other ethnocultural characteristics, and Bulgarians as an ethnic group living in Crimea, peculiarities of traditional life, home lifestyle, family relations, festive culture of Bulgarians, relations “man-woman”, “older-younger”, etc. The whole dialogue was recorded, special attention was paid to recording fragments of speech in Bulgarian (in the “mother” dialect). It is important to note, as the respondents also speak modern Bulgarian literary language and clearly differentiate lexical, grammatical, orthoepic norms of the literary language and native dialect.

A feature of the interviews is the answer to a number of questions directly related to the functioning of the mother tongue, dialects of the Bulgarian language, dialect differences, teaching the Bulgarian language in the family, in educational institutions, as part of nonformal education, and the language competence of native speakers of the Bulgarian language in Crimea. These series of questions were asked to clarify some aspects of functioning of the Bulgarian language that were poorly studied or fragmented in the scientific literature, and also to identify the affective component of the ethnic identity of Bulgarians living in Crimea. According to the analysis of interviews with Bulgarian native speakers, the following conclusions can be drawn. While discussing the topic of the native language, respondents had mostly positive attitudes, which could be reduced to a number of significant frames: “native language is of great value to my people”; “Bulgarian is a link between Bulgarians and Russians”; “Bulgarian is a beautiful language understood by many Slavs”; “Bulgarian has many dialects, but Bulgarians always understand each other”; “Mother tongue is the keeper of the traditions of the people.” Also some negative attitudes were fixed that characterized the attitude of Bulgarian native speakers to Bulgarians who did not pay enough attention to the preservation of the mother language, its transfer to future generations: “They forgot the language; they will forget their father’s home”; “They do not speak their language at home so their children will be “without roots”, etc. It can be noted that even in the negative attitudes, negative connotations are close to the concepts of “grief”, “regret”, but not “condemnation”, “denial”, “rejection”. Crimean Bulgarians speaking dialects do not treat the “dialect differences” as a marker distinguishing “friends” and “strangers” among the Bulgarians. Despite the phonetic, orthoepic, lexical differences (the attitudes “We speak softer than they do”, “They don’t say that”, “We call it differently ...”, etc.), all native speakers of the Bulgarian language are described by respondents as one community, with a high degree of acceptance of differences within the group. The authors associate it with the collectivist character of Bulgarian culture.

Conclusion

Thus, the high level of knowledge of the modern literary language by the Crimean Bulgarians does not significantly affect the preservation of the dialectic features of their mother language. The level of linguistic competence of native speakers of the Bulgarian language is assessed as low. It can be explained by a number of factors: deportation, a multicultural and multilingual environment, lack of interest of ethnic Bulgarians in the study and transferring their native language to the family, the absence or insufficiency of opportunities for language practice. It should be noted that Bulgarians in Crimea do not live compactly. They have a neutral or positive attitude towards interethnic marriages. Opportunities for learning the Bulgarian language outside the family are different forms of mastering the modern Bulgarian literary language, but not dialects typical for different groups of Bulgarians.

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