



## LANGUAGE LAW IN RUSSIA: MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN TYVA AND KHAKASSIA

TAMATA BORGOYAKOVA

The guarantees of use and development of the languages of the peoples of Russia are confirmed in the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) which establishes the fundamental principle of "the equality of the rights and freedoms of an individual and a citizen without distinction of any kind, such as race, language, national or social origin". The Constitution also bans "any forms of limitation of residents' rights according to their social, racial, national, linguistic or religious origin" (article 19). Article 26 states that every citizen enjoys the right "to use his/her mother tongue, to choose a language of communication, upbringing, education and arts". According to article 68 "Russian is the state language all across the territory of the Russian Federation". Republics of Russia "have the right to establish their own state languages". They are used in the bodies of republican and local administration, in the state institutions alongside with the state language of the Russian Federation. Besides, the Russian Federation "guarantees its peoples the right to preserve the mother tongue as well as create favorable conditions for its learning and development".

Language law of the RF is based on the Constitution, accepted standards of international law and international treaties of the RF and consists of the Federal law "On Languages of Peoples in the Russian Federation" (1991-1998), other Federal laws and legislation of the subjects of the Russian Federation. The Federal law on languages gives general principles of state protection and support of languages of the peoples of the RF. According to Article 7 of this law the Federal government works out Federal programs of preservation, studies and development of the languages of the peoples of RF, governments of the subjects of Russia may work out analogous programs on the regional level. Only one such Federal program on Russian language as the State language of the country has been adopted in 2000. In the majority of the Republics regional programs on national state languages were adopted in the 90s.

In general, new pluralist and democratic language legislation in Russia provides peoples of the country with equal legal foundation for revitalizing and development of their languages. Legislative acts on concrete languages are to be adopted on the regional



level. Regional laws are different and depend not only on the variety of language situations and economic difficulties but on the quota of national minority in the total population of the Republic and on the degree of the language shift. So, different models of language law implementation work on the regional level. The word model is used here in the sense of a description of the situation, and not in the other meaning of an object of imitation.

The republics of Tyva and Khakassia are situated in the south of Siberia. They were founded in the beginning of the 90s and in accordance with Republican Constitutions and language legislation based on the Federal ones the national languages of the Turkic family - Touvinian and Khakass got the status of state languages in addition to Russian. Many efforts have been made during the last decade to maintain these national languages. The results are different despite the common Federal legislation. The reasons lie in the different demographic and ethnolinguistic situations in the Republics, and in difference of the regional language laws and their implementation.

Most conspicuous results were achieved in the further development of the Touvinian language. The Tyva People's Republic joined the USSR in 1944. In the 1989 census 96% of total 206 000 Touvinian people live in their republic, making up 64,3% of its population. 70% of the Touvinians live in mostly monolingual countryside. 98,6% of the Touvinians reported their language as their mother tongue, about 60% of them were bilingual with Russian as a second language. Today eight newspapers in Touvinian with the circulation of 14,000-25,000 are published compared to two in 1975 with a circulation of 7,781. 97% of urban and 99% of village children under 15 consider the Touvinian language their mother tongue. In 1995-1996 61% of Touvinian children were taught in their mother tongue at school and 22% learnt it as a subject. Today Touvinian is the language of instruction in 80% of elementary and high schools of the Republic. In the majority of Touvinian homes the mother tongue is the only language spoken. So there is practically no shift from the Touvinian to the Russian language. The democratic changes in the language policies of the early 90s and positive language and ethnic demographics helped to preserve and improve strong position of the Touvinian language. Today it represents the most successful model of implementation of language law in Siberia.

The situation is different in the Republic of Khakassia. And if the first model is unique, the second is more common. The Khakass people joined Russia about 300 years ago. In the 1989 census 62% of the Khakass people live in their republic and make up 11,1% of the population of the Republic of Khakassia. 64,4% of the Khakass people live in the countryside. The Khakass language was the mother tongue of 76,7% of 78,000 of the Khakass and 67,3% of them were also Russian fluent speakers. Average of 54% of urban



children and 79% of village children report the Khakass language as their mother tongue. In 1995-1996 7% of children were taught in the Khakass language and 50% of children learnt it as a subject. Despite the positive changes in the attitude to the mother tongue and increase of number of schools and schoolchildren learning the Khakass language, there is cause for alarm insofar as the stability of the Khakass language is concerned.

According to Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) Stage 6 involving the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language from adult to a child within family life, neighbourhood and community institutions, is an especially crucial period for reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991). The Khakass society is obviously characterized by the symptoms of language shift in these critical contexts.

Language shift begins in cities and the poor level of native language abilities of the urban children serve as its indicator. In 1978 17% of urban schoolchildren were fluent in their mother tongue, 43% reported to know Russian better and 40% did not know the Khakass language (Krivonogov, 1984).

During the last decade opportunities to learn the Khakass language at school has improved. Today, for example, 35% of Khakass schoolchildren learn their native language as a subject at municipal schools in Abakan (the capital of the Republic) while before the 90s The Khakass language was not taught in any municipal school. According to the latest research of 2002 already 31% of the children who learn Khakass in municipal schools of Abakan (Group1) reported that they understand it well, 60% have limited understanding abilities, 22% are fluent speakers, 63% have limited speaking abilities. But despite the efforts at schools, regular, everyday use of the language in homes and neighbourhoods, among adults and children in Abakan remains rather rare. As few as 2% of Group 1 uses only the Khakass language with their parents, 22% - with grandparents and no one reported to use it among friends. More schoolchildren of this Group reported to use both Russian and Khakass: 59% with parents, 60% with grandparents and 18% with friends. 61% watch national TV-programs, 31% read newspapers in both languages.

So speaking abilities of schoolchildren in Group 1 fall behind reading and understanding. Russian has become the common language in the families and among friends. Children are used to answer their grandparents and parents in Russian even when asked in Khakass. Some grandparents and parents deliberately used Russian with the children to ensure their better academic success in school. It was widely spread in the urban Khakass families with educated and successful parents and they were an example to



follow for the rest of the nation. Now after the change in the language policy and raise of self-esteem among the Khakass people it's difficult to start using Khakass again as many parents and grandparents have limited Khakass skills or are Russian monolinguals. Sometimes, it is the lack of practice and habit in the case of parents with fluency in the native language. The remaining 65% of Khakass schoolchildren (Group 2) in Abakan don't learn the language because according to the language law it is not compulsory and not every school in Abakan has organized classes or groups for learning the language. There is no doubt that these children are Russian monolinguals as well as most of their parents.

The situation is much better in some villages of Askiz, Tashtyp and Beja districts where percentage of the Khakass population is high. Khakass is the language of instruction in the elementary school there. According to the latest studies in 2001 100% of school graduates of Nizhniaja Tioja of Askiz district have fluency in understanding, speaking, reading and writing in their mother tongue. 100% of them use it in everyday life with their parents and grandparents, 50% of them use it with their friends. In general the Khakass language is taught to 69% of all Khakass children in 114 out of 275 schools of the Republic. It is a means of instruction at the elementary level of 17 national schools with 600 children (Kyzlasova, 2000).

Recent study shows that overwhelming majority of schoolchildren and students both from Abakan and different districts of the Republic have positive emotional attitude to the mother tongue as a part of their ethnocultural identity and express readiness to take part in the language preserving and developing activities. This is a good reserve for reversing language shift supporters.

Activists of ethnolinguistic maintenance movement, researchers, intellectuals are aware of the negative tendencies threatening the health of the language. Much discussion of the problem appears in the Republican Khakass newspaper "Khakass Chiri" which circulation grew and is about 3 500 copies and in the Khakass TV programs. Usually these are very emotional articles and speeches with rhetorical questions. Some fluent Khakass speakers blame the writers, scholars and actors using the language as their professional means for their Russian monolingual children. Much time has been lost because the stereotypes of the past are strong and many people rely mostly on the official authorities and don't believe that individuals and NGOs may be important in fostering democracy, ethnocultural diversity, in saving threatened languages. But as the authorities represent the interests and views of the majority they will not take the necessary steps without fight for minority language policy. "Most of the time, the active involvement of individuals and groups has proved crucial, whether political parties, community organisations, specifically language related associations, or committed

language activists" (Grin, Vaillancourt, 1999). Besides support in the community at large activists' of reversing language shift need some clear priorities and goals to be set, and demands, to be formulated and given public visibility in political debate. F.Grín and F. Vaillancourt consider this as political condition -1.

Now it has become clear that schools alone will not be able to save the mother tongue because they can maintain the language only as a second one if it is not "absorbed" at home in preschool age. Besides the third part of the Khakass children today do not learn the native language at school and become Russian monolinguals. Now it is also clear that maintenance of a language is not the same as the natural intergenerational passing of the native languages in the families.

The Khakass model shows that: 1) there are some positive changes in the native language skills of urban schoolchildren due to newly created possibility for the third part of them to learn the language at school; 2) in accordance with regional language law Khakass language classes are not obligatory, therefore not all urban schoolchildren have the opportunity to learn the minority language;

3) language shift from the Khakass language is evident and most efforts should be concentrated on the natural intergenerational passing of the native language in the families; 4) the small percentage of the Khakass minority in the total population demands more activities and sacrifice on the side of NGOs and activists of reversing language shift; 5) there is need for officials to establish bodies for the purpose of advising the authorities on the matters pertaining to ethnic minority language.

Despite the difference of the two models it is evident that new Russian language law gives more opportunities to safeguard national languages but it's implementation depends both on political and sociolinguistic conditions in the regions of minority languages.

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