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RESEARCH REPORT

Topic of research.

My research is an examination of the speech of young Tatars (ages 18-30, but mostly 18-23) living in Kazan, Tatarstan, a semi-autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. My goal is to map out who is speaking Tatar and when, and in what ways their speech differs from (or doesn't differ from) "normative" literary Tatar. In other words, I am studying language choice (Tatar or Russian), language change (innovations and interference in the speech of young Tatars) and language viability (the functional domains where Tatar is used and not used, and how it will most likely be used or not used in the future).

Relevance and contribution to field.

For several decades, linguists have been attempting to classify the many factors involved in language maintenance and shift, and the interactions of those factors — this project will expand the typological database with which linguists work. Another contribution of this project will be to the typology of structural changes of endangered languages. There is debate as to whether the structural innovations of obsolescent languages are inherently symptomatic of language death. By studying a language in the earlier stages of decline, this project will hopefully provide a link between the variables and structural innovations found in clearly "healthy" languages and clearly "unhealthy" languages. This should significantly advance the field by broadening the typological database, and help linguists move towards a descriptive and predictive theory of language death.

Approach and research methodology.

My main approach to my dissertation research was as a participant observer in the lives of Tatar young people (ages 18-30) living in Kazan. The focal place of my research was originally meant to be the university, but for a variety of reasons I found a more productive and successful site to be a Tatar social club that met either weekly or bi-weekly in a Tatar center downtown. I observed and got to know reasonably to very well approximately 40 subjects: I participated in daily life, hung out in dormitories, danced in the Tatar disco, participated in religious festivals in homes, went to mosques, was invited on village excursions, visited other cities, and once I had moved into my own apartment, hosted many impromptu social gatherings. All of my observations were recorded in field notes.

I gathered conversational data from my informants in a variety of ways. The first was through conversations taped in my kitchen, where people who are usually conversational partners agreed to come to my house and speak for my dictaphone, after which we socialized. I found this to be unsatisfactory in many ways, however, as many things could and did go wrong in order to foul up data: people wouldn't show up, conversations were interrupted, there were accidents (included a window broken by a drunk in my courtyard at 2 in the morning), and more. Even worse, there was an element of artificiality that would not go away, no matter how long people spoke, supposedly

ignoring the microphone. They knew they were there to talk for me and be data, and this affected their speech: they barely code-switched into Russian, unnatural for almost all of them; they chose safe topics of conversation; they strove for a literary norm and to “speak Tatar well.” So I stopped this mode of data gathering. The second method was to ask permission to record people who were already gathered in my kitchen, people who were there “just to hang out.” This meant that my Tatar had to be good enough to participate in the conversations without forcing people to always be accommodating for me... This methodology worked better than the first option, particularly when people were meeting each other for the first time, which more than anything would cause them to forget, at least temporarily, that they were being recorded. My final methodological innovation was the “home recording kit” -- having searched Kazan exhaustively for dictaphones I put together kits that included a small tape recorder, two cassettes, permission slips (required by my university’s Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects), and instructions. I then asked my informants to tape conversations that were taking place in their usual place and usual time: at home around the dinner table, in the dorm having tea with friends, etc. They then returned filled-out permission slips and tapes. This worked best of all, but also had unforeseen (and foreseen) problems: people would keep dictaphones for longer than necessary since they were using them as Walkmen and using them to listen to music; recordings would be of extremely poor quality; and some people still haven’t returned the kits (having disappeared home to their villages), etc. But all three kinds of recording combined should give me enough data for the dissertation.

For information on language attitudes and self-identification, I used two methods. The first was informal elicitation during seemingly casual speech (which would then be recorded in field notes). The second was recorded sociolinguistic interviews composed of 52 questions, eliciting information on self-reported language use, language awareness, opinions on the new Latinized alphabet, Tatar-language education, and more. Since the interviews are in Tatar, and were done with a good quality microphone, they can be used as linguistic data as well, even for phonetic analysis.

For comparative purposes and data on “normative” Tatar speech, I also made recordings of public domain speech: several hours of recordings of DJs and callers on the three Tatar radio stations, each of which has a slightly different slant and audience, and many hours of television shows, including scripted performances (e.g., morning and evening news) and unscripted interviews or monologues. These recordings are probably not of sufficient quality for anything but the broadest phonetic analysis, but will be useful for morphology, calquing, and code-switching data.

The vast majority of written data was gathered at the Karl Marx Street branch of the National Public Library and comes from the post-Soviet Tatar press (until 1990 there were only two Tatar-language newspapers). I read the entirety of one “independent” mainstream newspaper, *Shehri Kazan* (Kazan City), from 1990 up to the present, and photocopied and typologized all relevant articles. These are useful in a variety of ways: the frequency of articles and opinions expressed therein show the level and topicality of language awareness. Additionally, the articles (including many letters to the editor written by “ordinary people”) give information on language attitudes and show people’s concerns about the proportions of Tatar and Russian, purity of the Tatar language, the rise in “improper” speech and usage, etc. Finally, the articles themselves can be used as linguistic texts for data, particularly with regard to the use of borrowings from Russian (consciously on the wane) and from Arabic and Persian (consciously on the rise). For

comparative purposes, I also culled articles from one year of Watanim Tatarstan (My Homeland, Tatarstan), the government newspaper, and from the entire five-year run of Medeni Jomga (Cultural Friday), a culture- and arts-oriented newspaper. Relevant articles were also culled from post-Soviet Tatar-language journals, although these were fewer: most useful were Fen hem Tel (Science and Language) and Idel (Volga). Additionally, these articles, even when on linguistic topics, were more useful as anthropological artifacts (to wit, who was writing about what and why) than as scholarly sources of information.

Research findings and preliminary conclusions.

I spent my ten months in Kazan focused on data gathering rather than analysis: it was more important to me to get recordings of conversations and interviews while I had the opportunity than to analyze what I had. Therefore my findings are few at the moment and my conclusions are very, very tentative, since the bulk of my linguistic analysis is going to be done here in California. But I will make a few preliminary statements. First, it seems that despite governmental and educational efforts to the contrary, the process of language shift from Tatar to Russian is continuing quite strongly in the generation including college-age and slightly older Tatars in Kazan. (An anecdotal example from my last week in Tatarstan: I was in a small Tatar village by the border of Chuvashia and a group of us went to the disco where I was surrounded by the town youth: all ethnically Tatar, all educated from kindergarten to 11th grade in Tatar only (Russian was taught as the foreign language in the local school), most if not all of them had Tatar as a home language, and yet hanging out at the disco probably about 70% of what I heard was in Russian.) The relationship between self-identification and “purity” of Tatar speech (conscious or unconscious) is not at all straightforward: for example, some of the most extreme nationalists that I met were Russian-dominant or code-switched quite freely with Russian, even in explicitly Tatar contexts that had other people scrambling to keep their speech “clean.” I am not sure that there is such a phenomenon as “pure” Tatar except in the most artificial of contexts: even in all-Tatar contexts and conversations, with Tatar-dominant speakers, Tatars (of all ages) will use Russian borrowings, even as basic grammatical function words, thus avoiding many non-Russian syntactic constructions. Language awareness is at an extremely high level: people are well aware of how much Tatar is available in which functional domains, e.g., people know how many hours of Tatar television there are a day, and on which channels, where Tatar-language higher education is available, when and how speaking Tatar can be economically advantageous, etc. People with low-prestige accents (Kazan) or dialects (Mishar) or even languages (Bashkir) are also extremely aware of their speech, and I met more than one person who was able to code-switch such that s/he spoke both their native dialect/language and the middle Volga literary norm. Finally, interference from Russian runs very high particularly in the use of calquing so that Tatar syntax ends up parallel to Russian (sometimes with exceedingly “ungrammatical” results).

Future research agendas.

Unfortunately, I found believable statistics and documents difficult to find: for example, there is suddenly a new number floating around that Tatarstan is now 51% ethnically Tatar (earlier the numbers given were in the high 40s), but no sources are given for the change in number: a new census? new calculations? emigration? I do not have the time or expertise to sort out truth from fiction, and it would be nice to have clear sociological work detailing just who lives in Tatarstan and where, for one.

In addition, an understudied area is Tatarstan's language politics from the early 19th century to the present day. This is particularly topical due to the ongoing change to a Latinized alphabet and the uproar it is causing not only in Tatarstan, but also in Moscow. Books that purport to be studies of language policy are either out of print and unfindable, or more useful as anthropological artifacts than as genuine sources of data.