

Crimean Tatar-Russian as a Reflection of Crimean Tatar Nationality

This paper is a study of the phonological system of Russian as spoken by Crimean Tatars (CT) in Crimea today, and the political and social ramifications of this dialect. I propose that CT, despite their mastery of Russian lexicon, grammar, and syntax, retain a distinct accent in Russian. The majority of CT children and a significant portion of their parents, born in exile, know the CT language at best on an everyday, household level. Almost 50 years of exile interrupted the normal cultural development that would have fostered the CT language. As part of increasingly intense efforts by CT to establish and reinforce their ethnic identity, their dialect of Russian, Crimean Tatar Russian (CT-R), serves to preserve their linguistic and cultural identity. This linguistic and ethnic phenomenon is concentrated in an area of Ukraine that has long had separatist tendencies. The CT movement has created heightened tension not only in Crimea, but throughout Ukraine. In the region at large, Ukraine foments instability in its indecision regarding CT rights. CT-R is important because it is part of a determined trend often seen among small ethnic groups to fight assimilation into the surrounding majority. Because language is an important part of defining culture, CT-R can be viewed as serving as a basis for motivating CT behavior.

In my paper I explore the various linguistic and sociological factors that have contributed to the unique dialect CT-R. The last decade has been a socially, politically, and linguistically pivotal period in Crimean Tatar history, and also an important stage in CT-R. The Crimean Tatars were exiled from Crimea in 1944 and allowed to return only in 1989. During that time they lived primarily in Uzbekistan and, with no access to education in CT, spoke Russian almost exclusively. Because language is one of the connecting links between generations, CT-R can appropriately be called the de facto native language of modern day Crimean Tatars. My study of CT-R examines language production as a reflection of ethnicity, national pride, and self-preservation in a Russian language dominated environment.

Linguistic variations result more from group affiliation than from individual action, and imitation of classes considered superior plays an important role in sociophonetic change. Several characteristics of CT-R usage indicate that its departures from the Russian norm are likely prestige features for Crimean Tatars. The fact that the younger generation retains some features of CT-R shows that these non-standard

forms have currency in the Crimean Tatar community. It is unlikely that Crimean Tatars consciously try to incorporate these features in their Russian speech, but when they speak Russian among themselves and hear these features spoken by members of a group they highly value and want to emulate, they reinforce the idea that these features are positive.

My description of CT-R provides insight into the Crimean Tatars' view of themselves in the greater Crimean community. This in turn helps us understand the socioethnic dynamic in Crimea. My research and future language and language policy studies can have an enormous impact on research in the field of Black Sea regional studies because language plays such a significant role in social interaction. Linguistic differences can lead to political attacks, ethnic stereotyping, or propagation of class biases. Crimea is a particularly volatile linguistic environment where long-standing ethnic stereotypes abound, and the more we understand about the linguistic situation, the more we understand about tensions in the region as a whole.

There is a widespread belief among CT that language is at the core of ethnicity. To support CT language Crimea currently has: eight schools with CT as the language of instruction and some mixed-language schools (as opposed to a single Ukrainian language school), a CT theater with performances in both Russian and CT language, the CT department at Simferopol State University, the Crimean Pedagogical Institute to train teachers to teach in CT language, a CT library, six newspapers and magazines, and one-and-a-half hours of television programming per week in CT language.

Understanding the nature of CT-R can help researchers understand the monumental internal policy difficulties that the Ukrainian government currently faces. If Ukraine decides to invest in retaining Crimea, it must consider issues of nationality and of loyalty. Of particular importance is the question of national language. If Ukrainian nationalists insist on enforcing one national language, they threaten to ignite the socioethnic situation throughout Ukraine. According to the Crimean Constitution, Russian, as the language of the majority and that of interethnic communication, can be used in all spheres of public life, while the official state language remains Ukrainian to appease Kyiv. However, CT say this language policy does not promote interethnic tolerance. Deterioration of the interethnic situation in the peninsula

became evident soon after the Constitution's adoption, when a new round of violence against CT broke out and anti-CT/Muslim propaganda appeared. These were especially fanned by events in Kosovo and Chechnya. The 1996 Ukrainian Constitution introduced the term "indigenous peoples" into Ukrainian legal terminology for the first time. Article 11 states: "The State shall facilitate the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious attributes of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine." In contrast, the entire chapter of the Main Law of Ukraine dealing with Crimea makes no mention of indigenous peoples or any specific provisions to protect their rights.

Because of the Black Sea region's strategic location and multiethnic composition, the United States has a vested interest in monitoring the sociopolitical situation in the Black Sea region and understanding the social tensions that exist among peoples there. The CT political organization, Mejlis, is an influential minority whose campaign for self-determination contributes to the instability in Crimea. The longer the delay in legislation establishing CT rights, the greater the danger of a more radicalized movement, which could result in a serious ethno-political conflict. Although Russian and Ukrainian forces may fear the politics of appeasement, ignoring CT problems is a delayed-action mine, and so is their unskillful solution.

Properly speaking, it is not a case of Russians or Ukrainians in Crimea, rather a Russian-speaking population, a specific extra-ethnic category. However, the CT issue does influence interactions between Ukrainian and Russian residents of Crimea, and between Russia and Ukraine on the international level. To "rescue" the situation and defend the Russophone population in Crimea, Russian "peacekeeping contingents" could be sent on a mission there to prologue Crimea's incorporation into the **RSFSR**. Russia could decide to create an atmosphere of suspicion between Ukraine and Turkey to objectively increase Russia's geopolitical weight in the Black Sea Region. The CT problem is among those on which Ukraine's domestic and foreign political situation hinges. The CT factor may lead to conflict, but taking this into account has so far played an essential stabilizing role in the Crimean situation.

It is imperative that the world's policymaking community understand how linguistic and cultural centrism contribute to instability and nationalistic fervor in the Black Sea region that may erupt into

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instability in the greater surrounding region. My research provides a lens through which to view the social tensions among peoples of this region.