

The Russian language in the North Caucasus

In the new century*

Русский язык на Северном Кавказе в новую эпоху

As it is well known, the Russian language is the state language across the territory of the Russian Federation. It is native to 144 million people and it has a significant spread in 33 countries around the world. Russian performs a role of *lingua franca* for all the peoples of the country and functions in intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic environments. As the North Caucasus is a part of Russia, Russian is also a state language there as well. The Russian language is a tool of formation of national integrity.

The use of the Russian language in the North Caucasus might be analyzed from the perspective of linguistic hegemony. The Russian language occupies a special place in the North Caucasus as the language of international and interethnic communication. It is a kind of auxiliary national language of contact, the language of intercommunication between the multiplicities of peoples of the North Caucasus. The majority of population use Russian, but only for the half of it is a mother tongue. The problem of the russification of the North Caucasus has been much discussed, and sometimes the debate took a derogative modus. Some opponents of russification argue that dominance of Russian, as a global language,

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enforces not only linguistic and communicative inequality, but insecurity and tension.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union the North Caucasus has experienced a new period of languages development: the Russian language, though continued to be a priority language as a state language, had to give way to many ethnic languages which started their revival due to ethnopolical and ethnonationalist processes. In some republics of the North Caucasus the laws on language were adopted, thus creating new conditions for development of ethnic languages. Nevertheless, the specificity of the current situation is characterized by linguistic ambiguity: although the ethnolinguistic vitality of ethnic languages undoubtedly increases, the Russian language continues to dominate in many areas. Legislation is not the only way to gain the language function as a manager of social and individual lives.

It goes without saying that linguistic and cultural pluralism should be secured. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Russian has always been the medium of unification of different minority groups. It has also been the language of science and technological progress. What is more important, Russian has been designated as the official language. The changing geopolitical situation has established unequal and asymmetrical relations of the Russian native speakers and non-native speakers in the North Caucasus, providing the chance for some titular nations to be in a position to control communication to their own advantage.

Statuses of the languages of the North Caucasus. Modern language situation in Russia is characterized by the fact that in the Republics and other constituent entities of the Russian Federation active lawmaking on issues of preservation and development of national languages and cultures is fulfilled. The constitutions of the member republics within the Russian Federation stipulate the status of official languages to languages of the title peoples. In connection with the fact that the languages of the title nationalities of the republics have received the status of the state languages, of utmost importance are the legal aspects of the functioning of these languages in their process of development, respect of the laws

on languages for citizens and legal entities. Giving priority to the development of the national state language, anyhow, some of the Republics began to underestimate the role of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation, resulting in underutilization (insufficient use) of the Russian language in public areas, as well as reduction of its study in educational institutions.

However, the study showed that currently the codification of the status of the Russian language as a state language of the Russian Federation does not provide it with full protection from the effects of negative factors [1, c. 419]. One of such factors is the lack of agreement on the functioning of the state language of the Russian Federation and the national languages of the republics.

In addition to Russian, other official languages are established in 20 of the 21 Republics (excluding Karelia) and in the Nenets autonomous district (Nenets). 15 republics have one more state language: in Dagestan there are 13 languages, in Karachay-Cherkessia - additionally 4 languages, in Kabardino-Balkaria, Mari-El and Mordovia - plus 2 languages. Thus, in the territories of the Russian Federation, there are 37 languages, except Russian, that are considered state languages (Chechen and Nogai are state languages in 2 republics).

The complexity of the problem is that the republican laws on languages do not always take into account the fact that currently the state of many languages of Russia still does not allow them to fully carry out the functions of the national languages, because they have no established written tradition and established literary norms, and functional styles applied in different fields of communication (science, business, journalism); the terminology relevant to some branches of knowledge is insufficiently developed.

So far as local languages are concerned, not all of them have gained a state status. The preference is given to the languages of majorities. The reasons for that are evident. On the one hand, the Russian language is ethnically ambivalent and hence it limits the ethnocentric division of the society. The concentration of language of intercultural communication in hands of those who yield power in society, its use as the only language (media) of instruction provides the political

elite with instruments of receiving economic and political resources, such as money, power, education, jobs that really matter. In these conditions, many nationals of the North Caucasus intentionally or unintentionally cut themselves off from their traditional culture and language when they switch to majority languages.

The Russian language in the North Caucasus. The North Caucasus is one of the most problematic areas of modern Russia. It includes the 10 members of the Federation, of which 7 are national Republics: Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Ingushetia.

As of the Census of 2010 year, Russians make up 3.6 percent of the population in Dagestan (104000), 1.9% in Chechnya (24382) and 0.8% in Ingushetia (3200). The Russians still account for 20.8% of the population in the North Ossetia and 22.5% in Kabardino-Balkaria, although their number is decreasing in both republics.

The structure of the ethnic composition in the republics of the North Caucasus changes from West to East, from a lowland landscapes to mountainous ones, from Adygea to Dagestan and Chechnya in the direction of increasing of the size of the title ethnic groups. Even before the dramatic events in the North Caucasus in the 90's Population Census 1989 recorded the largest number of Russian and Russian-speaking population in Adygeya, the lowest - in Dagestan. Modern migration processes significantly changed the ethnic structure of the population in the republics, but this general trend has continued so far. Thus, historical shaping the region has predetermined development of two opposite trends - the trend towards regional integration and the trend towards inter-ethnic competition "tearing apart" the socio-cultural fabric of the region.

The issue of the status of the Russian language in the North Caucasus must be considered in the context of the ethnic structure of the population, economic and political situations in the region, the structure of the language situation and regional education ideology.

Alas, high demographic abilities cannot boast only one people of the North Caucasus Federal Okrug – the Russians. In Dagestan, Russian, for example, a

number of Russians diminished during 8 years by 1.1%, in Kabardino-Balkaria - by 2.6%, in Karachay-Cherkessia - 2.1%, in Ossetia - 2.5% and in Chechnya - by 1.8%. Minus demonstrated even such Russian territory of the North Caucasus, as Stavropol region. There was 81.6% of the Russian population, now it is 80.9%.

The North Caucasus Federal Okrug today is home to 9.42 million (in 2002 was at 0.5 million less). According to the Census-2010, population growth occurred in all regions except for Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. The highest increase was recorded in Chechnya (+15%), Dagestan (+13%) and Karachay-Cherkessia (+8.7%). Anyhow, the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus continue to proliferate, despite high unemployment. In Chechnya, for example, it comes to 40.2%. In Ingushetia it is 42.4%.

Causes of Russian exodus. Causes of outflow of the Russian population from the Caucasus region were named many times: the clan structure of socio-economic relations, failure to comply with the legal norms that prevent harassment on ethnic grounds, bad economic situation. There were also various recommendations for changes in these trends.

The main causes are the excess of deaths over births and forced migration due to the demodernization of the North Caucasus, security threats and psychological discomfort, loss of previous high status, forcing out of Russians from power positions and other powerful, prestigious and profitable areas, no social lifts for the young, The withdrawal of Government from solving the problems of Slavic peoples in the North Caucasus is pushing the exodus of Russian population off the national republics, and generates a challenge to national security and the integrity of Russia.

So far, as the language is concerned, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union there is a growing tendency of gradual substitution of the Russian language by some national languages of the North Caucasus in many spheres of social life. There is direct correlation between the level of industrialization and urbanization and the number of Russian speakers, and back correlation with the influence of Islamic factors or military insecurity in the east of the area.

Meanwhile, the Russians are one of the guarantors of inter-ethnic stability, economic growth and languages sustainability in the region.

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