Changing of multilingual patterns and language choices in the Bashkirian Mari speech communities

The multilingual state of affairs in Bashkiria. Bashkirian Maris have been living for hundreds of years in a very special multilingual environment considering the local cultural characteristics of Bashkiria. Although Bashkirians make up the linguistic majority in the republic, it is Russian as second language that is becoming more and more essential among the Mari speech communities. In the regions with a significant Mari population like Mishkan district and several villages of Birsk district, mainly Mari, Tatar and Russian are spoken, therefore the local basic multilingual variants are Mari-Russian(-Tatar) or Mari-Tatar-Russian.

The aim and method of the research. Questionnaires. We needed special approaches to understand and analyse the language behaviour of such Mari minorities, that form quite homogenous blocks in a three-four-language area. Thus, within the framework of the joint project of Helsingin Yliopisto and Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem called *Multilingual practicies in Finno-Ugric communities,* a detailed questionnaire on language attitude has been compiled with 38+5 questions, divided into four thematic groups as follows:

Questions 1–5: personal data (sex, age, abode, education, workplace);

Questions 6–19: multilingual behaviour and language choices with possible code-switching within family and kinship;

Questions 20–38: code-switching in informal, everyday communicative situations e. g. on the street, on the bus, at work, at school; preferred language(s) listening to music, reading books, using social media;

Part 4 (Appendix): self rating of communicative language ability.

The prepared questionnaires were administered personally by our fieldworkers. The data of our attitudinal survey was collected from 71 informants last December and January of 2017, in several villages located in Mishkan and Birsk districts, however only in villages with absolute Mari majority. Of the 71 questionnaires 68 were suitable for complete analysis because three questionnaires had only partially been filled out. Of the 71 informants 49 were women and 18 were men, from three age-groups, (more detailed data of each age group can be found in the first row of the attached table). The research method is quantitative. The used method enables us to interpret some attitudinal differences across generations of speakers with the *apparent time hypothesis* (Labov Milroy–Gordon 2003: 35–37, Sakel–Everett 2012).

Outcomes. A small fraction of the outlined multilingual patterns are presented by the attached table. Here are some interesting phenomena indicating the generational attitude change:

– Mari-Russian code-switching is common even between speakers born to Mari parents and having Mari mates, especially in discourses involving children. Bilingualism, therefore, is present among the majority of youngsters, along with the danger of language loss.

– In the case of two minority languages encountering within one family, the claim to mutually preserve multilingualism is low: instead of learning the mate's language, both parties give up their own, and Russian as a lingua franca comes into view.

The recent days' unfavourable political changes regarding minority languages, along with a growing language right deficit can have a negative effect on the future of multilingual speech communities of Bashkiria.

Sources

Milroy, Leslie–Gordon, Matthew 2003. *Sociolinguistics. Method and interpretation.* Language in society 34. Oxford: Blackvell Publishing.

Sakel, Jeanette–Everett, Daniel 2012. *Linguistic Fieldwork*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Age-grading	age 18-30 (24 female, 7 male)	age 31–50 (16 female, 5 male)	age 51– (7 female, 6 male)	31–50 (1 female) 51– (1female)
Parents' first language (Q6–Q7)	Mari	Mari	Mari	Russian
Spouse's or mate's first language (Q16)	MAR (15) / TAT (1) / RUS (3)	MAR (18) / TAT (1) / (0)	MAR (8) / BAS (1) / RUS (2) / (0)	MAR (2)
Language(s) used with own children (Q17)	MAR (4) / MAR-RUS (2) / RUS (2) / (0) / RUS (1)	MAR (14) / MAR-RUS (2) / RUS (2) / RUS (1) / MAR (1)	MAR (5) / MAR-RUS (3) / RUS (1) / RUS (2) / MAR (1)	RUS-MAR- (1) / RUS (1)
Parents' first language (Q6–Q7)	Mari	Mari	Mari	Russian
Possible code-switching in every day communicative situations	MAR (9) / RUS (8) / MAR-RUS (11)	MAR (11) / MAR-RUS-TAT (1) / RUS (4) / MAR-RUS (4)	MAR (7) / MAR-RUS-TAT (3) / RUS (1) / MAR-RUS (2)	RUS-MAR (2)
Dominant (Primary) language(s)	MAR-RUS	MAR	MAR	RUS-MAR

Table1. A fraction of the outcomes *Changing of multilingual patterns and language choices in the Bashkirian Mari speech communities*