

## **The problem of bilingualism in Tuva**

*Z. Anayban*

*Russian Federation*

*(3-5 August 1992)*

Tuvinian Republic is a large region where the indigenous population – the Tuvinians – and the representatives of other nationalities. The population of Tuva had been forming over a long period of time. The goal of this paper is to show the process of bilingualism formation of that time in this territory.

In 1757 Tuva was conquered by the Manchurian or Zin dynasty during the military defeat of Dzhungaria (the 17<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century). The total number of the Tuvinians got under the Manchurian yoke was 40 – 50 000 persons.

As a result of disconnected and detached settling the Tuvinians had no opportunity to consolidate for a single people. On the contrary, the settling and the administrative structure of that period and also the migration both the Mongolians and the Tuvinians led up to the assimilation of considerable number of Tuvinian groups regarding their language, culture and state of life.

As to the dynamics of the Tuva population, there were 73 000 persons according to the 1916 data: since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had increased 1, 5 times.

Demographic development in Tuva of the period under review is characterized by the Russian migratory flow. The Russian emigrants together with the Tuvinians had formed the main population of the region.

The emigration of Russian peasants began in 80s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when there was peak of Russian immigration to Tuva, the tsarist government of Russia tried to occupy Tuva by prosperous peasants. To our mind, such measure had been dictated by the point of view that it was easier for a prosperous peasant to develop new lands, but not “to form a strong class basis” as some researchers explain. The Russian settlers came to be concentrated mainly in the northern Tuva. The north-east was the second area where the Russians settled. In other districts there were only a very few Russians. They were mainly engaged in farming and cattle-breeding, and partly in hunting. If at the end

of the 80s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were 150 Russian people then by 1910 the number of the Russians had reached over 2000 persons. Later on, especially after establishing of Russian protectorate (1914), the population of immigrants began to grow rapidly: in 1918 there were 11958 Russian settlers that made up about 20 percent of the total number.

In statistical data of 1931 there is most complete information about the population of Tuva and about its national structure. The total number of the inhabitants was 82176 persons. The Tuvinians made up 79 percent and the Russians made up about 21 percent. The part of the town population was very small – 4, 7 percent. According to the data, the literacy of the people of that time has hardly amounted to 20, 9 percent (among the Russians it was 59, 9 percent and among the Tuvinians it was only 12 percent). The representatives of other nationalities, such as the Mongolians, the Chinese, and the Tatars lived in Tuva.

Thus, long ethnic national contacts, naturally, could not tell on linguistic life. The period under review is characterized by the formation of different types of bilingualism. At the same time native people didn't know Russian language, excepting those who worked for hire in Russian gold-mines, and those who worked as guides of Russian scientists. Some of them could read and write in Russian. As a whole, it was a phenomenon for the Tuvinians. Such state when only some Tuvinians knew Russian may be called an "individual bilingualism". At the same time the Russian settlers knew Tuvinian in one or another degree. In 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to A. Kuzmin's report – the chief of Minusinsk okrug – the greater part of the Cossacks was able to speak Tuvinian fluently.

In F. Kon's papers there are interesting facts about the ability of Russian merchants to speak aboriginal language. He wrote that "merchants spoke Russian among themselves, but when they spoke with their shop-assistants they used Tuvinian". It is know that not only the merchants themselves but members of their families spoke Tuvinian.

Naturally, not every immigrant could speak native people's language fluently, but everyone was able to understand native people and carry on a conversation. So we can speak about the existence of group bilingualism among the Russian population of Tuva. Besides the above-mentions type of bilingualism formed much earlier. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the representatives the feudal clique had already known Mongolian language. During the Manchurian rule children of Tuvinian feudal lords learned in Mongolia. Some Tuvinian lamas also knew Mongolian. According to the materials of "Buddhist Congress", in 1928 about one

half of Tuvinian lamas could speak Mongolian. Besides that, the Tuva poor arats living along the Mongolian border also knew Mongolian language.

It should be said, that the late years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to the foundation of the Tuvinian alphabet the Mongolian written language was the only kind of written language used in Tuva. In the first place it was used in press and office work. It was learned at schools in the early years of TPR's existence (TPR – Tuva People's Republic). Nevertheless, by the end of 1920s only 1, 5 percent of Tuva population knew the Mongolian written language. Later on when the Tuvinian written language was introduced into practice, the Mongolian had lost its importance.

At present time school is the main factor of the development of bilingualism. There are three types of schools in Tuva: Tuvinians, Russian and mixed. Tuvinian or national schools are those where pupils have only of the fundamental nationality study. At these schools teaching of children of the 1-8 forms is conducted in the Tuvinian language and Russian as a subject. And only in the ninth form all subjects are taught in Russian. At mixed schools teaching may conduct either in Tuvinian or Russian. It depends on the national group of pupils.

The role of school factor in the further spreading of bilingualism is supplemented by the beneficial ethnic situation – joint living of people of different nationalities, mixed national groups in production collectives, that is the important condition for bilingualism function. In the whole number of population of the republic 64, 8 percent is Tuvinian people and 35, 2 percent is representatives of other nationalities. So far as the mixed national group is characterised mainly for towns of the republic, the ethnic environment together with school factor influence on the language life of urban Tuvinians.

The system of the means of communication exerts great influence to the development of language processes. Its main ways the press, broadcasting and TV play an active role in spreading of bilingualism in the territory of the republic.

TV and radio programs from the capital of Tuva are broadcasted in Tuvinian and Russian, besides the broadcast in the Tuvinian language is 75 percent and Russian 25 percent. As to TV programs, 50 percent is televised in Tuvinian and the same number in Russian.

On the whole the complex of factors exert to the spread of bilingualism in Tuva. These factors do not except, but complete the role of each other. Analyzing the empirical, material

one comes to the conclusion, that the main tendency of language processes in Tuva is the further development and perfection of the native Tuvian language.

At present time the Tuvian language, especially in connection with the decision of the problem of state language status acquires more general social functions and takes steady position in the national press, belles-lettres, some kinds of art, scientific researches, and clerical work. Besides, the spread of bilingualism does not lead to the language change and therefore does not transform the national self-awareness. According to the data of the census of population in 1989, 92, 2 percent of Tuva – people considerers the language of their nationality as native one. This is perhaps, one of the highest among not Russian nationalities index, of preservation the national language as native.

Thus, the analysis of the bilingualism problem has showed that the Tuvian – Russian bilingualism only began to form in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will be widely used during the Soviet period. In the population census of Tuva in 1989 58, 3 percent of the Tuvians know Russian language. And on the contrary more popular among the Tuvian people especially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mongolian language is losing its influence. Because of the lack of actual data of the number of Tuvian speaking Mongolian, at present time we use the results of sociological research. Thus every third among the inhabitants of the borders – line districts an Mongolia speaks colloquial (oral) Mongolian fluently. It is about nine thousand people. If the whole number of Tuvians in the republic reaches 198448, then the number of people mastering the Mongolian language is 4, 5 percent. It must be remembered that if it was a usual thing for the Russian people to speak Tuva native language, then now it cannot be spoken. At present only 0, 6 percent of the Russians know Tuvian. Recently adopted in Tuva “Language law”, apparently, will favour the development of different types of bilingualism.