



ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫ БІЛІМ ЖӘНЕ ҒЫЛЫМ МИНИСТРЛІГІ
Л.Н. ГУМИЛЕВ АТЫНДАҒЫ ЕУРАЗИЯ ҰЛТТЫҚ УНИВЕРСИТЕТІ



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MULTILINGUALISM IN BALTIC REGION AND THE KARAIM NATIONAL MINORITY

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There are fewer countries which have only one language spoken within its territory in the modern world than we could suppose. This is rather the result of various historic reasons than of modern globalization. Some languages developed from one source in the process of expansion and dissemination of its people, as for example happened with the Slavic languages. Other languages came to use in the common territory together with their speakers who moved from a different part of the world, which is the case of English, French, Arabic and Russian in many countries. These communities of newcomers have significantly influenced the culture and way of life of the aboriginal peoples which sometimes led to reduction and even extinction of their own languages. Nowadays a lot of people are born, grow up and live in bilingual or multilingual background. India, China, former Soviet republics, particularly Kazakhstan, are vivid examples. Baltic region presents one of the lesser-known cases.

Multilingualism is the act of using several languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingualism can be defined in different ways but basically it refers to the ability to use more than two languages. A basic distinction when discussing bilingualism and multilingualism is between the individual and societal level. At the individual level, bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the speaker's competence to use two or more languages. At the societal level the terms bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the use of two or more languages in a speech community and it does not necessary imply that all the speakers in that community are competent in more than one language. People who speak several languages are also called polyglots. Multilingualism offers an access and exposure to different cultures. Due to a wider cultural experience, there is a greater tolerance and open-mindedness of differences in creeds and customs. [1]

Different scientific research works suggest that a multilingual person develops creative thinking and an ability to think more flexibly. Such people have two or more words for each idea or object. They are also more sensitive to the needs of listeners as compared to monolingual people. Being multilingual obviously has a positive effect on intellectual growth of a person as well. Multilingual people have a better thinking capability. Being versed in more than one language, gives people the benefit of better understanding. Recent scientific research also showed that multilingualism can slow down the symptoms of ageing by boosting brain performance, and can therefore be an advantage in later life. [2]

According to [3], the relation between languages and the status of language in the multilingual societies are of huge political and social importance. Various languages are often unequal in the society; one language is more widely used and fulfils more functions in the society than other languages. This is the case in most states with a language majority and in most national states with one national or state language, like for example in Sweden. The situation when one language or language variety in a society fulfils more functions and is more widely used than other languages is called diglossia. Diglossia does not always mean that the speakers of the high language or language variety are more numerous than the speakers of the low language or language variety. In many cases, as for example in many of the republics of the Soviet Union, Russian was not the majority mother tongue, but nevertheless the dominant language. In most multilingual societies of today, the speakers of minority languages must know the majority or dominant language in order to function in society or to be able to climb socially. They must be bilingual. But the majority member or speaker of the dominant language does not have the same incentive to learn the minority language. It was the case of the Soviet Union where the speakers of the minority languages had to know Russian while the native Russian speakers almost never spoke other languages. Thus, bilingualism is usually a characteristic for a member of a linguistic minority. Only in cases where there is a power balance between various language groups, bilingualism may be more equally dispersed.

A multilingual society also inevitably means that languages influence one another. A common term for this influence is interference – adoption of new words, phonetic changes and even changes in syntax. Usually the dominant language or language variety influences the non-dominant one(s). This was the case in the Russian empire and even more so in the Soviet Union, where this influence was considered beneficial for the other, “less developed” languages. Also the meeting of two languages often results in what is called mixed languages (pidgins). The attitude towards such languages is usually negative. The mixed Ukrainian-Russian and Belarusian-Russian spoken languages have their own nick-names: Surzhyk and Trasjanka. The inhabitants of the Nordic countries use a kind of mixed Nordic, called Scandinavian or Samnordiska in every-day communication. [3]

Many minorities find themselves in a triglossic situation: local dialect (sometimes influenced by the surrounding society) + the standard language of the mother country (usually taught in minority schools and often very different from the local dialect) + majority language. This situation is particularly peculiar for Kazakhstan: many minorities (like the Uighurs, Turks, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Dungans, etc) are characterized by such triglossia – they speak their minority language at home, learn Kazakh at schools and speak Russian in the street. In the Baltic area two language families have been in contact since pre historical times: the Indo-European and the Uralic language families. Indo-European is represented by three linguistic branches, the Germanic, Baltic and Slavic groups, and Uralic by the Balto-Fennic branch and the Saami language(s). In addition, relatively early settlers in the area are the Tatars in Belarus, Lithuania and Poland, and the Karaims in Lithuania and Poland who have partly kept their languages (of the Turko-Tataric language family) and the Roma (Gypsies) who speak various dialects of Romani or Romanes (an Indo-Iranian language). However, it is worth mentioning that only Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Polish count more than a million speakers, and these languages are the only ones able to fulfil the role of national languages. All the other languages are minority languages, spoken by as few as 50–60 people up to as many as a hundred thousand. Some of them are near extinction, such as Votian, Livonian, Ingrian, the South Saami, and Karaim. [3]

One of the smallest national minorities in Baltic region is the Karaims. They stand apart from other minorities due to their origin – Turkic – and the fact that they belong to the recent newcomers in the region. Karaims are a Turkic-speaking people, their dialect of the Northwestern (Kipchak) language family also known as Karaim. They live in the North Caucasus region of southwestern Russia, in Ukraine, in Lithuania, as well as in Poland and Romania and in Asia in small numbers. In the eighth century CE the Karaims adopted Judaism as part of a sect known as Karaism. The name Karaim is probably derived from the Old Hebrew qaráim referring to readers of Holy Scripture.

Hebrew, in which their sacred texts have been written since the Middle Ages, became a second language for many Karaims. In the 8-10th centuries the Karaim tribal members were subject to the Khazars and the Turks, but managed to preserve their Jewish religion. From the 11th to the 18th century most Karaims lived in the mountainous central part of the Crimea. Their traditional activities were farming, crafts, and trading. Most Karaims now live in urban areas and their modern-day culture and activities are no different from those of the surrounding world. As the Karaims dispersed and many of their young people have adopted the languages of the nations where they live, their native language is on the verge of extinction. The Karaim language belongs to the Kipchak-Polovtsy group of Turkic languages. The closest related languages are Kumyk, Karachay-Balkar and Crimean Tatar. The Karaims have probably had contacts with Khazars, the Alani (whose descendants are the Ossetes) and the Bulgars. The Karaim language comprises a number of dialects: the Crimean dialect, the Trakai dialect (Lithuanian) and the Galich-Lutsk dialect (western Ukraine). The dialectal differences are mostly phonetic and in vocabulary. In addition to linguistic dissimilarities the Karaims differ widely in respect of their culture. By the end of the last century, the Crimean Karaims had adopted the closely related Crimean Tatar language. Now, they speak the middle dialect of the Crimean Tatars. The Slavic (Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Russian) influence on the Trakai and Galich-Lutsk dialects began early and is notable. The Karaim syntax is Slavic, but Turkic origins are still evident in the vocabulary. The Trakai dialect has been influenced by Lithuanian. The Karaim language itself has not had any effect on neighbouring languages, mostly due to the small numbers of the Karaims and their historical isolation. The Karaims have always been multilingual, apart from the Karaim, they have spoken Russian and Polish or Ukrainian and Polish. In the second half of the 19th century, when the Russification of Lithuania began, the Russian influence on the Karaim strengthened. The Karaims in Lutsk were affected by Russification even earlier. The Karaim language lost ground as a common spoken language, although as a written language it came to be used more widely owing to the emergence of a distinctly profane literature. Today the Karaims have no written language. A comprehensive survey of the Karaim language is still lacking. [4]

Karaims in Lithuania

For six hundred years the Karaims have been living in Lithuania. From linguistic and ethnogenetic point of view they belong to the oldest Turkish tribes – the Kipchaks. This ethnonym (Kipchak) for the first time was mentioned in historical chronicles of Central Asia in the 1st millennium BC. In Middle Ages the Kipchaks started to play an important role in the Eastern Europe. European historians and linguists call them Kumans; Russian scientists call them Polovtsy. Following the Turkish Oghuzs, who were the biggest Turkic tribe, in the 10th c. the Kipchaks crossed the Volga and settled in steppes near the Black Sea and Northern Caucasus. Huge territories occupied by the Kipchaks from the West of Tian-Shan to the Danube, in 11-15th cc. were called Dest-e-Kipchak (Kipchak's steppes). They did not have an integral state; khans guided the union of different tribes. Khazar's kaganate, spread over southern territories of contemporary Russia, and in the 9th c. being at its blossom, was famous for its religious tolerance. The Karaim missionaries reached the kaganate in the 8-10 c. passed their faith to some of the Turkic tribes (the Khazars, Kipchaks-Kumans, and others), living in the southern steppes of Russia and Crimea. A common language and religion united these tribes as a nation for a long time; the name of the religion became an ethnonym. Contemporary Lithuanian Karaims are the descendants of those tribes. The Karaims of Crimea, Galich-Lutsk area, Lithuania and Poland who have common origin, past, religion, language (with dialects), spiritual and factual culture, make the same nation. [5]

Their history in Lithuania began when, after the war against the Mongolian Golden Horde in Crimea in 1397-1398, the Polish-Lithuanian King Vytautas Magnus brought 380 Karaim families with him to his capital city of Trakai. They were given the task of guarding the royal castle as the only access to it was across a bridge from the part of the city the Karaim were allotted. Initially they worked as castle guards. In 1441, they were granted the same rights as the citizens of Magdeburg -- known as the Right of Magdeburg by the Polish--Lithuanian King Kasimir IV. This could be viewed as a model of self-government at the time, and the purpose was to ensure that they would

become permanent residents. The Karaims increasingly engaged in agriculture and horticulture, horse breeding and different handicrafts and gradually came to constitute a middle class between the aristocracy and the framers who tilled the soil.

The head of the Karaim was the elected “vaitas,” and he was their official representative in contacts with the Polish-Lithuanian kings. Their houses had three windows facing the street because this demonstrated wealth, while to have four windows was considered to be showy and conspicuous. Initially, the Karaims were settled in Trakai between two castles of The Great Duke, present Karaim Street. Later they were found living in Biržai, Naujamiestis, Pasvalys, Panevėžys, however, Trakai has always been the community's administrative and spiritual centre in Lithuania. The Karaims themselves began to hold it not only a homeland, but as fatherland, too. Throughout the centuries their ethnic and cultural relations with the the Karaims from Crimea and Galich-Lutsk areas were not interrupted either. In order to get thorough information about Karaims' social, cultural, ethnic and religious situation, in 1997 The Statistics Department of Lithuania carried out the ethno-statistic research "Karaims in Lithuania". It was decided to question all adult Karaims and mixed families, where one of the members is a Karaim. During the survey, i.e beginning 1997 there were 257 Karaim nationality people, 32 among them were children under 16. [6]

Due to the very small number of speakers of Karaim and the high level of multilingualism in Lithuania in general, there is also a high level of multilingualism among Karaim speakers. Karaim speakers also communicate with the dominant languages of their respective regions, including Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian. Some also have religious knowledge of Hebrew [7]. Multilingualism is a necessity for Karaim speakers, because without other languages the majority would not even be able to communicate with members of their own family. Most dialects of Karaim are now extinct. Maintenance of the Karaim language in Lithuania is now endangered due to the dispersal of Karaim speakers under the Soviet regime post-World War II and the very small number and old age of fluent speakers remaining. Children and grandchildren of Karaim speakers speak Lithuanian, Polish, or Russian, and only the oldest generation still speaks Karaim [7].

The multinational Baltic region unsurprisingly comprises numerous languages in its territory. A number of languages belong to the dominant group being the state languages and languages of large ethnical minorities. Some other languages are on the edge of extinction, among them Karaim. The Karaims come from the same ancestor as we, the Kazakhs – the tribe of Kipchaks. The more interesting for us is the story how they have come to live in the middle of Europe and preserved their cultural identity up to now.

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