
UDC 316.454.5+39

DOI: 10.33876/2311-0546/2026-1/48-67

Original Article

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ETHNOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY OF THE BASHKIRS IN BELARUS: THE CONCEPT OF *MOTHER TONGUE*

The article examines the ethnolinguistic identity of the Bashkirs living in Belarus in connection with the concept of “mother tongue”. While they clearly identify themselves as ethnic Bashkirs, some of them consider Tatar their native language. The adaptation strategies of the Bashkir diaspora and their inherent ethnolinguistic identification are of scientific interest. However, due to their small numbers, this ethnic community has remained completely unstudied in Belarusian ethnology thus far. The author qualifies the method of ethnolinguistic identification among the Bashkirs of Belarus as “combined.” It reflects the situation in their ethnic homeland at the time when they left. This problem is deeply rooted in the history of these peoples and is part of ethnopolitics.

Using survey materials on the Bashkirs of Belarus, the author showed that the concepts of “native language” / “mother tongue” / “ethnic language” are not always synonymous, since the native or ethnic language may not always serve as a marker of ethnicity but rather as an ethnocultural identifier. For this article, the author relied on field materials collected in 2021–2025 among Bashkirs and Tatars — natives of Bashkortostan. It is shown that in Belarus, as well as outside their ethnic homeland, Bashkirs usually establish Tatar-Bashkir connections, which can be considered an ethnocultural phenomenon. For this reason, as well as in view of linguistic, cultural and religious commonality, the author carried out research on the Bashkirs of Belarus in conjunction with the study of the Tatar diaspora.

Keywords: *Bashkirs of Belarus, diaspora, native language, ethnolinguistic identification*

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For citation: Kvilinkova, E. N. 2026. Ethnolinguistic Identity of the Bashkirs in Belarus: The Concept of *Mother Tongue*. *Herald of Anthropology (Vestnik Antropologii)* 1: 48–67.

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