



Language And Social Structure

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of the study is conditioned by the intensification of language contacts, as well as the development and active use of the majority international languages, that significantly narrows the scope of the ethno-national languages and contributes to their devaluation. However, despite of the universalization the actions aimed at the preservation and development of ethnic cultures get more intensive. Dialectically contradictory trends of modern verbal space are caused by the influence of the homogenization of cultural types and ethnic consciousness increase. The purpose of the article is to establish the dependence between the communicative competence and social differentiation of society in the conditions of growing trends of globalization and the spread of assimilation processes. The leading method of this problem study is sociological survey of bilingual population in the areas with a high level of ethnic composition mosaicity (the case of the Siberian region). The sample volume is 1006 people. The survey revealed that at the present stage the formation and development of contacts in the multicultural region is determined by the objective conditions of the social environment, as well as the subjective personal characteristics of linguocultural interaction participants. Communicative competence is influenced by such factors as: national and demographic characteristics, population density, dispersal of ethnic groups in the region, presence of subnational entities, correlation of urban and rural groups, as well as age, socio-status, vocational and educational differentiation and speech orientation of communicants. Urban lifestyle, violation of generations linkage, language pragmatic functions predominance in the minds of its speakers and high socio-professional activity form "social habit" of using a convenient language of an ethnic majority in all the spheres of life, that leads to the spread of receptive, incomplete, highly ineffective forms of language contacts. The information can be applied in the management and politics in order to minimize conflicts in the field of international and interethnic relations and in order to preserve the multiethnic cultural image of a region and state. The authoring are applicable in the field of national and cultural, educational and linguoecological activities to address the ethno-national and ethno-linguistic issues.

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication in Irkutsk Oblast nowadays provides diversity of cross-cultural contacts, including exogenous, with various structure. A bright example of bilingual communication in the Baikal region is the interaction between Russian and Buryat, Russian and Tatar, Russian and Polish, Russian and Evenk, due to the contacts of local ethnic cultures on the territory.

The difficulty of preserving and developing ethno-national languages in the contemporary situation of the Russian language dominance is increasing as a result of transformation of the definition of a “native language”. Drawing on the empirical data of regional research, we note the extension of the functional basis in the content of the term, overemphasizing the operational possibilities of language in contrast to the philosophical basis of the notion. Since the importance of the functional criteria in the twenty first century is undeniable, the identification of language load level for the analysis of language behavior becomes paramount (Istomina, 2009).

Bilingualism as a special complex quality of neuro-linguistic activity of a human being depends on the peculiarities of the social structures of his community, the accepted forms of relations and interethnic contacts. Social structure as a historically developed form of social relations determines socio-cultural models of behavior, roles, norms, rules of interethnic interactions. This structure creates social qualities, which combine individual consciousness with the consciousness of a certain ethnic group. The socio-territorial substructure (the type of interregional relations), gender substructure (sex ratio), age substructure (age ratio), educational substructure (educational status ratio), socio-professional substructure (types of jobs), confessional (religious beliefs) substructure — all of them characterize the socio-cultural conditions of interrelations and cooperation of ethnic groups in certain territories. Lots of elements of social structure influence the functioning of bilingualism. Taken together, the above factors define the peculiarities of discourse, language behavior and orientations.

2. Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the research was dialectical method, general scientific approaches and learning styles applicable to the subject of the language situation: historical, systemic, comparative, structural and functional analysis. In addition, such methods as synthesis, typologization, as well as some means of sociological research (questionnaire and expert surveys, semi-formalized and non-formalized interviews, etc.).

The data of federal, regional state statistics, the All-Union and All-Russia population census 1959, 1979, 1989, 2002, 2010., reports of sociological research hold by the Levada Center, information of the state archives of the Irkutsk Region, Ust-Ordynsky Buryatsky Autonomous District (since 1st January 2008 Ust-Ordynsky Buryatsky district), information references of administrations, regional and district departments of board of education, the press Committee of the Irkutsk region, information from the Ministry of education of the Irkutsk region, newspaper and magazine publications and materials from the Internet and the personal observations of the author served as informational basis for the research.

Basing on the empirical data of the author’s research (sociological survey of bilingual population “Language behavior: competence and orientations”, 1006 participants, 2012–2016), let us consider the levels of coexistence of the Russian and Buryat languages, taking into account the impacts of the determining factors.

The authors used a multi-stage sample comprising national, educational and professional groups of respondents. The purpose of the research was to determine the degree of minority languages and Russian language proficiency among the population of the Cisbaikal region, taking into account the socio-territorial, age, educational, occupational differentiation (Istomina, 2012).

3. Discussions

There is a few sciences that deal with the issues of language contacts. The variability of research approaches makes bilingualism general scientific and multifaceted problem. The linguistic approach, which is aimed at bilingual discourse characteristics identification by means of comparative analysis has become the most widely spread among all the aspects of language contacts study which are well-known in domestic and foreign science. In addition, language contacts are studied by ethnographers, lawyers, teachers, psychologists

and, of course, by philosophers, who analyze and synthesize all the information received for the development of a stable ethno-positional identification of society.

Under present-day conditions of society ideology standardization the problem of ethno-identification is becoming increasingly important. The processes of ethno-linguistic identification are associated with communication and social behavior principles selection, ethnic interactions types. The features of ethno-national character of ethnic identity were studied by such researches as A. O. Boronoeva, N. A. Narochnitskaya, Yu. E. Prokhorova, L. V. Savinova, A. Yu. Hamnaeva. The contribution of language to a person identification process determines its place in the national and ethno-linguistic political relations. The current state of ethno-linguistic policy is analyzed in the academic papers of S. E. Rybakov, R. H. Simonian, Zh. T. Toshchenko and V. N. Yarskaya. Attitude to language, its status, levels of competence and sphere of functional application are directly dependent on national policy systems in a region and state. In the modern multi-cultural environment language policy as a tool for managing international and interethnic relations acquires the functions of control and regulation of social relations.

Link between ethnic and linguistic identification and specific forms of social behavior are described by L. Bloomfield, L. N. Gumilyov, E. Fromm. The special role of lacunae, individual manifestations of culture as a means of expressing dispositional subjects of culture and the conditions of deeper objective self-assessment of the subjects data are described in the works of E. Haugen, J. Habermas and A. Schyutz. The need for cultural mirror to identify the properties of a person's worldview, including the language one was identified in the works of S. Goddard, C. H. Cooley and L. V. Shcherba.

In modern conditions language is understood as an indicator by means of which we can reveal many layers of social life. Bilingualism is indispensable attribute of the social life of a multi-ethnic region. The problems of formation of high-grade deep bilingual competencies are described by L. Leopold, J. Ronge, M. N. Pevzner and A. G. Shirin. The current situation about language contact between interethnic groups in the modern society, backed by the policy of cooperation and interaction between the peoples, indicates a need for the further theoretical understanding of the problem from the standpoint of an integrated approach based on actual linguistic, philosophical, sociological, psychological and pedagogical aspects. In the situation of ethnic and cultural pluralism, social importance of bilingualism is incontestable.

As is evident from the above works review, the scientific literature covers many aspects of linguistic contacts in modern society, especially in linguistic aspect. At the same time a number of important aspects of this complex problem were not quite fully understood by society and philosophers. Among them are the essence and basic forms of language contact in modern Russian society, in its regional entities. The basic tendencies of contacts development in the context of growing globalization remain poorly studied. The nature and characteristics of linguistic contacts in regional multi-ethnic environment also need to be analyzed. The influence of social structure on the dynamics of verbal behavior remains understudied. This determined the subject of the research, its purpose, objectives and methods.

4. Results

4.1. Socio-territorial substructure of bilingualism

The differences based on socio-territorial affiliation in the system of formed bilingual competences influence the choice of communication instrument. For example, the urban environment significantly decreases the degree of intensity of cross-national linguistic contacts providing information channels for monolingual discourse. The low index of national diversity in urban settlements determines the predominance of the language of ethnic majority, narrowing the "living space" for ethno-national languages, especially in regulated spheres. As in most

educational establishments instruction and training is performed in Russian, and other ethnic languages are not even included in the curriculum, the language of ethnic majority (Russian) becomes the only instrument of spoken communication, and the level of written language skills of ethno-national (non-Russian) languages in urban school students decreases considerably.

The high proportion of the Russian language in the structure of regional language behavior affects the levels of ethno-linguistic competences. In the self-estimation of reading abilities in the Buryat language, 9.0% of urban Buryats and 31.4% of rural respondents state fluent reading, 7.0% and 30.3% respectively register reading with difficulty; 7.0% and 23.2% write easily, while 8.0% and 26.5% write with difficulty. Certainly, the subjectivity of evaluation has its bearing on the results, which may be significantly corrected at objective consideration. The self-evaluation of listening/speaking skills in the national language demonstrates higher indicators: “understand easily” is marked by 71.1% urban Buryats and 91.9% rural Buryats, “understand with difficulty” — 9.0% and 7.9%, “speak fluently” — 62.7% and 80.3%, “speak with difficulty” — 16.0% and 15.5%, respectively (Istomina, 2012). The levels of writing and reading skills being so low demonstrates that only the reproductive and receptive types of bilingualism are common in the region. The level of language competence is inseparably connected with the degree of functional load of this language, thus, decreasing language competence reflects the decrease of functional load and declining actual use of a language.

The evident shift of ethnic languages in the region into the spheres of conversational use objectively decreases the need for writing skills. If a language is spoken only in certain socio-linguistic spheres, writing and reading skills are gradually depreciated (Istomina, 2011). In the modern society, as a result of technological development, personal correspondence loses its position of an independent type of language interaction; writing in the ethnic language of a group becomes unnecessary.

The language behavior of Buryats living in the urban environment is characterized by variable, alternate usage of the ethnic and Russian languages; in family communication with children the Buryat language is used in 33% of situations, with grown-ups — 63%, with friends — 21%, at work — 4%. The rural respondents use their native language more often: in family communication with children — 40.2%, with grown-ups — 42.2%, with friends — 53.1%, at work — 18.8%. Such language situations as “reading”, “watching TV”, “writing”, “appeals to authorities” are mediated only with the majority language (Istomina, 2012). To a greater extent, bilingual communications are characteristic of rural territories, in which traditional features of culture are preserved.

The social characteristics of linguistic identity based on territorial differentiations determine the forms of language behavior and the choice of communication instrument in different spheres of life. The socio-psychological context of communication accepted in a certain settlement is the basis for building an appropriate model of linguistic contacts.

4.2. Gender substructure of bilingualism

Gender as social sex, i.e. the set of socio-psychological characteristics of linguistic identity, has a significant effect on language behavior. Gender identification determines the peculiarities of social roles and the level of communicative competence. Differences in sex are reflected in the structure of linguistic identity that includes verbal, semantic, cognitive, pragmatic levels (from elementary production of speech to perception and evaluation of speech operations). On account of the pragmatic level, which provides interaction with motivation and goal, it is evident that the choice of language means is dependent on the gender (social sex) of communicants.

In the theory of F. Mounier and O. Jespersen (1924), femininity of speech is reflected in more conservative usage of language, which is especially characteristic of emigrants. O. Jespersen notes greater willingness to learn

a new language in men and explains it by their need for intensive work activity. And on the contrary, women focus on referential, intra-ethnic, family household communication, which determines the tendencies to monolingualism of their speech on the basis of ethnic language. However, in the modern world, the equality of social rights and guarantees reflects on language competences. The increasing social activity of women is projected on leveling the differences in language behavior of social genders. The knowledge of three and more languages (Russian, Buryat, one or two European ones) is mentioned by 28.2% men and 30.2% women, the knowledge of Russian only by 2.3% and 2.7%, respectively. Nevertheless, gender differences appear in the determination of functional priority of language: among men, the Buryat language is used in 2.3% cases, among women — in 5.9% (Istomina, 2012).

The results of the research give reason to believe that gender stratification, though to a lower degree than before, is able to exert pressure on language orientations of communicants. Smoothing the differences in rights between social genders and increasing social role of women in the society are able to change language competence and transform language preferences among social groups.

4.3. Age substructure of bilingualism

Bilingualism in the aspect of age characteristics allows to trace the stages in the history of bilingual education development, reflects the tendencies of national policy in the region and the whole country. In the end of the 1990s, the so-called “national component” was introduced into the school curriculum; the primary and secondary schools in ethnic settlements (mostly rural) started teaching the Buryat, Polish, Tatar, Evenk, Tofalar languages as separate subjects, which allowed younger people to be involved into bilingual relationships. Yet, the largest percentage of fluent language use (including all four language skills) is noted among the older age group, for whom the native language remains an effective means of communication. A direct relation between age and language competence is traced: the older the respondent, the higher his level of ethnic language. The dichotomous dependence between age and language behavior is confirmed by the choice of language in official and personal communication: older people use their native language more often, demonstrating the qualities of bilingualism. The spheres of broader co-functioning of languages are, again, household, family, referential communication. The co-functioning of the Russian and Buryat languages in household communication with children is characteristic of 20.4% of the respondents aged 14–20, 31.6% of those aged 21–40, 51.4% aged 41–60, 50.0% aged 61–80 (Istomina, 2012). In the modern conditions, when the link between generations is broken and children live separately from their parents, the pressure of the “prestigious”, convenient, majority language can become fatal for preserving and functioning of the ethnic language even in family–household communication. Similar processes and phenomena occur in many other ethno-national languages of the multicultural region and country as a whole.

4.4. Educational substructure of bilingualism

Among other factors, the educational status of an individual has a considerable influence on language behavior expressed in the level of language competence, in the functional priority/secondariness of language, in attitude to it, understanding its social roles, language preferences in typical spheres of communication.

The spoken form of language is more available for all educational groups, while the written form, which requires additional systemic intellectual efforts, depends on educational status. As A. A. Potebnya (1862) puts it, personal development correlates with national development, strengthening national identity. Nevertheless, the knowledge of a language does not imply the demand for it in everyday life; knowing a language does not mean using it. The respondents with primary education choose the Russian language as the main means of

communication in 63.9% cases and those with higher education — in 97.7%. Active involvement in the official and business sphere, professional work, social activity determines a greater need for the majority language; it reduces the frequency of switching linguistic codes, imposing Russian in the situations when the ethno-national language could and must be used. The results of our research prove that the higher the education of a person is, the more frequently he uses Russian as the instrument of communication, the lower the proportion of native language is in his discourse.

In case of several coexisting languages on one territory, a bilingual user, entering various communicative situations, always has to choose a language as the instrument of communication. As bilingualism in the system of social relations requires a choice of a language, determining its role and status, the term “preferred language” is introduced. After analyzing all objective and subjective factors determining a linguistic situation and language behavior of communicants, a language is selected, which is appropriate and suitable at this very moment for achieving the goal of communication. More often, the preferred language appears to be oriented to the social environment aiming to solve a large number of communicative tasks.

High educational status as a professional and social resource forms language behavior relevant to communicative preferences of a social group. The research results confirm the dependence of language orientations on the educational differentiation of population: the increase of this status corresponds to the decrease in the activity of language contacts on the basis of the Russian and ethnic languages, and increases the contacts between cross-national and European languages.

4.5. Socio-professional substructure of bilingualism

Social position and professional status also appear to be important factors influencing the process of determining the preferred language. Different groups of bilingual society have different level of language use. Five social groups participated in the research: students/school students, professional employees, non-professional employees, pensioners, unemployed people. The distribution of functional load depends on the level of involvement into social life: among students, the Russian language is 100% preferable, among non-professional employees — 97.5%, among professional employees — 97.1%, among pensioners — 77.6% , among unemployed — 31.5% (Istomina, 2012).

Active use of a language in the professional sphere over a long period of time forms a social habit of transferring the language preferences from this sphere to other levels of communication, including referential communication. Absence of affiliation with a professional group, quitting participation in official socio-industrial relations allows a person to choose the model of language behavior basing on his personal attitudes. The determining criteria in the choice of language are individual preferences of the speaker and socio-ethnic characteristics of his collocutor, which explains the need for bilingual communications in the social groups living in national settlements. The dependence of language behavior on the socio-professional structure of the society is expressed in the tendency towards increasing the importance of bilingual competences and their realization in actual discourse in case of decreased professional activity.

4.6. Confessional substructure of bilingualism

Religion as a worldview based on belief in a higher transcendent power, in the supernatural, is an important regulator of social relations in the modern poly-mentality of society. As religion is understood as “spiritual support”, it affects the content and expression of modern cultures, character of their interactions; it is able to promote preservation of tradition in culture. Performing rituals suggests the knowledge of language of a certain cult, which is why preservation of traditional confessions of ethnic groups on the territory of the region promotes

preservation of these ethnic languages.

Over the last twenty years, we have marked strengthening tendencies of increasing attention to religious and confessional organizations and groups: in 1990, 35 of them were registered in the region, in 1999 more than 250, nowadays there are more than 300 religious organizations, 283 of them are officially registered in the Department of Federal Registration Service. They relate to 21 confessions, dominating among them are: Orthodoxy — 75%, Islam — 6%, Protestantism — 5%, Buddhism — 2.5%, Judaism — 1.5%, Catholicism — 1%, shamanism — 0.8% (Istomina, 2012). Leaders of religious organizations are members of the Public Chamber (formed in 2007) as well as the Interconfessional Council of the Region, and they participate in the work of councils and committees on humanitarian and social issues.

The analysis of social structure exemplified by the regional type of cross-ethnic interactions proves that language behavior in many cases derives from social behavior of individuals. It is important to remember that the factors forming situational social settings and affecting the choice of language include, among others, the needs of speakers, their relations and roles, complementarity, social distance, etc. Language preference is affected by a number of objective and subjective reasons, the important one among them being the factor of addressee. If the addressee is monolingual, the choice of language is predetermined independently of the level of this language knowledge in the bilingual speaker and his language preferences. If the addressee is bilingual, the choice of language depends on the communicants' speech preferences, which, in turn, are modified by the language competence of both participants, on the character of situation (official/unofficial), and so on. Language preference can express group norms in relation to the contacting languages, their social status, their prestige, and individual attitude of a bilingual person to the languages he knows.

The number of communicative spheres of language functioning, as well as the set of its functions, is determined by extra-linguistic social factors. It is evident that opportunities for intensive development are given to the language which performs the majority of social functions, in other words, to the preferred one. The decreasing frequency of bicultural communications in the official and business spheres among urban and rural inhabitants, the predominance of Russian monolingualism strengthen the cultural stereotype of the “prestigious” Russian language performing the role of macro-mediator. These stereotypes are expressed in various forms of ethnic unification process, in changing the position of lingual identity. The differentiation of languages according to the scope of their use, which is reflected in the discourse of urban and rural people, naturally transforms the understanding of the “native language” idea. There is a steady decrease in the number of people considering the language of their nationality to be their native language. Language assimilation among ethnic groups in the Russian Federation continues, and under the influence of universalization, its speed is increasing. In accordance with the report on “Prevalence in knowledge of languages in Russian federal entities”, only 28.7% Buryats, 8.6% Evenks, 31.7% Tatar, 11.9% Tofalars, 47.2% Yakuts living in Irkutsk Oblast know the language of their ethnic group to varying degrees. It is evident that the importance of ethno-national languages in the social life of people is gradually decreasing. This is the reason for including the question “What language do you consider native?” into the questionnaire surveying the regional features of bilingualism. It reveals not only language preferences but also the main aspects of national policy.

The Buryat language is considered native by 70.7% respondents of this ethnic group, and for 29.3% respondents this function is performed by the Russian language. The information received during the research correlates to the results of the 2002 and 2010 All-Russian Population Censuses. If a language is not known by a communicant and is not the instrument of communication in any sphere of life, it cannot be the key to self-identification or the conductor to the ethno-national culture. The result of this situation is ethnic indifference.

The choice of native language is influenced by the same factors, among which: the place of residence, age,

social group, education level. The function of ethnic identification is associated with the Buryat language by 91.7% respondents with primary school education and by 74.7% respondents with higher university education (Istomina, 2012). The growth of education level promotes the rise of social activity, increases the functional load of the majority language and contributes to the spread of ethnic unification tendencies.

The system of language preferences among those respondents who changed their native language is focused on the use of the cross-national communication language in most spheres as an instrument of successful socialization. As a rule, the process of ethnic unification involves the communicants of the junior and middle age groups of employable population with high level of education and professional status.

As a result of urbanization, atomization in the society, the phenomenon of objective narrowing of ethnic language functions is revealed. Today, the main and sometimes the only means of communication for many ethnic groups involved in the process of intensive industry development is the Russian language. As an instrument of family communication with children, the Russian language is also used very often, which is why many children do not perceive the language of their ethnic group as fully native; it stops being the basis for further mental and cognitive development.

The considered characteristics of language contacts from the point of view of the social system stratification, allow us to reveal the peculiarities of bilingualism in a region, which correlates to the tendencies of general ethno-linguistic development in the country. It is established that the typical features of speech behavior are in direct dependence on the peculiarities of social system structure and social characteristics of communicants. The language orientations of bilingual people express the character of transformations of individual and social settings of discourse, and also reflect the attitude of subjects to native and another language. The factors of language choice are the subjective role relations of speakers, social distance, communicative needs of the addresser and addressee, their social roles and disposition, as well as the objective peculiarities of regional language situation. The common tendency of cross-ethnic interactions for all social ethnic groups in the region is the spread of the Russian language as the means of cross-national communication and the decrease of the functional space occupied by minority ethnic languages, their shift to the family–household sphere of communication. The spread of Russian monolingualism is explained by the following socio-cultural determinants: the increase of educational and professional status, predominance of town population, social activity, affiliation with the confession of the region's ethnic majority.

4.7. Conclusion

In the contemporary conditions, speech behavior is regulated by the importance of the functional opportunities provided by a language, its social prospects. These properties of the regional social and linguo-cultural structure express the tendencies of development of functionally limited incomplete forms of bilingualism and the spread of unification of speech behavior in regulated official communication.

Speech behavior is the process derived from social behavior of a person. Properties and features of the social structure determine the peculiarities of functioning and development of cross-cultural contacts and language interactions in ethnically heterogeneous environment. The nature of historically developed models of contacts, the peculiarities of ethnic identification of regional groups, the psycho-cultural distance between them impact on the production of speech. The self-identification of people in a poly-cultural environment has a significant influence on the inter-ethnic balance, speech behavior of population and the whole character of cross-cultural communication.

The most effective model of communication in a poly-ethnic region should be built within a multi-lingual picture of the world (on the basis of ethnic, cross-national, international languages). Its components complement

each other, deepen the understanding of native and foreign cultures, broaden the frames of language cognition, promote the development of syncretical thinking, and contribute to the formation of positive ethnic identity.

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