Age—as One of Socio-Demographic Factors Determining the Speech Behavior of the Older Generation of Russian Germans of the Kirov Region

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Abstract. Over the past 20 years, there has been a surge in academic interest in the problem of the relationship between the language and the environment, caused by great concern among scientists about the fate of national minorities in Russia and the CIS. This led to an increase in the number of studies of their history, culture, and language. The study of the relationship between linguistic diversity, the extinction and disappearance of languages is becoming the topic of numerous works at the turn of the XX–XXI centuries. The fate of languages, their current existence and future are the first priority for humanity, since the language is the philosophy of the world. It is the system of knowledge about the world embodied in its linguistic structure, in its rules. In this sense, the language is the world itself, the death of which will be an irreparable loss both for the person and for the world.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of the study of the speech behavior of the German ethnic minority of the Kirov region, which reflects the features manifested under the influence of socio-demographic factors in the foreign language environment, in particular, under the influence of the factor "age". The following methods are used in the work: field methods when collecting linguistic materials; the method of continuous fixing of dialectological materiais with subsequent transcription of texts; the method of sociolinguistic questionnaire and interviewing of the questioned, etc. Using these methods when analysing the material allows to consider the detected phenomena with a high degree of objectivity and reliability. As our studies show, the distribution of the areas of use of German and Russian among ethnic Germans of the Kirov region, as well as the choice of the language as a native language, are largely determined by the age of informants-speakers.

We believe that this article will be of interest to scientists involved in problems of German island dialectology.

1. Introduction

Recently, the concept “speech behavior” has again been put forward by linguists, psychologists and sociologists to the forefront of studies.

This is due to the fact that it is a complex phenomenon that requires “grounding in view of the paradoxical state of modern science, first of all, linguistics, in which the word does not keep pace with the thought and in which the terms begin to lose their basic functional and semantic attributes” [1].

Some scientists compare the speech behavior with the process of choosing the best option for constructing a socially correct statement [2] or with the person's emotions and actions which are...
determined by the communicative situation and expressed using the language and non-verbal means \[1\]. Other researchers consider the speech behavior as a human speech activity \[3\].

In our study, the sociolinguistic concept is accepted: the “speech behavior” is the person’s behavior determined by the speech activity, which reflects both internal and external features, manifested under the influence of factors that determine the process of the speech behavior in the foreign language environment.

It is necessary to note the factors determining the speech behavior of the individual are divided into internal – linguistic proper and external—extralinguistic. Extra-linguistic factors in its turn are divided into: 1) factors of the socio-demographic nature (socio-economic, geographical, socio-historical living conditions, absence or presence of mixed marriages, gender, age, nationality, level of education, profession, participation in public life); 2) factors of the situational-variable nature (theme, situation, nature of relations between communicants, their social status).

Particular attention in this work is given to the study of the socio-demographic parameter "age", which significantly affects the speech behavior of Russian Germans of the Kirov region living in the foreign language and foreign dialect environment. The relevance and novelty of the study in the Kirov region is determined by the general linguistic, historical-linguistic, sociolinguistic significance of island dialectology connected with the study of development and functioning of dialects (languages) in the foreign-dialect, foreign-language and foreign-national environment, that is, in the situation where separate ethnic-language groups exist in isolation from the main ethnic environment.

2. Research Methodology

The aim of this work is to analyze the speech behavior of Russian Germans in the Kirov region, taking into account their age, which helps to characterize entire generations regarding their use of different language options. Our observations, firstly, supplement the factors of the socio-demographic nature that affect the speech behavior of Russian Germans in the region under consideration, and secondly, they correlate with general studies conducted by Russian scientists in the field of studying sociolinguistic aspects of the speech behavior \[3, 4\]. Methods of direct observation, audio recording of speech and content-analysis and functional analysis of the speech of Russian Germans of different ages were used in this study.

3. Research Results

One of the most significant factors of the socio-demographic nature that affects the speech behavior of Russian Germans in the Kirov region is the age. Based on the analyzed material, it should be noted that the functions of the German language among representatives of the older, middle and younger generations of the Kirov region is different. To identify the use of languages, depending on the age of the informants, we turn first of all to the definition of the concept “age”. L. I. Moskalyuk believes that “age is not just a chronological quantity, a unit of time, time periods that replace each other ... the age factors serve to characterize individual groups-collectives, examples of which are: groups of the same age (interest groups, entertainment groups, etc.), or generations in the family, forming groups of different ages ” \[5\].

As studies of the speech behavior of Russian Germans in the Kirov region showed, the age factor helps to characterize entire generations regarding their use of different language options. Each age group of Russian Germans has its own characteristics, a significant role in the formation of which is assigned to different historical eras, and the use of language systems is considered in the context of the most important historical events of a certain time, which played a significant role in the speech behavior of ethnic Germans and should be taken into account when describing linguistic characteristics of representatives of different age groups. In this case, we can talk about the linguistic competence and
the linguistic behavior of a certain generation. Based on the three age groups identified by us, we will try to characterize the speech behavior of Germans who have been living in the Verkhnekamsk district of the Kirov region since the 1940s of the XX century.

First of all, we consider the criteria for distinguishing age groups, which according to each scientist are largely subordinate to the goals of the study. As a rule, several age groups are distinguished, the difference between which varies in the range from 25 to 10 years. In this case, it seems necessary for the criterion for distinguishing age groups among the Germans of the Kirov Region to consider the main points of their history, namely: 1) the period until 1941—the time of development of the German ethnic group under more or less liberal national policies, which resulted in the formation of the Volga German Autonomous Republic (1924), as well as the formation of national regions in many areas of compact German residence in the outskirts and south of Russia, in Transcaucasia, Crimea, etc.; 2) the period from 1941 to 1955—the beginning of the Great Patriotic War and the mass forced deportation of Germans to the northern and eastern regions of the country, life in the deportation areas under the supervision of special commandant's offices, forced labor in “labor armies”; 3) the period from 1955—the abolition of special commandant’s offices, partial rehabilitation of the Germans, the possibility of free movement and mass migration to new areas of permanent residence [6]. P. Hilkes and V. A. Manykin adhere to a similar criterion for distinguishing age groups, offering three main age groups that are closely related to the above three historical layers: 1) the first generation (“older”)—persons born before 1933; 2) the second generation (“middle”)—persons born from 1933 to 1956; 3) the third generation (“younger”), persons born since 1957 [7, 4].

For a more detailed and objective study, we distinguish two subgroups of the older generation: the first subgroup of the older generation—people born before 1933, the second subgroup of the older generation—people born before 1937, where the main criterion for distinguishing these subgroups is the language competence of the Russian Germans, knowledge of not only the dialect, but also the literary German language, the ability to speak, read and write in the language of their ethnicity.

We will adhere to the classification of P. Hilkes and V. A. Manykin. The representatives of the older generation, born before 1933 (the first age subgroup of the older generation) and born before 1937 (the second age subgroup of the older generation), find enough strong knowledge of the native dialect language; therefore, when collecting the dialect material, we consciously focused on the elderly, expecting from them the highest level of the language competence. Of the 35 informants-speakers interviewed during the dialectological and ethnographic expeditions (from 2000 to 2009), 21 are from the first age subgroup of the older generation, 5 belong to the second age subgroup of the older generation, 5 are from the middle and 4 are from younger generations. The analysis of the data revealed that the Russian Germans of the first subgroup grew up in a more or less homogeneous (German) ethnic environment and had the opportunity to study at a national school, where all subjects were taught in German. Most of them came from Ukrainian (17 people), as well as Volga colonies (9 people). All the above mentioned places of compact residence of Germans had the status of national regions before the start of World War II (except for of the Volga German Republic, which maintained its status until August 1941), which meant the use of the German language in almost all areas of everyday life, including such an important aspect, as national schools teaching all subjects in native German [see 8]. All representatives of the older generation noted that they attended a German school. The number of years spent in school ranges from 1 to 8, depending on the age of the informant-speaker: the younger the interviewee, the less he/she studied at a national school. Generations of Germans who grew up in conditions of such national “communities”, wherever these “communities” are, firmly identified themselves with the German nation, preserving national traditions, life and culture of their historical homeland. Written German was studied at a German elementary school and only the oldest representatives of the first age subgroup could freely use it later. The ability to write in Latin letters for people studying in an elementary school in German was lost after graduation, but reading skills were preserved. The results of the survey showed that a large number of informants regularly read the Bible,
spiritual literature in German. For this part of the informants, the German language is the language of their childhood, school years, the language in which their parents read to them, and the language that identifies their national culture.

The second age subgroup of the older generation includes 5 informant-speakers born between 1934 and 1937. This is the most tragic period for Russian Germans, including years of repression that started with the beginning of World War II and led to mass deportation of Germans from the European part of the former USSR to the north and east in 1941. Representatives of this generation are characterized by the fact that only the oldest of them were born in the old pre-war colonies on the Volga, in Ukraine or in the south of Russia. Four informant-speakers of the second age group called Ukraine their homeland and one informant—the Volga region. As for education, the Germans of this group studied in comprehensive Russian schools where German was taught as a foreign language. It should be noted that representatives of the older generation, whose childhood was in the years of the war, did not master the written German language at all, since their level of education is an elementary school where teaching was in Russian, that is, they can write in German only in Cyrillic, read only in Russian or not at all. All representatives of this generation were able to graduate from high school, learn German in the framework of the school subject "Foreign language".

The main distinguishing feature of the speech behavior of all representatives of the older generation is that they use the German language in the form of one of dialects. This is the language option that most respondents speak. All informant-speakers of this age group belong to the German national minority and call the German dialect their native language.

As for the middle and younger generations, they, although they understand German, refuse to speak their native language in most cases, since, according to them, they cannot find the right word, they cannot reproduce it. Representatives of the middle and younger generations do not know the German language, since there is no need for this; some of them study the language because they are planning to leave for Germany, and only a few know and study the language in order to communicate with the older generation. The German language for representatives of the middle and younger age groups is the language of their parents and grandparents, a school subject, but, as observations show, it is rarely their mother tongue. In this case, the German language plays a secondary role, since Russian Germans do not need to use it in speech. Thus, the displacement of the native language, the dialect is taken place. And this is true not only for the extra-family, but also for the intra-family sphere of communication. As the results of the study show, the Russian language has become a necessary form of communication, with the help of which mutual understanding is achieved.

4. Summary

So, the distribution of the spheres of use of the German and Russian languages among ethnic Germans of the Kirov region, as well as the choice of language as a native language, is determined by the socio-demographic factor "age".

It should be noted that the possibility of learning German in the family and school, as a necessary condition for high-level language competence, as well as the possibility of its full application in all areas of everyday life, depend to a large extent on the socio-political conditions in which this or that ethnic community is.

As for Russian Germans of the former Soviet Union, the older generation of this ethnic group had both opportunities, the realization of which was ensured by the existence of the Volga German Republic and national regions within the European part of the USSR. For subsequent generations of ethnic Germans the possibilities of studying and applying the German language in everyday life are sharply limited or practically reduced to zero.

Thus, the data obtained as a result of the study allow us to conclude that in the conditions of dispersed resettlement of Russian Germans, the loss of linguistic and cultural ties occurs rather quickly,
and by the third generation the level of language proficiency of their nationality language may come to naught or remain at the level of the school curriculum, because the acquired communication skills are not applied in practice or they are rarely used.

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