Stages of Development of Bilingualism of Russian Germans in the Situation of the Foreign Language Environment

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Abstract. The problems of forms of the language existence are of great importance in modern linguistics. Domestic and foreign studies of recent decades point out that despite the large number of works devoted to the study of language variability, many questions related to the study and description of heterogeneity of the linguistic continuum still remain relevant.

The relevance of the presented study is due to the general linguistic, historical-linguistic and sociolinguistic significance of the German island dialectology related to the study of development and functioning of the German dialects in a foreign-dialect, foreign-language and foreign-national environment and the need to in-depth study the regions of compact residence of ethnic Germans in Russia.

The article analyzes the main stages of formation and development of bilingualism of Russian Germans in the former Soviet Union, in particular in the Kirov region, and explores the nature of German-Russian bilingualism of Russian Germans. The Kirov region was not chosen by chance, since Russian Germans here do not form a closed community and do not belong to autochthonous ethnic groups, but they were deported from the Volga region, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine in the 1940s.

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

1. Introduction

In the Kirov region representatives of the German national minority do not form a closed community united economically, culturally and linguistically. Russian Germans are a small ethnic group scattered among the multinational population of the region. The ethnic characteristics of this population are specially preserved; the process of preserving the traditional and appearing of the innovative in their culture was influenced by the forced nature of resettlement, that is, the deportation of the 1940s. The ethnic specificity still continues to be preserved in the way of life, culture, everyday life, but it is especially manifested in the sphere of spiritual culture and self-awareness. Without forming a more or less uniform community, whose members are in constant contact with each other (including linguistic), German settlers of the Kirov region speak the Upper German and Low German dialects.

Since all informants, according to the data obtained, speak the Russian language and use it in all areas of everyday life, it can be assumed that the Russian language is gradually becoming the main language for most Russian Germans, crowding out German from many areas of communication.
2. Research Methodology

The aim of this work is to analyze the main stages of formation and development of bilingualism of Russian Germans in the former Soviet Union, in particular in the Kirov region. The Kirov region was not chosen by chance, since Russian Germans here do not form a closed community and do not belong to autochthonous ethnical groups, but they were deported from the Volga region, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine in the 1940s. For the study the methods of direct observation were used, we also used the method of auditory analysis of speech in natural communication and speech recorded on magnetic and digital media; the method of socially differentiated analysis of the studied linguistic material, including observations on functioning of the languages of Russian Germans in various communication situations; these methods allowed us to consider the detected phenomena with a large degree of objectivity and reliability.

3. Research Results

3.1 The Bilingualism of the Russian Germans in Historical Perspective

When determining the nature of German-Russian bilingualism among Russian Germans in the Kirov region, we turn to the studies conducted by R. Boni, V. Kirshner, V. Manykin, S. V. Smirnitskaya in the regions where Germans lived in the former Soviet Union. Considering bilingualism in relation to Germans of the former Soviet Union in historical perspective, V. Kirchner \[1\] suggests distinguishing three stages of bilingualism: 1) the stage of individual bilingualism, 2) the stage of collective bilingualism, 3) the stage of mass bilingualism. The distinguished stages are firmly connected with the main periods of the history of Russian Germans: the first covers the pre-revolutionary period, the second—the period after 1917 until the beginning of World War II, and the third stage begins with the deportation of Germans in 1941. According to S.V. Smirnitskaya and M.A. Barotov, the stage of individual bilingualism can be chronologically continued until 1941. This stage of bilingualism is a characteristic of the older age group of Russian Germans born before 1933. It was these Russian Germans who were born and lived in German settlements (colonies), both primary (Mutterkolonien) and secondary (Tochterkolonien), which were quite closed communities having German cultural and linguistic traditions inherited from their ancestors. The population of these colonies in the south of Russia, in Ukraine, in the Crimea or in the Volga region was homogeneous in ethnic and monolingual language terms. Of course, bilingualism took place in these colonies, as German island-type settlements were located in a foreign and foreign language environment, where, besides Russian, Ukrainian (in Ukraine), Tatar (in the Crimea and on the Volga), Georgian (in the Caucasus), Bashkir (on the Volga), etc. could act as contact languages. However, it should be noted that it was individual in nature, and it was not about all members of the German community, most of which remained monolingual \[2. P. 49\].

According to the scale proposed by R. Boni, this stage in the development of bilingualism among Russian Germans is associated with primary active German monolinguism, as well as with active German and passive Russian (or other) bilingualism \[3. P. 194\].

The stage of collective bilingualism is a characteristic of the period from 1941, when Germans, deported from old German colonies to the northern and eastern regions – to Siberia and Central Asia, found themselves in the position of a national minority, diffused in the places of deportation and “interspersed” in other ethnic and linguistic environment. The acquisition of contact languages of Siberia and Central Asia (Russian, Kazakh, etc.) turned out to be vital for ethnic Germans. This period was a turning point in terms of the transition from the mass mastery of the mother tongue (from monolinguism) to the mastery of two (sometimes three) languages (to bilingualism, polilnguism) by almost all members of the collective, i.e. to collective bilingualism. Collective bilingualism embraced the representatives of the older and middle generations and became an integral part of the linguistic competence and linguistic behavior of the German national minority in the former USSR. The stages of
collective bilingualism according to the scale suggested by R. Boni correspond to the state of active German and active Russian bilingualism, which has become typical for the middle generation of ethnic Germans [3. P. 194].

The stage of mass bilingualism is undoubtedly a characteristic of the latest stage in the history of Russian Germans. This stage should be associated with the active migration processes of the post-war period beginning in the mid-1950s, which stimulated the geographical "diffusion" of ethnic Germans on the vast territory of the country and the language assimilation of the German national minority in new places of living, where Germans, as a rule, do not represent a compact and solid group, which is able to resist a foreign, often multilingual, environment. The "absorption" by a foreign-language, often Russian-speaking, environment leads to dissolving of the German-speaking minority in the predominant ethnic group with inevitable Russification. This process takes place especially intensively in cities, and can be applied to people of all age groups. However, representatives of the younger age group, born after the rehabilitation of Germans in the new areas of resettlement of the German national minority, are strongly affected by the process of “complete Russification”. For this period, which corresponds to the third stage of bilingualism, passive German and active Russian bilingualism (for persons of the first and partially second age groups) is a characteristic according to R. Boni. This bilingualism passes into active Russian monolingualism, which is a characteristic of almost all (but especially of young) generations [3. P. 194].

As V. A. Manykin notes, the studied correlation between the German and Russian languages in the process of communication among representatives of ethnic Germans of the former USSR in historical perspective reveals the following trend: from German monolingualism (with individual bilingualism) to German-Russian bilingualism, covering ever-greater groups participating in communication and becoming widespread. The transition to Russian monolingualism from mass bilingualism with predominant (active) knowledge of the Russian language is very easy [4. P. 17].

3.2 Stages of Development of Bilingualism of the Russian Germans in Kirov Region

According to R. Boni, we distinguish five successive stages in the development of bilingualism among Russian Germans in the Kirov region: 1) active German monolingualism; 2) active-passive German-Russian bilingualism; 3) active German-Russian bilingualism; 4) passive-active German-Russian bilingualism; 5) active Russian monolingualism [5. P. 21-22]. The study revealed that each age group of ethnic Germans corresponds to the certain stage of bilingualism. So, most of the representatives of the older age group (20 out of 26) have already passed the first two stages of bilingualism: active German monolingualism, active-passive German-Russian bilingualism, and currently representatives of this group are characterized by active German-Russian bilingualism, which means active knowledge of the German dialect and the Russian language.

For the middle age group of the informants according to the scale suggested by R. Boni, two stages of bilingualism are typical: the stage of passive-active German-Russian bilingualism and the stage of active Russian monolingualism [5. P. 21-22]. At the stage of passive-active German-Russian bilingualism, there are informants who learned the German dialect in their families, but due to the limited use of the German language they lost the possibility of using it and now only understand the German dialect. As for the knowledge of the Russian language, as the results of the study show, the representatives of this age group of Germans are fluent in the Russian language and use it in all areas of communication.

The younger age group is at the stage of active Russian monolingualism. The vast majority of Russian Germans of the younger age group does not speak the German dialects and do not use them in communication. The representatives of this age group studied or are studying German at school, at university or in German language courses. In this case, we can talk about Russian-German bilingualism, which should be described as an individual, non-contact, artificial, auxiliary type of bilingualism, which means that the German language serves as a foreign language.
3.3. The Nature of German-Russian Bilingualism of the Russian Germans in Kirov Region

The studied bilingualism is characterized as massive, since all Germans of the Kirov region speak Russian. German-Russian bilingualism is one-sided, since Germans of the Kirov region learned Russian in contrast to the Russian-speaking population, who do not speak German, as the functions of the language systems, the sphere of their distribution, as well as the number of people who speak these languages are different. According to the amount of use in various fields of activities, the language of the German minority is a mono-functional language form (intra-family communication), functionally it is the second code system. The Russian language carries the maximum social load in the public life of Russian Germans; it is universal and functions as the first language. German-Russian bilingualism can be regarded as natural, since Germans, who live in the territory of the Kirov region for historical reasons, were in constant contact with the Russian language, and mastered it naturally, in the course of their labor activity. German-Russian bilingualism is subordinate, which is characterized by mixed statements, that is, Russian Germans can use either their own dialect or the Russian language in specific language situations.

4. Summary

Thus, when conducting the sociolinguistic survey of Russian Germans in the Kirov region, we discovered a number of circumstances that contribute to a fairly high degree of linguistic assimilation of the German population in favor of the Russian language. The most important fact is that in the studied region there are no pure German settlements, since Russian Germans are a small ethnic group, they remain to be national minorities scattered among the multinational population. The second important circumstance is the ethnic composition of the Kirov region, which includes Russians, Tatars, Mari, Udmurts, Belarusians, Azerbaijanis, Chuvashs, Germans, Komi, etc. It is this circumstance that is a consequence of the concentration of multinational migration flows of the post-war period, contributed to the transformation of the Russian language into the language of inter-ethnic communication for all ethnic groups represented in the region, including Germans. Another circumstance that does not impede the linguistic assimilation of ethnic Germans in the Kirov region is the absence of the role of institutions which support linguistic competence in relation to the native language and promote its use in everyday life.

It should be noted that the development of the main stages of bilingualism, the distribution of areas of use of the German and Russian languages among ethnic Germans of the Kirov region, and the choice of a native language are determined by various extralinguistic factors [see 6], namely, socio-demographic factors, in particular, age, education, gender of informants, family circumstances.

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