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LANGUAGE IN ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

Olga Istomina (a)*, Tuyana Tontoeva (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Irkutsk State University, 9, Sukhe-Bator St., Irkutsk, Russia
olgaistomina@mail.ru, 89021742386]
(b) Buryat State University, 24 a, Smolin Str., Ulan-Ude, Russia
tontoeva@gmail.com, 89085931984

Abstract

In this article, the author analyzes the role of language in self-identification process of the individual. Language, being a marker of all sociocultural behaviour, participates in determining the identity of an ethnic culture. This language function is actualized in a multicultural social environment. Foreign language environment determines a special significance of the ethno-consolidating function of the language. Linguistic and cultural contacts in a multi-ethnic region are simultaneously: a form of dialogue of cultures; "social mirror", providing for identification of culture specific features of its own ethnic group; means of interaction. The interaction of languages in a common area is the disposition action of "one's own language is another language". These findings are based on the results of the author's research of criteria for determining the native language by respondents living in Irkutsk region (2011-2018). Despite the objective spread of the instrumentalist approach in language philosophy, the philosophical-culturological approach has no less significance in modern conditions. The priority of a language philosophical understanding attributes value of a communicative resource to the ethnicity defining verbal and social behaviour. The author considers linguistic features of ethnic group contacts as an obligatory characteristic of a multicultural community, as a kind of peculiar cultural markers of the discourse specifics. Language is the most important part of the world picture, "home of being," and its ability to contact allows actors, discourse participants, to go beyond the framework of homogeneous perception of the world. Language occupies a leading position in the system of ethnic identification.

1. Introduction

The role of language is significant in the modern polycultural space. The language is a sociocultural marker in interethnic communications, a means of not only ethno-identification, but also of self-determination in a wide area of cultural diversity. Under the conditions of pressure of globalization processes and the opposing glocalisation, the language is the dominant factor for ethnic group both in self-categorization and in the preservation and development of ethnic culture in general. The situation of the functional field expansion of the majority language (and, objectively, such is Russian language in Russian communicative space) determines the narrowing of ethnic discourse spheres, its shift to the family domestic sphere and, as a result, the assimilation of ethnic languages. These destructive processes cause the devaluation of ethnic languages, and therefore have a negative impact on the culture of the ethnic group as a whole., According to Heidegger (2002), the language is "home of being"; it preserves the narrative content of culture for as long as possible and creates conditions for successful socialization of *homo loguens*. This is the cultural value of the language and its ethno-consolidating potencies. Homo loguens or linguistic personality is an expression of communicative behaviour of an individual, which accumulates the history of peoples, its mythology and narrative values, historical past, moral and ethical guidelines, spiritual and ideological ties, specific features of culture, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, social norms and dispositions, household norms - all this determines the content of linguistic world picture, its ontological, gnoseological, axiological bases.

2. Problem Statement

Settlement structure of the majority of Russian regions is characterized by a high dispersion of settlement of ethnic groups, different degrees of mosaic of ethno-national structure, which causes the difference between types of ethnic identification: from ethno-fanaticism to ethnic indifference. In the conditions of growing conflict gene in foreign and domestic political relations, it is important to preserve the prevailing tendencies of dominating positive identity in many regions. These regions include Irkutsk region, where the ethno-national structure in terms of the number of groups is identical to the all-Russian structure. The Russians (88.3%), the Ukrainians (1.2%), the Buryats (3.2%), the Tatars (0.9%), and others (6.4%) dominate numerically in the above region. More than 140 ethnic groups live in the region, while the mosaic index of the national composition and the intensity of interethnic contacts associated with it are characterized by low rates due to the numerical disproportion of ethnic groups (based on data from All-Russian Population Census 2010, the index is 0.1). These indicators are calculated by the method of Dzhunusov (1978). However, settlements with a high index are historically formed in the region, where several ethnic groups live, approximately equal in numerical terms, which increases the intensity of contacts. These groups include Ust-Ordyn Buryat District (the index is 0.6), Tatar village of Taras, Polish settlement of Vershiny, etc. Historically established type of positive ethno-identification in the region determines the importance of this process in the system of interethnic contacts and ensures conflict-free interaction of ethnic groups (Istomina, 2012). Nevertheless, problems exist. In our opinion, it is important to preserve the non-conflict nature of cultural ties in a region with a dispersed and heterogeneous type of resettlement of ethnic groups, which directly depends on the type of linguocultural contacts adopted in the

region, on sociocultural habits and worldview ties implemented by *homo loguens* in their daily discourse (Agar, 1994). These ties and attitudes towards one's own ethnic culture as a whole are determined by the attitude to mother tongue, its understanding and perception, and evaluation of its role in the individual and cultural world picture. The authors have conducted a research of the dynamics of content assessments of "mother tongue" concept by an expert group of the region.

3. Research Questions

The subject of research of this scientific article is the content and criteria for determining the definition of "mother tongue" and its role in the process of self-identification of an individual in a modern multi-ethnic region.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the role of language in the ethno-identification system of linguistic personality in a multicultural environment. The authors also set the task of identifying the integrative and consolidating features of the language of ethnic groups required for preserving the positive type of their self-categorization in a dispersed environment, for developing positive forms of linguocultural contacts, which the ethno-cultural portrait of a multi-ethnic region depends on.

5. Research Methods

Dialectical and comparative methods, structural and functional analysis were used in order to conduct the author research and the preparation of this article. The case study method was also used: expert surveys "Criteria for determining mother tongue", conducted by the authors in 2011–2018. The total sample volume was 82 respondents (in 2011), 98 respondents (2018). The expert focus groups at each stage of the study to determine the dynamics of the definition of the mother tongue were teachers and graduate students of Irkutsk State University philological faculty. The questionnaire compiled by the authors contained the most requested criteria, conditionally divided into three groups: instrumentalist group (activity of language use and its functional load are important), philosophical and cultural group (language is understood as a basic component of culture), group of independent choice (according to respondent's self-determination). The data of the 2010 All-Russian Population Census served as an information base to determine the mosaic index of national composition of the studied region.

6. Findings

The ambivalence of language assessments and its functions in modern conditions is manifested in the standardization of the society worldview (influence of globalization processes) and in the actualization of the identification and consolidating functions of languages of ethnic groups in a multicultural space (phenomenon of glocalisation and revitalization of ethnic self-consciousness).

Modern philosophy of the language is represented by theories of two large-scale approaches: philosophical-cultural and instrumentalist.

Philosophical and cultural approach is presented in the works of Arutiunova (1999), Vaisgerber (2004), Gumboldt (2000), Drobizheva (2003), Mechkovskaia (2000), Miuller, Sepir, Uorf, and Vitgenshtein (2003), Tamerian (2004). According to fair comment of Toshchenko (2003), language is "a peculiar political-psychological thesaurus that allows us to perceive the surrounding reality in a uniform way, evaluate it and act in it in accordance with certain norms and behaviours that are well-established in a social community, while adequately perceiving and understanding each other" (p. 97). Philosophical interpretation of a language and a language native to an ethnic group is directly related to its worldview, a set of judgments about a person, world, and their interaction. Within this approach, the language is thought as a kind of reflexion (or metatheory) of the content of social system, its transformation, the dynamics of the value-motivational basis of consciousness, consequently the self-perception, as a reflection of autostereotypes. Pankin (2009) names the language as "main indicator of personal and national self-consciousness, the most important structural element of the culture of peoples, the basis for the development of its intellect, emotional sphere, creative potential, the key to interethnic education of young people" (p. 112). On the basis of this approach, the concept of "linguistic picture of the world" is formed; it records the peculiarities of peoples mentality, its culture as "a complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, laws, customs, as well as other abilities and skills learned by a man as a member of society" (Shcherba, 1974, p. 206). According to Vitgenshtein (2005), reality is mediated by language; the language creates an image of the world: "The boundaries of my language define the boundaries of my world" (p. 36). In conformity with these definitions, lingua ethos is the "linguocode of culture".

In contrast to the philosophical approach in the framework of the processes of culture universalization, the language understanding is transformed into the side of the pragmatization of meanings, when functional load and rotational characteristics of the language gain a dominant position in the semantics of the "mother tongue" concept. The consequence of the spread of instrumentalist approach can be recognized as the need for "functional primacy and frequency of use" criterion in the total volume of identifications of a mother tongue by its carriers. This approach popularizes the utilitarian tasks of the language, its potential in practical application in specific social strategies. Thus, the instrumentalist approach is focused on achieving of narrow-pragmatic applied goals of discourse.

Nevertheless, despite the difference in defining positions, the designated approaches are not antagonists in their extreme forms. It seems, on the contrary, their disposition expresses complementarity and integrity in total. The integration of philosophical and instrumental approaches as a synthesis of objective and subjective positions of determining the semantic field of the "mother tongue" concept makes it possible to maintain an understanding of cultural significance and language value when its functional load changes. Obviously, the instrumentalist approach, in spite of its rationality and pragmatism, significantly impoverishes the worldview position of a native speaker, diminishes the role of minority languages, and contributes to the destruction of ethnic self- consciousness, the spread of assimilation processes.

In the situation of the spread of acculturation mechanisms of intercultural interaction and the reduction of mother tongue to a primitive tool for solving communicative tasks, risks of erosion of ethnocultural diversity increase. These conditions devalue the ethnic criterion in identification system and reorient the individual to global cultural space with the majority language.

As a result of research on the priority criteria for determining the mother tongue conducted by the authors in 2011–2018 in Irkutsk region, a gradual shift in the position of philosophical-cultural approach towards instrumentalism has been revealed. In our opinion, the transformations into the definitions of the mother tongue are due to the predominance of pragmatic tasks in the communicative process, with dominance of the majority language in all spheres of communication (numerically dominant ethnic group in the region) as a means of successful socialization. In the course of the survey, experts independently determined the significance of the criterion in the process of self-identification, assessing the importance degree according to principle 1 - the most important, 7 - the least important of the above. According to the questionnaire, the average score is calculated, reflecting the criterion position in the rating. Calculus points are built on the sum of numbers that determine each criterion separately and dividing the amount received by the total number of respondents. The lower average score of the criterion is, the higher its importance degree in the respondent consciousness. The results of the expert survey are shown in Table 01.

Table 01. Criteria For Determining "Mother Tongue" Definition

№	Mother Tongue Is …	Average Score	
		2011	2018
1	My Mother's Language, The Language Spoken In My Family	2,3	2,4
2	Language That I Learned First	4,1	3,7
3	Language Of My People, My Nationality	1,9	2,1
4	Language I Speak Best	4,6	3,9
5	Language That Is Functionally The First In My Life That I Use Most Often	3,7	2,9
6	Language In Which I Think	2,9	2,5
7	Language I Voluntarily Consider To Be Such	5,5	5,4
8	Other Variants	4	5

During the seven-year period, the criterion of nationality remains the most significant (criterion 3), the second place takes the criterion of functionality in the family (criterion 1), the third is the criterion of functionality in the respondent's own speech (criterion 5) and in the process of speech generation as a cognitive act (criterion 6). The results of the survey reveal the ambivalence of identification, expressed in the recognition by the focus group of both philosophical and instrumental approaches to the language definition. The significance of rotational characteristics of the language in the total volume of discourse was revealed in the youth group of respondents (21-23 years old) - 14.6%. For older people, the language is a linguocode of culture, acting as a means of interaction, providing, according to Giddens (1991), "reflexive self-design". In other words, respondents of the older age group consider that "language is a symbol of ethnic identity, and language choice is a symbol of ethnic relations" (Heller, 1982, p. 19). Therefore, the criteria of a functional group are relevant only for 2.4% of experts from 45 to 60 years old.

Repeated research in 2018 revealed an increase in the trends of instrumentalism in relation to the mother tongue. In regions with a dispersed and heterogeneous type of resettlement of ethnic groups, such as Baikal region, the preservation of the mosaic ethnocultural structure is important for the development of non-conflict cultural ties. The language is identical to the culture of the ethnic group as a whole in multicultural environment, and its preservation is a feature of the ethnos preservation. One cannot but agree with Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), no language - no people, the language defines "ethno-linguistic vitality of the ethnos". Revitalization of languages of ethnic groups in a multicultural region determines the

development of linguocultural contacts, reminiscences. Linguocontact plays the role of a "cultural mirror". In terms of the "own-alien" disposition, the linguoculture reveals its own specifics, indicates basic differences, and finds out the originality and uniqueness of the culture. One can discover oneself only in the course of a dialogue, understand oneself more deeply. As Bakhtin (1986) wrote: "we put new questions to a foreign culture, which it did not put to itself, we are looking for answers to these questions; and a foreign culture responds to us, revealing new sides to us, new semantic depths" (p. 23). Based on the dialogue of cultures, the cross-cultural competence of actors is formed. The interaction of linguocultures prepares the minds of recipients for the perception of a different environment, for a tolerant attitude of cultural differences, which is a condition of ethnonational equilibrium in a multi-ethnic space, teaches communicants to function successfully in various sociocultural contexts, to achieve the goal of effective social interaction (Istomina, 2012).

The ability to understand and appreciate their culture is directly related to the willingness of accepting other cultural entities, to the dialogue openness. The dialogue of culture, owing to comparative procedures, allows the group to identify itself, through the social mirror to know oneself.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the language in ethnic identification system is of fundamental importance, its role in the process of socialization and enculturation of the individual is paramount. Both thinking and language, being interconnected and interdependent components of consciousness, form the linguistic picture of the world, which involves the whole narrative, the whole sociocultural experience of the ethnic group. The ethnicity acts as a resource in the individual self-consciousness that provides not only communicative, but social behaviour in general. The ethnicity determines social and domestic habits, basics of the worldview, self-esteem, foundations of life, defines longitudinal and short-term social strategies in accordance with the requirements of social environment.

According to the philosophical-culturological approach taken as the basis of this study, the language, the linguocultural code of the ethnic group, is a differentiating feature of the ethnos, its self-perception, objective and spatial-temporal, motivational, normative orientation.

As a result of expert surveys, the authors revealed the dynamics of "mother tongue" definition, ambivalence of the definition of this concept, actualization of the instrumentalist approach in the youth social group and the dominance of philosophical understanding of lingua ethos from the older generation of respondents. The pragmatization of discourse and the language definition only as a tool in solving narrowly utilitarian practical tasks significantly reduces the space of ethnic languages, designates the spread of trends in the unification and universalization of culture, which determines the erosion of ethnic consciousness and language assimilation. Philosophical interpretation of the language contributes to the preservation and revitalization of cultural diversity in multinational states, emphasizes the significance of linguistic contacts, dialogue of cultures for deeper immersion in their own culture and tolerant attitude to the foreign cultural environment:

> *...only the contact of one language with another on the basis of comparisons, as the same thought*
> *in different languages is expressed differently - naturally stops at the means of expression and makes*

a person attentive to delicate nuances of thought and feeling; teaches a person not to slide over the familiar phenomena of his mother tongue, but to notice various shades of thought that have not yet been seen in his native language. (Shcherba, 1974, p. 217)

The dialogue of metaphors, achieved through linguocultural contacts, contributes to the objectivation of culture in general and individual perception, enriching the world picture, rooting of self-categorization and conflict-free types of interethnic and cross-national communication in the consciousness of a positive type.

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