

FORECASTING THE FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGES IN RUSSIA: MAJORITY, MINORITY, DIASPORAS LANGUAGES

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Abstract

One of the important tasks for sociolinguistics is to solve the problem of forecasting the future for different linguistic varieties and languages. Conceptual forecasting is important for planning the social language functions in the areas of organized communication of different linguistic communities.

In the Russian Federation there are three main types of linguistic communities: majority languages (speakers of more than 50,000 people – 32 linguistic communities); minority languages (speakers of less than 50,000 people – 54 linguistic communities), national minorities or diasporas, there are about 50 of them.

It should be noted that the current level of development of the social functions among the languages in these linguistic communities is very different. Majority languages are developing most intensively, although a negative shift is sometimes observed among them in a number of areas of communication compared to the Soviet period. Most minority languages have insufficient potential for further development, and the languages of Siberia and the Russian Far East are at most risk, these languages have a small ethnic community, i.e. the potential to expand in social functions is low.

Forecasting the future of the languages in the Russian Federation includes a number of sociolinguistic procedures: the identification of linguistic communities with speakers that use an ethnic language; study of ethnolinguistic conditions of their existence, including compactness or dispersion of living; language contacts of speakers of a language community, etc.

Based on the research material, it is possible to trace the trends in the development of linguistic communities over two or three decades, evaluate these trends by measuring the demographic and communicative power of a given language or languages. This makes it possible to formulate possible scenarios for their further development – the expansion or narrowing in their social functions, the preservation or loss of a language by a certain linguistic community. Should there be a danger of the disappearance of a language, special attention should be paid to its scientific description, recording its texts, in order to preserve this language for the world culture.

Keywords: linguistic community, areas of communication, demographic power of a language, communicative power of a language

1 INTRODUCTION

The existing system of methods and techniques in Russian sociolinguistics was developed in the process of conducting specific sociolinguistic studies based on the factual material of the linguistic life of the USSR, and

later in the Russian Federation. The system of sociolinguistic methods and techniques organically combines research procedures with the procedures used in other branches of linguistics, as well as in ethnography, sociology and social psychology. For sociolinguistics, currently one of the important tasks is to create a system of forecasting the future for different communities of speakers and their languages.

Forecasting is very important when planning the development of a particular language in different areas of organized communication, since when drawing up programs for the functional development of languages and financing these programs, it is necessary to know if there is a social need for extra measures in preservation of a given language and, consequently, its culture in a given cultural-linguistic community. Prediction methods can be either traditional or new ones, with the help of modern technologies for language forecasting.

2 METHODOLOGY

Traditional forecasting methods include detailed surveys of different language groups, ways of organizing their language life, speech practice, as well as conducting assessments of speakers' commitment to their native languages and willingness to make efforts to support their languages in different ethnolinguistic conditions. The functioning of a language primarily depends on the number of speakers and how the language is functionally structured.

Language forecasting is the study of specific development prospects of a language, its internal structure, and language situation in a particular social community.

There have been defined five areas of sociolinguistic forecasting of language development: 1) development of languages in the world; 2) the fate of individual languages; 3) the development of social functions of languages; 4) the structural development of languages; 5) the development and interaction of languages.

For a sociolinguistic assessment, it's not the general calculations of ethnic groups that are important, but the analysis of the composition of language communities. Individuals in the age of new technologies, of course, have the opportunity to use their own language in some areas: listen to the radio, watch television, write letters in their native language with relatives, however, these processes are spontaneous, not controlled, and the conscious influence of society is impossible here.

To identify the specifics of language life of different language communities, it is necessary to carry out some sociolinguistic procedures:

- When considering ethnic communities, it is needed to single out language communities that have good competence in their national language and actively use it;
- Identify the ethnolinguistic conditions for the existence of these language communities.

The following indicators will be important here:

- 1) The compactness or dispersion of residence of speakers of a given language community, since the best conditions for the functioning of the language are observed in compact communities;
- 2) The duration of the compact residence of a given language community;
- 3) Language contacts of speakers, as they affect the language use; often the ethnic language of the community speakers is gradually functionally supplanted by a different variety.

Having received the above data on language groups, we can make assumptions on the trends for the further development of the studied languages whether they undergo a positive or negative functional shift.

For proper forecasting, it is necessary to conduct the following sociolinguistic procedures:

- To trace, according to the census, the development trends of the studied language groups within 2 or 3 decades: note an increase or decrease in the number of their speakers, whether the increase is consequent or intermittent;
- Language loyalty among the studied communities: competence in the language (according to the census);
- Assessment of the objective possibilities of using one's native language in different areas of communication: the presence of radio and television programs in the language studied, the use of the language in education and other areas of social communication;
- Study of the actual functioning of the language, both in specific language communities and among individual speakers.

Thus, in a generalized form, forecasts (according to censuses) can be formed as follows:

- If within 2-3 decades the number of speakers is stable or it increases, then it is quite possible to further maintain and expand this language community. If the number of speakers decreases, a tendency towards the reduction of the language community is highly likely. The positive outcome depends on the correlation of the vitality of a language and the pressure force of ethnolinguistic factors. If the number of speakers of the language community is constantly decreasing, we can predict its gradual disappearance. In the latter case, it is necessary to study the language of this community, record its sounds, describe the structure in order to preserve it for history.

3 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Indigenous peoples living on the territory of the Russian Federation differ in numbers. The most numerous people, according to the 2010 census, are Russian people (appx. 111 million people). The second largest nationality are Tatar people (appx. 6 million people).

Three nationalities have population over a million people, these are: the Bashkirs (1.6 million people), the Chuvashs (1.4 million people) and the Chechens (1.4 million people). These peoples, as well as nationalities with more than 50,000 people are defined as language majorities.

The nationalities which have about or less than 50,000 people are language minorities.

Finally, there are some specific language communities in Russia, namely the diasporas, which are represented by various ethnic groups. This part of the population is most difficult to account for, as they are subject to migration processes, assimilation and language shift.

The language majorities, i.e. the languages of numerically dominant ethnic groups, which most often have the status of the official languages of a state, a region, or a territorial-administrative entity as part of the federal state, are currently thriving. The functional status of language majorities is mostly institutional, such languages are being widely used in the administrative, educational, media and other important spheres of communication.

Diasporas are groups of people of a certain ethnicity, living outside the main traditional place of settlement, they are united by common ethnic self-awareness and, as a rule, they consciously preserve their ethnic languages as the means of communication. Diasporas can be represented by ethnic (national) groups of various demographic powers that find themselves outside their place of origin due to various historical reasons. The difference in living conditions in the cities and in the countryside is expressed in different conditions of functioning of a given variety. Diasporas' speakers, as a rule, are exposed to a strong linguistic impact from a surrounding language environment, consequently, prosodic shifts and occasional borrowings are more or less frequently observed in their speech. As a result of prolonged contacts, typical interference phenomena can become systemic, and over time, a local version of the given language (ethnolect) can be formed. On the territory of Russia various diasporas can be found, namely Armenian, Jewish, German, Ukrainian, etc.

In Russia there are so-called 'the old' diasporas and 'the new' ones. The old diasporas include, for example, the Finno-Ugric diasporas in the territories of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and other regions who migrated there as early as the 16th – 18th centuries. New ones have appeared relatively recently as a result of all kinds of political and social cataclysms of the 20th and 21st centuries. Finding themselves in a different ethnic and linguistic environment, they are forced to adapt to new living conditions and often lose their language, being unable to use it, educate their children, read literature. In this regard, the old diasporas in Russia are in better situation: in some regions, schools are opened for them, a small periodical is published, national-cultural autonomies work, folk art groups are created, and communication with the main territory of settlement is maintained. However, in general, the languages of the diasporas, even if they are duly preserved, do not have prospects for use in institutional spheres even in the areas of diasporas settlement. Their main task is to at least preserve their native languages at the level of everyday communication.

By and large, the focus of major concern is focused on the vitality of language minorities in the Russian Federation, since the ability of such languages for functional development and preservation of structural qualities of their languages raises fears.

As an illustration, we present the table 'Some Minority Languages of Peoples of the Russian Federation'. The language situation for the minority languages of the peoples of Russian Federation is considered on the material from all-Russian census surveys (2002 and 2010).

According to the data below, in the majority of cases of considered languages:

- 1) The ethnic community in most cases decreased within 10 years;
- 2) The number of speakers of the corresponding language community is shrinking.

These two tendencies give rise to negative assumptions about the vitality of these languages in the future. In accordance with the indicated trends, the forecast shows the reduction in the functional power for the considered languages of the indigenous peoples of Russia.

Table 1. Some Minority Languages of Peoples of the Russian Federation.

nationality/ language	population (2010 census)	population dynamics 2002-2010	number of speakers	speakers dynamics 2002-2010
Abazins	43341	+14,23%	37831	-1,09%
Andii	11780	-45,98%	5800	-75,56%
Akhvakh	7930	+24,37%	270	-96,37%
Bezhta	5958	-3,87%	6072	-6,02%
Veps	5936	-27,96%	3613	-37,20%
Dolgans	7885	+8,59%	1054	-78,34%
Itelmen	3193	+0,41%	82	-78,70%
Karata	4787	-20,90%	255	-96,12%
Koryak	7953	-9,04%	1665	-44,85%
Mansi	12269	+7,32%	938	-65,84%
Nanaian	12003	-1,29%	1347	-65,34%
Niwch	4652	-9,88%	1347	+95,78%
Ulchis	2765	-5,08%	154	-78,96%
Khanty	30943	+7,90%	9584	-29,36%
Tsakhur	12769	+23,18%	10596	+8,44%
Chelkans	1181	+38,13%	310	-42,49%
Chukchi	15908	+0,89%	5095	-34,19%
Shor	12888	-7,78%	2839	-54,28%
Evenki	37843	+6,52%	4802	-36,68%
Tat	1585	-31,18%	2012	-33,29%

The situation is different for the other languages of the Russian Federation (with more than 50,000 speakers). They sometimes lose their social functions through a negative linguistic shift and as a result such functions are then performed by the Russian language or local state languages of the republics.

There are 22 republics in the Russian Federation, the number of state languages in these republics is 41.

This difference is caused by the fact that in a number of republics there are several state languages: for example, Mari El, Mordovia and Kabardinono Balkaria have three state languages (along with the Russian language, there are two national languages), there are five state languages in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, 14 in Dagestan, 2 in the other republics (Russian and a title language). All the state languages of the republics have relatively strong positions in such areas as school education, the media, national culture (performances in theaters), literature, legislation (laws are printed both in Russian and in state languages of the republics), family and everyday communication (in rural areas).

4 CONCLUSION

It should be noted that while the number of communication areas even for majority languages remains relatively stable, the functional use of languages does not expand, but rather decreases. For example, the number of newspapers and magazines is decreasing, the time on television broadcasts, etc. is reduced. With regard to languages that are not state languages of the republics, the situation is even more challenging, since their use is not fixed in legislation. It is difficult to make predictions regarding their future; much depends on the speakers. As Finnish researchers correctly note, if the speakers are not ready to make efforts for the sake of the future of their languages, the forecasts will remain unfavorable.

Summarizing the above, we note that predicting the functional development of languages in the future is a difficult task, depending on a number of factors, mainly on well-thought out and planned language policies of the state, aimed at ensuring that the languages of Russia are well preserved and developed.

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