

German Ethnic Minority in Glasov and in the Kirov Region: Field Research of Ethnic Identity

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Abstract: Topicality of the research on German ethnic minority in Glasov and in the Kirov region is determined by the general linguistic, historical-linguistic and sociolinguistic value of insular dialectology connected with peculiarities of development and functioning of dialects in the situation when separate ethnolinguistic groups exist in isolation from the main ethnic community. It is common knowledge that ethnic identity is nowadays susceptible to such global processes as labour migration, immigration, ethnic mixing etc. This paper looks in more detail at identity in the local German community in Glasov (Russia, Udmurt Republic) and in the Kirov region (Russia).

Key words: Ethnic Germans • German Dialects • Distinctive Identity Markers • Common Territory
• Ethnical Language • Religion Everyday Family Culture • Folklore • Crafts • Behavior Code
• Common Historical Experience

INTRODUCTION

Modern Russian linguistics studies mainly languages which are actively operating. An interest in dialects especially of small ethnic groups is determined by concern to lose distinctive character of cultures of the groups, which is known to be reflected in the language. Such research is also necessary to understand the way different languages develop and interact especially in case of their direct contact. Comparative linguistics offers many theories which describe the key stages when separate languages influence and change each other. Some of these theories can be proved by actual facts; others are hypothetical ones since it's not always historically possible to restore all the levels of mutual influence. But these processes are permanent and basically identical, which can be seen even these days in the languages of small ethnic groups. The models of such interaction are best seen in the example of dialects existing alongside with a common national language. Dialect is

one of the forms the national language exists in. In this view Germany is a rather unique country due a great variety of dialects on a comparatively small territory and a standard was formed not so long ago in historical terms.

It was the history of German people that migration flows appeared in Germany in the 18th century and started moving to the Russian Empire. The coming refugees densely settled on the territory of the Empire forming island settlements each having its dominant dialect. These dialects were then the only language for people to communicate with each other. The languages assimilated slowly and keeping native language on the territory of another language area could barely influence the life of its speakers. As a rule, the native dialect was the only means of communication in everyday life. The further historical events connected with the Great Patriotic War were a tragedy even for the Germans who were habitual residents of the USSR. When the war began, they were deported to move to Siberia and Central Asia which was the reason why they started to bind together nationality-based.

And surely, another language situation arose and dialects which were autonomous before mixed up together. Besides, it was officially forbidden to speak these dialects and next generations didn't have an opportunity to be educated in their native language. But irrespective of prohibition to speak German on the national level, it was still the means of communication in everyday life.

One of the islands the Soviet Germans were forced to move to was the Kirov region and Udmurt Republic (Glasov) where ethnic groups and their language were mixing together. Transformations have been taking place from the beginning of the war till present days. Let us define their character and probably will help the scholars to find the ways to save the disappearing dialects and cultures of small ethnic groups [1-4].

The study of the Russian Germans in Glasov and in the Kirov region is made by research into the 4 main aspects of functioning of the German dialects in terms of linguistic island. These aspects are historical-demographical, cultural, sociolinguistic and linguistic proper. Historical-demographical aspect is connected with obtaining and generalizing different data, including statistics ones, in regard to when the Germans come to the Vyatka land and Udmurt Republic, how they settled geographically, also in regard to their population, age structure and social status. Cultural aspect helps us to follow the connection between speech facts of the island dialect speakers and their culture, ethnic awareness and attitude to the neighboring ethnic groups. Sociolinguistic aspect us lets estimates the linguistic competence, define functioning fields of the German island dialects and esteem their pragmatic value. And finally, the linguistic aspect proper defines the level of informant's mastering the language.

The topicality of this research is chiefly determined by the fact that historical, linguistic and social-political constituents of the languages and their dialect interaction beyond their main area are becoming now a real social problem. It concerns not only research into the German dialects in Russia but also in other multinational, *i.e.* multilingual societies. Therefore, it's topical to use a complex approach to study German ethnic minority in terms of language contacts in multinational societies.

The present research is aimed at finding peculiarities of the unique language form which is the mixed German dialects, systematizing the sociolinguistic, linguistic mechanism of languages interaction which arise, making notional system for creation of a single theory of their

development under conditions of alien languages and dialects surroundings, analyzing the main trends of their functioning under conditions of bilingualism and multilingualism. The research was done on the basis of interview and questionnaire data, with 101 respondents, both in Russia and Germany, within the span of 14 years (1999–2013).

It should be noted that issues of the language contacts are studied on the basis of linguistic materials of informants who saved and still speak their native dialects (idiolects) in everyday life. These people kept original ethnic characteristics with deportation, *i.e.* their forced migration influencing the process of remaining the traditional traits and appearing of new ones in their culture. Original peculiarities of their way of life are still remaining in a way in their habits, traditions, day-to-day life but recently they are best seen in spheres of spiritual culture and national self-awareness.

Field work started in 1999 (in the Kirov region) and in 2007 (in Glasov), includes regular "involvement observation", interviewing, recording, perceptive analysis and instrumental analysis (GoldWave, Praat). Both common linguistic traits and considerable variation can be observed within a small vernacular community. A large-scale interference of Russian is common at all levels: phonetic, prosodic, lexical, morphological and syntactical. On the other hand, the two basic German dialect distinctions (Low German and High German) are marked, as well as present day structural changes typical both of dialect variation and Standard German. Methodology and intermediate results of field research will be elaborated for poster presentation.

Beyond any doubt, identity is an interdisciplinary area of research and its markers (subareas) have been discussed in special literature [5-10]. The distinctive identity markers are: common territory, ethnical language, religion, everyday family culture, family set-up, folklore, crafts, behavior code, common historical experience, psychological makeup.

As to the first parameter, common territory, it has always been of minor importance with ethnic German settlers in Russia / USSR. The Germans coming to Russia during the late 18-early 20th centuries, lived mostly in rural areas across the whole territory, Central Asia being the extreme eastern part. Today, traditional "German language islands" are considerably stable in West Siberia, the Altai Region, Kazakhstan and since 2011 attempts have been made to re-vitalize German settlements in the Volga Region (Saratov).

Ethnical language is unanimously considered to be most crucial within ethnical identity structure, being the spiritual backbone and means of reflecting a peculiar picture of the outer (and inner) world. The German community in Glasov and in Kirov region is linguistically extremely heterogeneous. The linguistic competence ranges from non-speaking / reading to full-fledged skills. In the oldest age group the respondents speak “dialectally mixed” vernacular, with the traits of Swabian, South German and Low German dialects. It should be stressed that the senior group members have mastered their mother tongue within the family, which is the easiest, most efficient and natural way to learn a language. Middle age group (45 – 59 years) had different experience in learning German: from grandparents and elder relatives, at high school and university, through self-instruction. Only a few of them can speak Standard German, comprehend and have writing skills, the rest of the group understand the text, know the most common oral clichés and can produce simple sayings. It should be mentioned that Germans speaking mother tongue were strongly demotivated since their childhood, because many Russians considered German to be “the language of fascist invaders”. Several informants told that German kids used to be punished for speaking their mother tongue in the kindergarten (early 1950s).

On the contrary, 3 respondents in the older age group who have never concealed their categorization, have mastered German in the family from their older relatives. On the whole, we witness a vivid example of language shift, a voluntary change from German to Russian, the language of the majority. Nevertheless, German is taught in special classes sponsored by Germany. Besides, some informants of the younger age groups, strongly motivated to master German, have achieved very good results.

Religion is regarded by ethnologists as a crucial consolidating factor. But for decades the Soviet authorities have persecuted religion whether Russian Orthodox, Lutheran or Mennonite denomination. Nevertheless, childhood memories of Christian Easter, Christmas or Advent have become part and parcel of the celebrations, festive decoration and the cousin. The traditional holiday sessions have a religious colouring. During Christmas and Easter celebrations, the choir sings the prayers (hymns) “Großer Gott”, “Christ ist aufgestanden”, the former is also performed on funeral occasions. The Glasov and the Kirov German community is unanimous in regarding Christmas and Easter the major religious occasions free from consumerism, fairly popular

nowadays, both in Russia and elsewhere. There also remains a common Protestant tradition to mark the coming Christmas with a special Advent Calendar, which is popular in the oldest age group.

Religion Everyday family culture (housekeeping, hygiene, food) has also preserved ethnic peculiarities. At the level of livelihood special dishes have become a sociocultural marker, e.g. Strudel, Schneeball Suppe, baked goose with Sauerkraut etc. In the families there is a tradition of following major religious holidays, Christmas and Easter with cooking particular dishes.

The family set up is also peculiar. 95% of the respondents are married, being single is extinct. The marriages are mixed (94%), with two children as a rule, divorce is extremely rare. Most respondents have graduated from universities or colleges, it is more typical of females (engineer, kindergarten teacher, high school teacher, doctor, economist). Categorization of children in mixed families is done on the consensus basis, e.g. with two children, one characterized as German the second as Russian.

German folklore is well-known to the respondents in Glasov and in the Kirov region, *i.e.* fairy tales and their characters, legends, proverbs, nursery rhymes, etc. Quite a number of them sing in the choir, rehearsals are held on a weekly basis. Naturally, the traditional German melodically structure has been changed into unison singing, “open voice” technique and greater emotional charge than the ethnical prototypes, which is also Russian impact.

Crafts are not popular, but some respondents display high artistic skill as blacksmiths, or in carpentry. Some women before retirement used to be professional cooks, having introduced elements of German cuisine into the traditional Russian menu (fruit soup).

Behavior patterns code seems to be correlative with psychological makeup. Most typical are the eagerness to do the job perfectly, responsibility, sober and practical attitude to the problems and difficulties arising, a rational turn of mind alongside with compassion. Family history is well-known and cherished among all age groups, including the youngest. In some families written family history has been compiled.

In the course of field research our hypothesis on common historical experience as a formidable ethno-consolidating factor, proved to be valid. The older generation cherish memories of hardships and injustice of the deportation and the way they managed to overcome the hardships, which creates a consolidating

emotional memory. In the younger age groups ethnicity is not concealed, moreover, kids and young people are proud of their German ancestors and eager to probe deeper into the family history.

Summing up, in the course of field research it was established that ethnicity is a category that changes with regard to time and situation. The ten parameters / markers of identity are dynamic, responding to objective factors (political system, ethnic policy of the state, territorial administration) and individual-oriented factors (empathic attitudes, memories, motivations, family history etc.) With regard to the ethnic Germans of Russia the factor of common historical experience is the most crucial ethno-consolidating factor.

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