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Preserving Russian Cultural Identity of Learners in Multicultural Learning Environment

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to move readers toward a deeper understanding of and wider respect for the issues of the modern system of bilingual education based on the principles of multiculturalism. Different conditions of learning are taken into account: the Russian language in restricted linguistic medium as well as Russian as a foreign language. The principles of multiculturalism determine the educational concepts used in teaching Russian to diverse categories of learners. The authors developed different approaches to the methodology of teaching the Russian language depending upon the conditions of the language environment.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze the state of the modern system of bilingual education where one of the languages is Russian. The study has been conducted over 20 years in the Russian-speaking communities in Europe and North America. The aim of the research was to identify opportunities to learn the mother language at schools for students from Russian-speaking diasporas and preserve national identity.

The materials of the study are:

- Authors' personal experiences of teaching students of Russian origin from European and American universities in Lomonosov Moscow State University (1994 –2015) and Moscow State University of Technology "STANKIN" (1994 –2015).

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- Analysis of the scientific and methodical literature, i.e. textbooks in Russian addressed to different categories of students depending on the level of language skills and conditions of the training process.
- Results of a Russian language test for students who are representatives of Russian diasporas. The test was held in the Testing center of Moscow State University from 2005 to 2015.
- Results of a Russian language test for students who are from Russian diasporas abroad. The test was held in the Test control department of Pushkin State Russian Language Institute from 1996 to 2003.

The results of the study were tested at the Institute of Russian Language and Culture, Moscow State University, Moscow State Technical University "STANKIN", and Tomsk Polytechnic University. Practical output was gained in the form of teaching materials "In the world of men" (issue #1 was published in 2013, Issue #2 is in print now).

Using the test results shows the validity of the research, leading to the development of a new methodology of teaching Russian language in the conditions of a limited language environment.

2. Bilingual education in the European Union

The modern Western system of bilingual education is one of the global projects based on the principles of multiculturalism and is considered as a benchmark in many countries today. The concept of multiculturalism is directly related to the social and cultural integration of migrants into European society "primarily through education and enlightenment while preserving their cultural and religious identity" according to Coman and Valov (2012). It should be noted that this approach is exactly the same as a concept of Kazan University professor N.I. Ilminsky. Ilminsky presented his concept to the Ministry of Education of the Russian Empire in 1870 and it was implemented in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Currently, the declared aim of education is the formation of a tolerant person. This is primarily due to the fact that, according to UN data, the majority of international problems in the contemporary world come from the ignorance and lack of understanding of people from different ethnic groups (nations, states) due to the lack of education (Vasileva & Uskova, 2012).

It should be noted that despite the similarity in methodologies in Europe and North America, the approaches to bilingual education have fundamental differences. First of all, it concerns the subjects of the study: students from the Russian-speaking diaspora in Europe are referred to as bilingual (subordinative / coordinative bilingualism: native language / Russian - the language of socialization / language of the country of residence), while in North America they are considered to be «Heritage Speakers» (subordinative bilingualism: an inherited language / Russian - the language of socialization / language of the country of residence).

The traditions of the Russian scientific school have developed three areas of Russian language teaching methodology where the main criterion is the characteristic of the language environment:

- Monolingual language environment: learning Russian language in the country of the target language (Russia) - Russian as a second language.
- Bilingual language environment: learning Russian language in the real / official bilingualism, where both languages are used in all spheres of communication (household, administrative, economic, scientific, cultural, etc.) Russian as a foreign language.
- Limited language environment: learning Russian language in a situation where language is used mainly in the domestic sphere (Russian-speaking diaspora abroad) –Russian language in restricted linguistic environment (Uskova, 2014).

The principal difference between the far abroad Russian diaspora compared to the Russian diaspora in the CIS countries of the former Soviet Union is as follows:

- The lack of official bilingualism, which is a prerequisite for the development of bilingual education.
- The absence of the only possible legal status for the Russian language –the status of "regional language minority", or in terms of Russian research "the language of a national minority."

The latter circumstance is essential for bilingual education. The fact is that according to the Russian methodological school of N.I. Ilminsky, the goal of learning is defined as the formation of coordinative bilingualism. So school-leavers should be equally fluent in native and state (Russian) languages.

This principle applies in the European Union if the nation has the legal status of a regional minority. In this case students can be roughly defined as "bilinguals." If the language does not have a regional status, students, respectively, are not entitled to bilingual education.

Thus, it can be stated nowadays that there is a fundamentally new type of student –the«Heritage Speaker» – forwhom the Russian language has moved from native status to the status of an inheritance language.

These three areas of teaching methodologies of the Russian language have different linguistic bases:

- Russian as a second language is based on functional linguistics.
- Russian as a foreign language is based on comparative linguistics.
- Russian language in a restricted linguistic environment is based on a combination of descriptive and functional linguistics.

Another significant factor determining the content of training is the student's home country language policy. For example, in a multi-ethnic environment in countries like Belgium and Switzerland, coordinative bilingualism prevails. Thus it is assumed that all citizens are equally fluent in official languages, and this is legislated.

Another situation is observed in countries with significant national minorities (France, Britain, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Finland): bilingual education aims at "soft" integration of the "bilingual" category of students to the dominant language environment. The result of studying in such an environment is a loss of national identity (self-identity of a person), which is associated with the displacement of the native language of socialization and, consequently, changes the internal identity. These changes lead to the formation of the language person with the mentality of the titular nation.

Nevertheless, there are the following categories of Russian-speaking students in Europe:

- Graduates of Russian schools (Russian Embassy).
- Graduates of European public schools where Russian is taught as a foreign language.
- Graduates of mixed type schools, for example, the Finnish-Russian Schools.
- Graduates where three languages are taught, for example, the British-American, German-Swedish schools, where Russian language is taught as a second foreign language. For example, the language of education is English, the first foreign language is German, the second foreign language is Russian.

Evaluating the results of education, despite this, we can say that the European system of bilingual education in most cases aims at the assimilation of national minorities. In this connection, issues about the identity of native Russian speakers living in European countries and having the status of language minority are really urgent. Studies on these themes are conducted in several directions:

- a. the reaction of Russian speakers to the changes concerning Russian language status,
- b. the development of the language contacts outside Russia,
- c. the role of Russian language in the formation of identity and intra-solidarity in Russian speaking communities and diasporas,
- d. determining the discursive strategies in the construction of the Russian linguistic minority identity,
- e. the peculiarities of the Russian language in various fields, from the Internet to everyday communication,
- f. features of the perception of the image of the Russian immigrant or representative of the diaspora in different communities (Kagan, Dillon).

The European concept of multiculturalism, despite the declared aims of adaptation and integration of the other national cultures into the modern Western society, proved to be unsustainable due to the fact that the authors did not take into account the factor considering the peculiarities of national archetype, which is a cornerstone in the Russian philosophical and pedagogical school concepts.

The consequences of this undeveloped idea listed in the analytical review of "The European experience of legal and organizational solutions in the field of integration of migrants through education": "Almost confirmed the

possibility of appearance of the distortions and errors in different countries... In many ways, these distortions and errors caused by a too categorical government and authorities' orientation on the ideological values and attitudes of Western European societies, do not always coincide with the values and approaches of other peoples and cultures "(Coman & Gross, 2012).

3. Bilingual education in North America

In North America, the system of bilingual education has its own characteristics. Canada has two official languages (English and French). An equal number of training hours is given to the study of each to meet the requirements of accepted standards, so education in Canada can be considered as originally bilingual.

In this system, Russian language can be taught in the discipline of "Foreign Language" (at best). Most often, the Russian language is included in the program of additional education: evening, Sunday schools, language courses, etc. Russian schools, which were established by recent Russian emigrants, appear worthy of special focus. The program of these schools includes not only the study of the Russian language, but also the natural sciences in Russian. The high level of knowledge of graduates proved the effectiveness of such learning, which in turn has attracted other nationalities to these schools, including the titular nation. Of course, the opportunity to go to a prestigious university and gain opportunities for career growth through training in Russian schools is the best motivation for learning Russian.

In the US, the Russian language is positioned mainly for the «Heritage Speakers» category of students (in higher and secondary education). It has legislative support:

- Bilingual education program «The two-way Bilingual Program» (Florida, 1963);
- Act on bilingual education (1968 signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1973-1974. Supported by the Congress).

Russian language is also studied in a system of supplementary education; for example learning to read and write in Russian church and private schools. However, the program of learning how to read and write at an elementary level (level A1), and the use of Russian language in the conditions of a limited language environment leads to the fact that the mother tongue goes into the category of "inherited". This fact does not contribute to the motivation to study the Russian language. On the contrary, it leads to the replacement by the English language, which is a language of socialization.

The system of higher education for «Heritage Speakers / Learners» contains special programs for Russian language courses. In contrast to the teaching content within the framework of an additional education, these university programs not only increase the motivation of learning Russian language, but also help preserve national identity. This is due to the fact that the discipline "Foreign Language" in the United States is not considered as a priority, and the need for translators is thus provided by teaching «Heritage Speakers».

Thus, the factor of multiculturalism requires the variations provision for the modern Western education, which takes into account the knowledge of Russian language by different categories of students in the different conditions.

The language situation in Europe and North America involves the development of bilingual education in two ways:

- Bilingual schools existing in a natural bilingual language environment (Canada, Belgium, Switzerland). The goal of education is coordinative bilingualism attainment by the students (equal possession of the two official languages).
- Bilingual schools aimed at the integration of ethnic minorities into the dominant language environment (USA, France, Great Britain, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden). This type of bilingual education distinguished by an intensive process of national minorities integration, involving soft assimilation. As an example, let's have a look at the Finnish-Russian School: according to the program graduates should know Russian language at A2

level (we specify that subordinative bilingualism starts from level B2), thus school education is focused on the dominance of language socialization that is in fact directed to the formation of the titular nation mentality.

Besides the multiculturalism factor influence to the modern system of bilingual education, where one of the languages of instruction is Russian, there is a need for Russian language in the population of one or another country.

The content of teaching Russian language in the context of globalization is defined by "over-territory" conception of "The Russian World", which dates back to the theory of "Russian-ness" by V.S. Bibler about insufficiency of "geographically bound" characteristics of a nation, as "mentally national mind is closed on the person, but in the twentieth century this person is living easily across borders" (Bibler, 1993).

From a linguistic point of view, Y. Karaulov defines the concept of "The Russian World". Its structure consists of three components: Russian view of the world, Russian mentality, and All-Russian linguistic type (Karaulov, 2004).

In this regard, the Russian language gets a particular function to be a universal translator of meanings, which connects the national cultures with the Russian world, and through it to the values of Western culture through the language constants.

4. Conclusion

In closing, we will summarize what we believe are key findings of our research. The development of the world community at the present stage can be defined as the period of reformatting the socio-cultural space that affects almost all aspects of society: political, economic, and social. The integration of all these areas leads to increasing and accelerating the information exchange, which in turn increases the necessity for personal contact and, accordingly, the knowledge of foreign cultures. As a result, there is inevitably an intercultural communication, which is possible according to S.G. Ter-Minasova in two versions - the conflict (us -them) and contact (Ter-Minasova, 2004).

We note that the Russian language functioning in the context of preserving the national identity of Russian-speaking diasporas must surely go in line with the dialogue of national cultures as cultural and educational activities for the development and formation of bilingualism, which is the basis for the education and formation of a multicultural identity.

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