

M. N. GUBOGLO

USSR Academy of Science

BILINGUALISM IN ALIEN ETHNIC ENVIRONMENT: PROBLEMS OF STUDY

(Ethnic Surveys in the USSR)

In analysing the ethnic composition of a country, territory, republic, region, district or any other administrative unit, researchers are often faced with a problem of terminology and definition, that is how to identify diverse groups of people occupying the same territory in keeping with the standard scientific hierarchy of ethnic communities. The most popular terms in this case are national minorities, national, ethnic, local, ethnic-area, ethnically dispersed, ethnographic, minor groups. These definitions are bound to identify a section of the population which, on the one hand, represents a subethnic category, i. e., fragments of the national nucleus (nations or peoples), and on the other, specifies a group of the population outside the framework of the basic nationality living in a given administrative unit. However, alongside of the above distinct groups with a set of common traits, there are individual representatives of other nationalities in some republics which have not been associated with any specific group. In this sense, even in few monoethnic states or in some Soviet republics with approximately monoethnic parameters, there is always a certain amount of people of other nationality.

Therefore, on a larger scale it appears feasible to identify population sections either living in native or alien ethnic environment.

The goal of this study is to outline some features of the linguistic environment against the background of alien ethnoses, formulate questions and prospects of study on the example of Soviet republics.

This task is quite rational since, according to the 1979 census, about 50 million people, or almost one-fifth of the entire population (including 33.6 per cent of Armenians, 22.8 per cent of Tajiks, 19.3 per cent of Kazakhs and 17.4 per cent of Russians¹) lived outside the boundaries of their national formations.

Living in alien ethnic environment demands a knowledge of the second language. More often than not the language of the specific environment, or the one adopted as a means of nationwide communication, serve this purpose. There is widespread evidence

1. S. I. Brook. *Naseleniye mira. Etnodemograficheskiy spravochnik* (Population of the World. Ethno-Demographic Reference Book). Moscow, 1986, 2nd ed., p. 148.

that in alien linguistic environment, the second language is used more extensively than at home, in a native ethnic environment. Among Soviet nationalities bilingual peoples living in the confines of their republics and autonomous regions accounted for 16.9 per cent and those outside for 37.6 per cent, that is 2.2 times as much. For the non-Russian population the figures are 37.8 per cent and 57.4 per cent.

In the USSR the presence of alien ethnic medium is not regarded as an exception for many nationalities, Russians included.

All the Russians living in Soviet national republics (23.9 million according to the 1979 census), as well as the Russians of the Russian Federation constitute a section of the Russian ethnos. However, the Russians living in the republics have specific traits that appeared owing to joint living and long contacts with indigenous peoples. In 1970–1979, the share of Russians with a good command of a second language (bilingual Russians) grew from 3.2 per cent to 3.7 per cent in the Soviet Union, while in the union republics (except for the Russian Federation) the figures are 15.4 per cent and 18.1 per cent.

With the overall growth by 6.5 per cent of the Russian population in the USSR in the same period, the number of bilingual Russians increased by 24.1 per cent. The figures for the union republics are 12.2 per cent and 32.7 per cent.² As the number of second language speakers grew faster than the overall number of the Russians it is clear that there was an urgent need for the Russian-national bilingualism. Ethnological surveys of speech habits in alien ethnic environment showed that, first, not in all cases a conscious approach towards learning the second language could be identified, second, few localities could boast of a well-organized system of education, and third, it was not easy for the non-Russians and the non-indigenous people to choose a second language.

The first impression of ethno-linguistic processes in alien ethnic medium is justified and trivial all the same. Indeed, hardly anyone dares to question the theory about the greater scope of knowledge of the second language in alien ethnic environment as compared to native environment. Yet the USSR's linguistic map is so multi-coloured that at closer scrutiny one is able to identify a series of exceptions from general rules governing the formation of bilingualism in foreign ethnic environment. For example, in a number of cases, the knowledge of a second language or quite conscious switch over to it is weaker in alien ethnic environment than in the native one. Calculations showed that each of the indigenous people living in the Volga basin (Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Udmurt, Mordovian and Mary autonomous republics) preserve their native language „at home“ more than outside its boundaries. This regularity, judging by the census, is relatively standardized both in the cities and in the countryside.

The only exception in the general linguistic situation is constituted by the Udmurts. In the Udmurt Autonomous Republic, the share of the Udmurts who consider Russian to be their native tongue totals 22.7 per cent, and in the cities of the Tatar and Bashkir autonomous republics these figures are 17.1 per cent and 18.5 per cent.³

2. Itogi Vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya 1970 g. IV tom. Natsionalnyi sostav naseleniya SSSR (Results of the 1970 All-Union Census. National Composition of Soviet Population). Moscow, 1973, vol. 4.

3. For more detail see: Guboglo, „The Leninist Nationalities Policy and Problems of the Language of Inter-Ethnic Communication“. In: *Torzhestvo leninskoy natsionalnoy politiki*. Cheboksary, 1972, pp. 359–380.

Thus, we see the universality of reverse-proportional ratio between the share of nationals in alien ethnic environment and the latter's desire to learn a second language. This exception (or a deviation) needs a thorough study.

The 1960's and 1970's showed that 14 national groups of Russians in Soviet republics increasingly need to learn the language of indigenous nationality of a respective republic. In some cases, the problem of encouraging the non-Russians in Soviet republics to learn Russian becomes urgent. In education, for example, they have to choose, on the one hand, between the local basic language and Russian, and, on the other, the problem is how to put their native language on the curriculum. As a result, a section of non-Russian national groups develop, along with national Russian speech habits, the so-called national bilingualism, or a combination of their own national language and the language of the republic's indigenous population. Three-lingual groups can be added to that category. Such a linguistic plurality does not only bring positive results. This is particularly true of cases when a child who enters a school speaks better the language of his own national group. At school he attends classes in the indigenous language, and in addition, some in Russian so that he could go over to Russian in senior grades. In addition to three above languages (native, Indigenous and Russian) children from the 5th grade began to take a foreign language which causes overstrain and narrows their chances to do well in other subjects. As a result, children living in alien ethnic environment leave school with inadequate knowledge for entering secondary specialized or higher learning establishments. Therefore, linguistic plurality aggravates competition on the threshold of higher education and creates artificial barriers on the way of natural socio-professional structure. This also has an adverse effect on the policy of improving educational standards and professional mobility and on the atmosphere of inter-ethnic relations in general.

There are cases in the USSR, when some nationalities changed their national groups by force of historical circumstances: there are the Ukrainians in Moldavia and vice versa. Mutual exchanges between national groups are common among peoples of the Volga area, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Task studies revealed that on mixed ethnic territories, the language pattern of a national group, including its speech habits, depends not only on the distribution character and many situational factors, but also on the nature of communication ties between the national group and its national nucleus. Ethno-sociological surveys among the Moldavians living in the Ukraine and the Ukrainians living in Moldavia showed that in some Moldavian villages in the Ukraine bilingual Moldavians speak Moldavian more willingly than their counterparts living in Moldavia. In addition, the ethnicity of the Moldavians in the Ukraine was more emphatic than that of the Ukrainians in Moldavia. A comparative analysis of information flows between indigenous people and national groups that branched off (in terms of territory), i. e., between the Moldavians in Moldavia and the Ukraine and the Ukraine and between the Ukrainians of the Ukraine and Moldavia made it possible to draw a number of conclusions. It seems that the Moldavian nation retains the ethnicity and originality of Moldavian culture in the villages of Ukraine's border areas. Following this strategy, the ministries and departments of Moldavia elaborate plans to supply the Ukrainian Moldavians with textbooks, education guides, Moldavian fiction literature, periodicals and special-purpose radio and TV programs. Thus, target-oriented arrangement of information about the Moldavian culture in Moldavia impedes assimilation of national groups within alien environment.

Spontaneous factors are also at work in these processes along with special „care“, that is a well-organized policy of preserving ethnicity in alien ethnic environment.

Analyses of ethnic and linguistic conditions of the Koreans living in Uzbekistan showed that in small Korean communities people tend to communicate with more often in their native language. This is where spontaneous rather than well-organized factors come into play related as they are to linguistic and ethnic nostalgia.

As was noted, life in the alien ethnic environment affects correlation between linguistic components of bilingualism proper: language competence, speech habits and linguistic requirements.

While in some cases language competence exceeds speech habits, in many cases there is a drastic shortage of language competence. For example, clusters of Moldavians were identified in some Moldavian villages which, despite their good command of Russian, speak it only occasionally. In contrast, a group of Russians with poor command of Moldavian had to communicate with rather often in Moldavian, especially as regards northern areas of Moldavia with a dense indigenous population.

To sum up, well-coordinated results of statistical calculations and ethno-sociological research give us more confidence in the correctness of our estimations and more incentives to search for new ways, problems and tasks facing studies of diverse ethno-linguistic processes, alien ethnic environment included.

Speaking about control over contemporary national relationship and development and intercourse between languages of Soviet peoples, we put special emphasis on the fact that in a number of republics direct inter-ethnic contacts between nationalities speaking different languages come only second and third (after school) in terms of influence on language competence and speech habits. The factor of geographic location is also important, although it was long underestimated in relevant works.

In addition to traditional inversely-proportional dependence between the share of the national group in a specific foreign environment and the scope of its involvement in the sphere of the second language (either Russian or any indigenous) attention should be focused on the study of mutual links between other factors: historical, socio-cultural, psychological.

In a vast realm of ethno-sociological research, the study of basic types and directions of bilingualism in alien ethnic environment is very urgent. The motives behind this are a dynamic picture of republics' ethnic composition characterized by growing monoethnicity in some areas and mounting polyethnicity in others. In this context the tasks set before researchers are strongly affected by contradictory dynamics of ethnic composition, for example, shrinking polyethnicity in some republics coupled with an increase in the overall number of nationalities alien to the indigenous environment.

Comparing factors that are at work in ethno-linguistic processes in two ethnic media, we will be able to work out a differentiated approach towards language policies in various regions of the country, different situations and among diverse national groups.

There is a need for certain recommendations to provide incentives for choosing between the first and the second language.

In larger terms, representatives of 14 indigenous nationalities face the urgent task of taking up the second language, i. e., improving their Russian or learning it from scratch.

The nationalities of autonomous republics, regions and districts, as well as nationalities without their own territorial administrative formations and national groups living in alien ethnic environment are also confronted with the problem of preserving their native language. In this context what really counts is the qualitative aspect or the problem of good command and use of the literary language of their own nationality.

We need to undertake special-purpose research to take into account the regularities accompanying deviations in modern ethnolinguistic processes. We must bring under the spotlight a wide range of heterogeneous typological situations and sources.