

COMMUNICATIVE PREVALENCE OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SAKHA (YAKUTIA)

КОММУНИКАТИВНОЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО РУССКОГО ЯЗЫКА В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ САХА (ЯКУТИЯ)

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ABSTRACT

The present article deals with the study results of basic characteristics of communicative prevalence of the Russian language (its functions, linguistic behavior, preference and positioning) on the basis of a specific sociolinguistic material – the inquiry of 14 settlements of Yakutia, 1829 respondents interrogated. There are data on linguistic identity, level of proficiency in evolution; positioning in the issues of interlanguage liaison. In the second part, the issues of modern functioning of the Russian language in comparison to similar data of various researches of 1968, 1980, 1985, 2008 are considered.

Key Words: Communicative Prevalence Of The Russian Language, Ethnolinguistic Identity, Direct Ethnolinguistic Identity, Level Of Proficiency In Languages, Spheres Of Communication

АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена результатам изучения основных характеристик коммуникативного пространства русского языка на конкретном социолингвистическом материале – обследований населения 14 населенных пунктов Якутии с охватом 1829 респондентов. Представлены данные о языковой идентичности, уровне владения языками в динамике; о позициях в вопросах межъязыкового взаимодействия. Во второй части рассматривается современное функционирование русского языка в регламентируемых и нерегламентируемых коммуникативных сферах, языковые ориентации населения в разрезе динамики изменений в сопоставлении с аналогичными данными различных исследований 1968, 1980, 1985, 2008 гг.

Ключевые Слова: Коммуникативное Пространство Русского Языка, Этноязыковая Идентичность, Прямая Этноязыковая Идентичность, Уровень Владения Языками, Сферы Общения.

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ÖZET

Makalede sosyolingvistik malzemelere (Yakutistan'ın 14 yerleşim yerinden 1829 kişi ile görüşmelerle) dayanarak Rusça'nın (fonksiyonu, dil kullanım şekli, tercih, yanlılık) yayılma alanı incelenmiştir. Ayrıca dil özdeşlemeler, dile sahip olmanın derecesi ile diller arası temaslar hakkında bilgiler ortaya koyulmuştur. İkinci bölümde günümüzde mecburi konuşulacak ve konuşması şart olmayan alanlarda, eğitim müesseslerine, medyada, halk arasında, görsel haberlerde Rusça'nın yayılma alanı tetkik edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte 1968, 1980, 1985, 2008 yıllarında yapılan araştırmalara karşılaştırılarak hizmet sektöründe, toplum arasında ve kişisel temaslarda dil kullanımının şekilleri tahlil edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusça'nın Yayılma Alanı, Etnik-Dil Özdeşleşmesi, Bilvasıta Etnik-Dil Özdeşleşmesi, Dile Sahip Olma Sevyesi, Temas Alanları.

There is an evident scientific resources movement in studying the indigenous peoples' languages and the study of the indigenous peoples themselves in the Yakut linguistic science. At the same time, there is a noticeable growing tendency toward studying the regional Russian language. However, there is still a problem in studying the peculiarities of the modern Russian language functioning, the transformations, narrowing, widening or preserving its communicative functions, necessities, preferences of the Russian-speaking (not only ethnic Russian) population of the Republic. The problem created a vacuum and it needs to be described, thought through and transferred immediately.

The ethnic, social, and linguistic reality change in the Republic, the demographic and migration data in particular, reflect the Russian-speaking communicative surroundings. In general, the reasons for such an occurrence are clear and objective in their sense: there is a new language balance, especially in the Republic's capital, and it should be noted that today it is closer to harmonic bilingualism by many features, than in the 70-90's period. Therefore, the Russians and the Yakut begin to adapt and their verbal behavior, language orientations and preferences start changing as well. In this situation, it is important to track how the Russian language status changes, if it changes at all, and what is the balance of Yakut and Russian language social functions in our everyday use.

The Russian language functions in the communicative surroundings in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) as 1) a native language of the ethnic Russians and the representatives of other nationalities; 2) the first functional language for the majority of ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking population of other nationalities; 3) the second language, the official language of communication of ethnic Yakuts with the Yakut and other languages, except for Russian; 4) the language of international communication for almost the entire population.

This article shows the main characteristics of the Russian language communicative surroundings based on a specific social and linguistic material – the population study of 14 Republic areas. We present the comparative data from the general Republic's figures as well as the figures of the Yakutsk town, the Vilyusky region, and the Oymyakonsky region. We also give the data about language identity, the dynamics of the language skills level, the positions and problems of interlanguage communication, the Russian language functioning in the regulated and non-regulated communicative spheres, the population's language preferences in education, mass media, mass visual media information use, verbal behavior

in the service spheres, preferences in public communication and personal communicative surroundings shown in the changing dynamics in comparison with the similar older research data. We also used the questionnaire material of both ethnic Russians and ethnic Yakuts with a straight, mixed and multiple (dual) identity, as well as the representatives of other ethnic groups, joined into one group of “Other”.

The peculiarities of the modern ethnic and linguistic situation in the Republic are in most cases formed by migration factors that define the new language balance formation: the Russian language surroundings narrowing in the Republic as a result of their mass migration to other regions; the increasing role of internal migration; the village population’s migration to the town areas. The 2010 census showed an increasing headcount of titled and indigenous population; the migration to other regions is moderation (37,022 people) in comparison with the 2002 census (almost 160,000 people).

Language identity. The questionnaire showed an identical national identity and native language among the Russians (95.7%) and the Yakuts (87.4%) Языковая идентификация. 2.8% claimed the Yakut language as their native language and 2.4% claimed both languages (Russian and Yakut) as their native language, 5.5% of Yakuts claimed the Russian language as their native, 10.3% claimed both languages as their native one. These are the figures with the prevailing straight language identity of the Russians.

Table 1. The Respondents’ native language in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

Your nationality

	Yakuts	Russians	Other
Yakut	84,5%	2,8%	27,8%
Russian	5,3%	95,7%	44,4%
Both Russian and Yakut	9,9%	2,4%	8,3%

The Russians (95.7%) and the Yakuts (5.3%) actively use the Russian language as a native language. There is a language shift of two types among the last group: those with maintained national language knowledge and those, who do not know their native language.

The technical indicator (acceptance of the non-ethnic language as the native one) shows that the language shift is more typical of the Yakuts. However, the shift to the Russian language is less than the indicators of numerous language identities that most of the Yakut youth has; and these indicators have a tendency to increase. It is interesting that the Yakuts with a language shift have different levels of Yakut language efficiency – from active fluent speech to an absolute inefficiency: 32.1% are completely or almost completely inefficient in the Yakut language; the remainder (67.9%) are fluent or have writing and speaking skills in Yakut. Among the Russians with the Yakut language as their native language 13.6% are active Yakut language speakers; 6.8% can explain things in Yakut; 5% have some difficulties with speaking in Russian. Thus, both, the ethnic identity and the language identity are not determined by the language competence. In the regions, where there is a contacting Russian and Yakut bilingualism, people often have difficulties with the ethnic self-identification (in the Tomtor village of the Oymyakonsky region, Vilyuisk, the Vilyuisk region); the majority of ethnic Russians accept the Yakut language as their native language, or both, the Russian and the Yakut language (in the Tomtor village – 7.7% and 7.7% correspondingly; in Vilyuisk – 6.7% and 6.7% correspondingly) in comparison with

the 2.8% in Yakutsk. In general, young people with high school education marked both languages as their native; this number decreases among the representatives with higher education. Therefore, there is a strong tendency among the youth toward using multiple language identities and this tendency is increasing.

At the same time, there is a very strong attempt to self-identification through the native language; it can be traced in the table, where among the three applicant groups, it is more important for the Yakuts to know the native language (73.2%) and to have a national identity and self-identification (51.6%) in defining their ethnic background; the Russians and other groups only pay special attention to native language knowledge, 62.1% and 45.3% correspondingly.

It is remarkable that the citizens of Yakutia pay very special attention to the linguistic and ethnic interaction. The ethnological studies (Tishkov, 2008: 36-37) note that the number of those, who do not accept multiple ethnic identity is bigger in Yakutsk, than in Grozny. Besides, the majority of Russian applicants (64%) and Yakut applicants (68%) answered that there can be only one ethnic identity for each person.

The majority of answers to our questionnaire seems to have the features of regional identity, generally typical of all the Yakutia citizens, both the Russians and the Yakuts. The study shows that the citizens of Yakutia, first of all, have an ethnic identity and only then, a regional one.

The level of language acquisition. 99.2% of Russians speak fluently, 99.6% speak very fluent Russian. The percentage of fluency is high among the other nationalities – 100%, including 94.4% - fluent speech, 97% - active speakers. 11.1% of the applicants have difficulties in speaking Russian, including Yakuts (8.7%), Russians (0.2%) and others (2.2%). It is also known that the number of fluent Yakut-speaking Russians has slightly increased: in 1989 – 1.4% and in 2002 – 2%. We managed to get more detailed data on the Yakut language involvement in the Russian linguistic competence: 41.2% of Russians speak the Yakut in this or that sense (fluent speakers (4.3%), active users (5.8%)), but the majority are passive speakers. This includes a significant part (25.5%) that understands the general meaning the message, but cannot speak the language and 58.8% can't speak the language.

Census data shows that the number of fluent Russian-speaking Yakuts is increasing: 1970 – 45,4%; 1979 – 60, 3%; 1989 - 65%; 2002 – 87,1%. 99.8% of the Yakuts speak Russian in some form; this includes those, who are fluent speakers (87.2%), active users (89.4%) and passive users (10.3%). Thus, the majority of the Yakut population is bilingual; moreover, the level of Russian language speakers is quite low, but at the same higher, than the number of native speakers. If we compare the results of the 1990 “Interpersonal relations” questionnaire, we will see the following qualitative changes: the number of fluent Russian-speaking Yakuts increased in 2.6 times, the number of those with some speaking difficulties reduced by 2.5 times, and the number of non-Russian speakers reduced by 1.5 times.

Finding out the tendency of compulsory or non-compulsory ethnic language speaking can help define the problem of language sustainability: in the Republic the following imperative is very important for the Yakuts (96.2%), relatively important for the Russians (83%) and for the representatives of other nationalities (86.7%). In order to figure out the strategies of inner ethnic language exceptions, we asked a question “How do feel about

people of your nationality, who don't speak the native language?"; the answers were quite different, from "negative" to "positive". This question was the hardest to define – the majority, mainly the Russians and the representatives of other nationalities could not give a definite answer; but the meaningful results show a tolerant attitude toward this matter: the Russians – 45.6%, the Yakuts – 39.4% and others – 38.8%.

The sphere of family communication. The family communication process is specific in terms of the family's ethnic group; a mixture of extralinguistic factors represents these specific features. The language is in stable and sustainable position among the Russians, there is a insignificant usage of the Yakut language (2.1%) in speaking with the elder relatives (grandmother of grandfather). The Yakuts most often use the Russian language as the language of communication between the generations of relatives (married couple).

Language distribution in public communication has a different rate of the social functions that the languages perform. Thus, the established social functions determine the language correspondence in referring to the government, in giving public speeches, i.e., by the major importance of the Russian language in office management: 47.7% of Yakuts refer to the government institutions in Russian, in official correspondence 81.0% of the people also use Russian. The oral and written form of speech plays a more significant role for the Yakuts and a less significant role for the Russians and other nationalities; that is 76.9%. There is a significant decrease in using the Yakut language and both languages in writing equally; this is an objective reality and it can be explained by the fact that the Yakut language official style and terminology is no so well developed. The oral form decreases the amount of using the Russian language, transferring a part of its functions onto bilingualism. The Yakut population is mostly oriented on the Russian language and bilingualism in the perception and making a public speech. The Russian language usage has increased by 3 and 6 times correspondingly since 1985 (Argunova,1992: 65).

There is a dependence on the language choice in terms of the oral or written form of speech organization, in the majority of Yakut population; there is also a stable Russian language usage in the official style and it has an increasing tendency.

The Russian language is important for the Russians in the service sphere and the Russian language prevails among others, bilingual communication is less significant. There are different language experiences among the Yakuts; they probably depend on the ethnic self-identification level in terms of the positive self-evaluation, on language loyalty established in the course of the communication's long period of time and on the language tolerance: in Yakutsk the Russian language prevails – 47.0%, in the Yakut language prevails in the Vilyusky region – 40.8%, the Oymyakonsky region is bilingual (46.3%). The service sphere in the existing research conditions makes maximum use of the parity Russian national and national Russian bilingualism: 4.3% of fluent Yakut-speaking Russians and 5.1% of colloquial Yakut language speakers use it in this sphere in Yakut (1.5%) and in the bilingual form (3.5%). 8.5% of the other ethnic groups speak Yakut and 14.8% use both Russian and Yakut languages, while their colloquial language knowledge is about 52.8%. The given level of Yakut language acquisition in its active form is only partially realized in every sphere; or the data were increased for subjective reasons.

The distribution in the personal communicative surrounding (personal correspondence, personal notes, diaries, poem and prose composition) is quite difficult, different and different factors define it. In Yakutsk the Russian language prevails in all 3 situations. A comparative analysis (Argunova,1992: 66) showed a negative tendency of using the Yakut

language and bilingualism in personal correspondence and a positive tendency in using the Russian language. In general, the Yakuts all over the Republic prefer to use the Russian language in the most intimate situations – in writing personal notes and diaries.

Tendencies in the educational sphere. The language preferences in secondary schools: the Yakuts tend to study in their native language with the Russian language study (30.0%); the Russians and others tend to study in Russian-speaking schools with an in-depth study of the foreign languages (40.2%; 31.1%) correspondingly. The young Yakut people found it difficult to choose the language of tutoring and teaching in a pre-school. In all the groups there is a strategy to learn another, foreign language, one of the Republic's predominant languages at an early age; thus in order to learn the Russian language at an early stage, the Yakuts choose Russian-speaking pre-schools for tutoring and studying and learning the native language. The Russians choose this variant to attach children to the local language and culture, the others choose it to attach to the socially popular language; this tendency is becoming more and more popular among the older generation. Using the Russian language for teaching and tutoring in pre-schools, with Yakut language learning, is predominant in all the age groups and increases with the older generation.

We also observe that the native village population sees their children's future in using their native language, but owing to the expansion of the communicative surroundings in the modern society, the parents also give special attention to the foreign languages. Therefore, in comparison with 1989 the Yakut parents were less oriented towards the Russian and Yakut language only; there is a shift toward foreign languages and a sustainable need for bilingual schools.

Language preferences in the TV and radio broadcasting. The Russians prefer to watch programs in the Russian language in obtaining information; they seldom watch programs in the Yakut or both languages. The majority of Yakuts watch TV programs broadcasted in both languages. The views are quite satisfied with the *NVK Sakha* local broadcasting network in Russian. The Yakut mostly read the press (newspapers and magazines) and literature in Russian. The problem of the TV and radio hosts' speech culture and the Republic printed press' literacy gave an opportunity to understand the lingual and ecological component of the Yakut language personality: the society is more concerned with the status of the Russian language rather than the Yakut. The local society pays twice less attention to the integrity of the Yakut language, than to the integrity of the Russian language. The majority of Yakut are satisfied with their Republic's press literacy level.

In terms of the languages' ranking in the visual media (signs, banners and ads) there is a lack of correspondence between the demand and supply of those informational products. All the interviewed groups agree on expanding the two languages usage; the Yakut language should be used sporadically, as a component of the foreign language and in contracting information in their Russian language only.

In our questionnaire we made an important conclusion that the Russian language functions steadily in all the communicative spheres. This is the evaluation of the majority among the three questioned groups.

Language learning motivation. The linguistic behavior in terms of acquisition (fluent speech acquisition) correlates with the level of language competence: the greater the language competence, the less the interest toward learning the language. In the ethnically homogeneous monoethnic Yakut surroundings, there is strong need in learning the Russian

language. The linguistic behavior is more complicated by the different language integration strategies in the ethnically heterogeneous societies due to prevalence and demographic and communicative strength of the Russian language in the region.

Creating a stable language situation with the existing typological features, such as cutlips minnow, multiple components, an active contact type of bilingualism, mostly Russian and Yakut languages, presupposes creating conditions for an oncoming bilingualism. When learning and using the Yakut language, the Russian population often moves from mono- and polyethnic components and from urbanization. As we can see, the Russian population living in the contact bilingual conditions has a greater desire to integrate using the language. The majority of the Russian population has a positive attitude toward the necessity to learn the Yakut language, which can be easily explained by the following: 1) in most cases from the civil awareness point of view “I live in Yakutia and I have to know the local language”; 2) the pragmatic aims – the titular nation language knowledge helps to improve social mobility; 3) psychological advantages - unlike the bilingual Yakut, the monolingual Russians have less access to attaining information in the Yakut language, information on the local popular themes and Yakut culture; all this has a negative effect on their psychological wellbeing.

In general, the answers reflected the different ethnic groups’ sincerity, quite a high ethnic and linguistic tolerance, and the strategic peculiarities in learning languages. The experimental research results of the Yakut language learning motivation showed that the potential conative structures are connected with the supralinguistic, social and psychological factors as well as inner individual preferences. The ethnic Yakuts that do not speak the Yakut language use a spectrum of motives in learning the Yakut language and it shows the respondents’ institutional needs – the appropriateness of communication in a multinational family, at work in a mixed or a predominantly Yakut-speaking staff. The ethnic identification necessity is not so significant and it is somewhat spontaneous. The exact ethnic identification need clearly shows among the elder generation respondents. The mixed Russian-Yakut marriages descendants have a rather realized civil point of view in terms of the bilingualism need, but it is not actualized in reality due to a low level of personal motivation toward learning and improving the Yakut language.

The other non-Yakut-speaking language carriers follow their institutional, linguistic and cultural needs, that is apart from the functional language usage, they want to know the language more fluently, for example, to understand humor.

In general, the field research showed an uncertainty of the linguistic and ethnic interaction in the region with a prevailing neutral attitude of the Russians; there was no visible interference in the general communicative space, but there was a clear problem that appeared in the answers to the following question: “Do you agree with the statement that the Yakut language can be used as a language of science, education, diplomacy, mass media, files management, legal procedures, business, interethnic communication, public administration, and service industry?” The majority of Russians gave a negative answer. It is clear that the answers do not reflect the existing social status of the language, but on explicitly express the ethnic and linguistic wellbeing. The Yakut people’s strive toward an equal language status contact creates such a tension due short-term adaptation period. The hetero stereotype as an identity element and a relations indicator is very illustrative in this case; the Yakut language has no ability to serve in a communicative sphere in terms of using the Yakut language in the spheres mentioned above and this marks a conflicting

genetic zone. At the same time, the Yakut auto stereotypes reflect the absence of ethnic self-recognition exaggeration that has a negative effect on tolerance – the estimations correspond to the existing functional state of the Yakut language in the spheres of life and these estimations give an objective value of an average Yakut-speaking citizen.

In conclusion, it should be noted that despite the changes in ethnic and lingual wellbeing of the Russians, the Russian language social status continues to grow, the Russian language competence increases as well, there is a strong need in studying the Russian language; the Russian language functions in most of the communicative spheres. The majority of the Yakuts pay special attention to regional identity. There are many common features in the strategies of choosing a language and there is also an ethnic and linguistic tolerance.

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