

THE LANGUAGE SHIFT PHENOMENON

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Анотація

У публікації розглянуто особливості зникнення мов через мовний зсув, що є поширеним явищем у сучасному глобалізованому світі.

Ключові слова: мовний зсув, зникаюча мова, домінуюча мова, двомовний.

Abstract

The article considers the peculiarities of languages' disappearance due to language shift, which is a common phenomenon in today's globalized world.

Keywords: language shift, disappearing language, dominant language, bilingual.

Language shift is the process of changing the main language in a community of speakers. It can be caused by various factors, such as industrialization, urbanization, economic changes, the introduction of schooling, the spread of television, military or colonial seizure of territory, relocation to a region where a different language is spoken. The disparity in prestige between the two languages and the presence of language contact can also contribute to the language shift. A disappearing language is often perceived by speakers as unnecessary and not prestigious, and a new, dominant language is associated with a higher social status, the opportunity to get a good job, a high level of civilization and culture. Therefore, parents may find it unnecessary to teach their children the ethnic language and only speak to them in the dominant language (English, German, French, etc.). The voluntary choice to switch to a new language is often combined with more or less coercion by the state.

In different parts of the world, states have pursued such policies towards linguistic minorities. Children of these peoples were forcibly removed from their families and sent to study in boarding schools, where education was in the dominant language. As a result, grown-up children not only did not speak the language of their people, but also lost connection with its culture and often could no longer return to the traditional way of life. Similar events took place in Alaska, in Brazil, in Australia; they are known in history as the Stolen generations.

Sometimes all the factors contributing to it are present, but the disappearance of the language does not occur. People continue to speak their ethnic language at home, and in other areas to use the dominant language, and so does generation after generation. Moreover, there are languages that, surprisingly, over the course of centuries, refute predictions about their imminent disappearance.

What explains the unexpected persistence of languages? This is facilitated by some features of the functioning of the language in a traditional society with bilingualism. The older generation usually acts as a bearer of traditional culture, including the custodian of the ethnic language. Representatives of the middle generation may even say that they have completely forgotten their language. But several years pass, they themselves reach a certain age and begin to fulfill the function of a bearer of tradition. And here it turns out that they are quite tolerably fluent in their ethnic language.

Moreover, it is often culturally expected that young and middle-aged people will not speak the ethnic language. It's like they're supposed not to know it. They themselves may refrain from communicating in it, because they speak the language worse than their parents, and are embarrassed by this, especially in the presence of the older generation. But when the older generation leaves, they render the best connoisseurs of their language.

Therefore, among many nations researchers meet similar phenomenon. The old people speak the ethnic language even to their children when they communicate with them. The younger generation does not speak it, and it is generally accepted that they know it poorly or do not know it at all. Many years later, the situation is still the same, but the role of the old people is performed by the former younger generation. In this case, changes inevitably occur under the influence of the dominant language.

Some phonemes peculiar only to this language and certain constructions may be lost. As a result, languages are sometimes changed quite significantly. A language disappears when people stop speaking it. If

at the same time this language was spoken language, that is, it existed only in oral form, no traces remain of it, and then we can say that the language has disappeared. This does not mean that people become silent and stop talking, they just start speaking some other language. Therefore, this group must speak two languages for some period of time. It is impossible that people first forget one language and then learn another. Then they are mute for some time. So, there must be some more or less long period when this group of people will be bilingual.

What makes people abandon one language and start speaking another? Language contact occurs exclusively in the human head. It is there that two languages coexist, they begin to influence each other, and one of them can gradually replace the other. Sometimes a person may remain bilingual for all his life and teach two languages to his children and grandchildren.

The contact of two languages creates some period of bilingualism. It can last longer or quicker, it can be very short for one generation. And hence the pace of this language shift can be very slow, even for hundreds of years as it happened to Celtic languages in England which were giving way to English language for centuries, and yet gave way. They can last for three or four generations, when great-grandmothers became bilingual, and already their great-grandchildren started speaking the dominant language. And this can be called a catastrophic shift when parents speak one language, children speak two languages, and grandchildren speak only the dominant language, barely understanding the language of their grandmothers.

While there exist systemic changes in a language, the language remains viable. One can discuss its irreversible disappearance only when chaotic, non-systemic changes appear and they cannot be described either structurally or statistically.

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