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MULTILINGUALISM AS A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PHENOMENON

Abstract: *the article presents a review of the research findings related to the formation of multilingualism as a sociocultural phenomenon and its impact on the development of society and the preservation of cultural identity.*

Keywords: *multilingualism, bilingualism, culture, society, sociocultural phenomenon.*

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МНОГОЯЗЫЧИЕ КАК СОЦИАЛЬНОЕ И КУЛЬТУРНОЕ ЯВЛЕНИЕ

Аннотация: *статья представляет обзор результатов исследований, связанных с формированием многоязычия как социокультурного явления и его влиянием на развитие общества и сохранение культурной идентичности.*

Ключевые слова: *многоязычие, билингвизм, культура, общество, социокультурное явление.*

Globalization means not only the process of turning the world into a single unit, but also a set of social processes that affect the exact situation between different countries. These social processes also lead to the emergence of new forms of interpersonal interaction, among which the Internet and social networks are the most influential. The creation of additional means of communication allows individuals from different parts of the world to share their information in many languages as effectively as possible,

although the priority of English leads to a situation when it is often preferred for online communication.

It can be assumed that systems and structures of a great scope of languages are being significantly affected by the growing sociocultural processes and tendencies increasing at present. As a result of the integration of economic and social processes, the world community has begun to unite diverse cultures. This sociocultural phenomenon has a noticeable impact on many aspects of human life, including the language field. The field of linguistics is changing in accordance with social and cultural trends. On the one hand, one of the visible consequences of these processes has been the strengthening of the position of the English language, which now functions as a versatile communication tool at the international level. On the other hand, the increasing number of individuals speaking not only English but two or even more languages is also considered consequent.

According to the latest data released by UNESCO, «Chinese is at the top of the list of the most widely used languages. Many experts suggest that in the nearest future the world community may face the challenge of intensive learning Chinese by people who belong to different cultures and diverse social groups. However, at the current stage, this prospect does not seem to be an imminent reality» [5].

Moreover, there is a tendency for a huge number of people to learn English, including Chinese residents, who seek to learn it quickly and effectively to communicate in the everyday and professional contexts. We have witnessed an era of change in communication, the essence of which is in the growing need for the synthesis of national languages and English-speaking bilingualism.

In the modern world, about 75% of people of different nations speak more than two languages. According to the official data, «About one quarter of the countries of the world officially recognize two languages on their territory, and a few countries recognize three or more languages, although the actual number of coexisting languages in many countries is significantly higher» [6, с. 120]. Thus, multilingualism is mostly regarded as a social and cultural phenomenon in the modern world.

Why multilingualism is considered such a relevant phenomenon these days? The essence of this issue is that speaking several languages gives a person the opportunity to properly immerse themselves in such a phenomenon as world globalization processes. In societies where there are many languages, people may use different languages depending on their cultural differences, conventions, context and communication discourse. For example, people can speak their native language or a local dialect at home, but at work they may communicate using the official state language.

Modern society is strongly affected by the influence of multilingualism on its cultural and social processes. Multilingualism commits to the development and preservation of cultural identity, social customs and local traditions. In this regard Mosesova assumes “<...> it is the language that is the one of the main signs and characteristics of personal, national, professional and group identity» [3, c. 322]; “<...> certain mentality and the way people think are formed by means of a language <...>” [4, c. 178]. It is widely believed that multilingual people can adapt to another culture faster and be more tolerant of its differences. In turn, this can lead to a more amicable and respectful co-existence of all kinds of cultures in one society. Research confirms that multilingual people have more developed cognitive functions such as attention, memory and problem-solving ability. It is also known that learning new languages can facilitate the development of creativity and communication skills.

In general, multilingualism is an important aspect of a multicultural society and can contribute to both individual development and the progress of society as a whole.

In this work multilingualism is viewed in terms of form, levels and particular case.

Recent studies reveal that «Multilingualism is the use of several (more than two) languages within a certain social community (primarily the state); the use of several languages by an individual (group of people), each of which is chosen in accordance with a specific situation» [2, c. 144]. It should be mentioned that this term implies not only verbal skills of a person, but also the ability of an individual to perceive foreign culture reflected in traditional values, and try to relate it with his own vision of the world.

It is well-known that there are two levels of multilingualism: individual and national. The individual level implies a person to use a vast array of languages in daily communication. The use of languages by people, communities and groups is referred to as national multilingualism. This level is common for multinational states and regions populated by residents speaking official and local languages. One of the examples is the Republic of Adygea, where people study and speak both Russian and Adyghe.

Linguistic studies suggest certain forms of national multilingualism existence:

- two or more languages have been established in a country as state languages due to historical processes, e.g., in Canada (English, and French), Finland (Finnish and Swedish) and the Netherlands (Dutch and West Frisian);

- there is only one state and several ethnic languages in the country being used in colloquial speech on a daily basis, e.g., Russia, Spain and Great Britain.

A particular case of the manifestation of multilingualism is bilingualism, which means the knowledge of two languages. Bilingualism is the process of mastering a second language and accepting new culture, which allows individual to adapt to new environment while maintaining his linguistic identity. It takes a lot of time, persistence and effort to achieve high proficiency in both languages. According to the researchers, «Bilingualism <...> makes it possible for an ethnic group to use different languages in different sociocultural situations and traditions <...>» [1, с. 253].

However, multilingualism can be accompanied by a number of issues: language barrier; lack of language proficiency; cultural differentiation; loss of national identity; educational difficulties; translation costs, etc.

A recent survey conducted on the basis of Kuban State Agrarian University has revealed empirical data. Fifty students were asked to fill in the questionnaire and answer different questions, «How many languages do you know/speak?», among them. The table shows the results of the survey.

Table 1

<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Number of languages</i>
31	1 (Russian)
12	2 (Russian and English)

Russian is a common language for 31 students who speak it very well, 12 students know Russian and English and speak them fluently and 7 students know 3 languages (Russian, English and an extra language). The study also identified the languages that are most popular among young people. These are: English, Turkish, Japanese, German and French.

English is an international language, which over time has gained great importance for people in professional and social sphere. But the desire of a person to learn an additional language, besides Russian and English, is due to his immersion in the culture of other countries. Recent survey suggests that some students actively learn Japanese and Turkish as a result of modern sociocultural trends (watching Turkish TV series, reading Japanese manga, as well as watching anime). In this way, people are deliberately involved in culture and traditions of foreign countries expressing conscious desire and interest. Learning a foreign language, i.e. becoming multilingual, helps them feel close to a particular country to the greatest extent and to enjoy their self-development.

Thus, the results of the study reveal the frequency and conditionality of learning different languages. The conducted survey supports the idea of multilingualism being an important sociocultural phenomenon due to the following aspects.

1. Linguistic diversity is considered to be a rather significant component of social and cultural heritage to preserve unique cultural identity;
2. Multilingualism commits to deploying intercultural dialogue and understanding between nations, which is important for strengthening society and global cooperation;
3. On a global scale, the maintenance of linguistic diversity enables mankind not to lose a variety of local languages and preserve sociocultural values worldwide.

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