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Linguistic Diversity and Coexistence: Experience of Spain and Russia

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Keywords: contacting languages; bilingual environments; co-official languages; linguistic situation; language conflicts; national identity.

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Linguistic Diversity and Coexistence: Experience of Spain and Russia

Lilia V. Moiseenko [α] & Fatima R. Biragova [σ]

Abstract- The article examines the contacting languages in regional bilingual environments and their role in the preservation of national identity and national culture in multinational states. Using the example of the regional languages of Spain that have received the status of co-official languages (Basque, Catalan, Galician, Aran and Valencian), the linguistic situation in autonomous entities, the peculiarities of bilingualism and the types of language conflicts are studied. The selected parameters are used to describe the linguistic situation in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. The article concludes about the status of the Ossetian language, the dominant role of the Russian language, and the unbalanced linguistic situation[1]. The formation of national – Ossetian – identity should take place in the three-dimensional space of national, all-Russian and world culture.

Keywords: contacting languages; bilingual environments; co-official languages; linguistic situation; language conflicts; national identity.

I. Introduction

The bilingual language environment is linked to the concept of "*contacting languages*" or "*languages in contact*". Linguistic contactology studies the mechanisms of language contact between two or more languages under certain socio-historical conditions in monolingual/ bilingual/polylingual environments.

The issues of national identity and the preservation of national cultures are particularly acute in multinational states.

The formation of a bilingual environment involves the study of the *linguistic situation* of the country /region, what is related to the use of the following terms:

– *regional language*, which means a language that exists independently from the official language on the territory of the state, but has an official status within the administrative-territorial subject;
– a *minority language* or the language of a national minority, which is used by a smaller group of the population and also differs from the official language of the country.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (European Charter 1992) changed attitudes towards minority languages, called for respect for the linguistic rights of minority peoples within multinational states, proclaimed the principle of multilingualism, and defended minority languages as part of cultural heritage and cultural diversity. Although the European Charter (European Charter 1992) lists regional and minority languages as synonyms, it seems that a minority language is a broader concept than a regional language, because not every minority language has official status within an administrative-territorial entity.

The *linguistic situation* (Shcheglova 2017) is defined as the linguo-geographical unity of the contacting languages in the form of a social and communicative system in a certain time and territorial format. The sociolinguistic description of the linguistic situation in polylingual (multinational) countries/regions is difficult in the context of two opposing trends:

– towards political and economic integration within a single state;
– towards cultural and linguistic diversification at the regional level.

These trends are reflected in the status of regional and minority languages. On the one hand, they are being replaced by languages that play a primary role in interethnic communication, social interaction and professional growth, on the other hand, there is an expansion of the social functions and scope of regional and minority languages, an increase in interest in them as a means of preserving ethnic identity.

Language planning / language engineering (Kaplan 2013) is inextricably linked to *language policy*. The language policy of the state refers to the state policy on national-language issues, the identification of the causes of language conflicts and the role of the state in their solution, measures to change (preserve) the functional distribution of languages and their subsystems, as well as the normalization of the language, the codification of the literary norm, etc. (Cybdenova 2016, p.89).

Language policy, which aims to "change the language environment in the desired direction" (Marusenko 2014, p. 7), is implemented through legislation, the media and the education system.

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Modern researchers distinguish three main directions of language policy:

- expansion of the language corpus, including standardization;
- raising the status of the language;
- dissemination of language learning.

The status of a language is determined legally and assumes the position of the language in relation to another. Along with the legal status, the actual status of the language is distinguished, due to its actual use, that is, the functional load of the language is determined.

The analysis of the language state involves the consideration of: 1) the status of the language; 2) the totality of functional styles and their substyles; 3) the forms of language existence; 4) the forms of language implementation in speech (oral, written, audiovisual, electronic forms of text existence) (Shcheglova 2017). Depending on the functional distribution of languages, *balanced and unbalanced* language situations are distinguished.

II. Experience of a Bilingual Language Environment on the Example of Spain

One of the most contacting languages in the world is Spanish. Language contacts play an essential role:

- in the formation of Spanish, when vulgar Latin and the autochthonous languages of the Mediterranean come into contact;
- in the process of its spread on the Iberian Peninsula and interaction with Asturian, Aragonese, Galician-Portuguese and other idioms, Arabic and Catalan languages;
- in the course of its export overseas and contacts with the Native American languages of Latin America.

The historical development of the Spanish language has led to its dominant position in the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America, creating a kind of discrimination against the languages and idioms in contact with it (for example, the disappearance of some Native American languages).

During the 40 years of Franco's dictatorship in Spain, the use of languages other than the official Spanish (Castilian) was completely banned. The same Franco decreed the persecution of the languages of the different regions, making it clear that in Spain only Spanish was spoken. However, this concerned only certain social functions of the language and their scope (use by the mass media, the education system, etc.), Minority languages occupied a marginal position in society and existed only in the sphere of family communication.

The modern communication space of Spain is defined as multilingual, with regions of bilingualism fixed at the state level. Almost 50% of Spaniards live in an autonomous community with more than one language. Along with the official Spanish (Castilian)[2] language that operates throughout Spain, the status of co-official languages within the respective territorial entities received 5 regional languages: Basque, Catalan, Galician, Aran (Occitan)[3] and Valencian (Real Decreto 2092/1978; Real Decreto 1049/1979; Real Decreto 1981/1979; Ley 35/2010). The co-official language has equal rights with the official language (Spanish) in the territory of the corresponding autonomous entity (Constitución Española 1978).

One of the most current issues in Spain today is the requirement to speak the co - official language (such as Valencian, Catalan or Galician) to be able to access positions within the Public Administration of the different communities (Pagani https://). The artificial imposition of a regional language (for example, forcing native Spanish speakers to learn Catalan or Valencian) can be characterized as a manifestation of nationalism with tendencies towards separatism.

Central and regional authorities should be able to use such language policy tools as language status, which is the official recognition of regional languages. The status of the co-official languages indicates the recognition of their independence, but in no way represents a step towards the recognition of the independence of the autonomous entities of Spain.

Ch. Ferguson distinguishes two main types of language situation: diglossia and bilingualism (Ferguson 2012). Diglossia is the simultaneous existence in society of two languages or two forms of the same language used in different functional areas. In the conditions of diglossia, one of the languages is a high, prestigious, language of culture, science, education, office work and legislation, the other is less prestigious, everyday language and switching to it occurs in the sphere of family communication. High language is most often not the native language of native speakers.

An indicator of the prestige of a language is the number of bilinguals in one and the other groups (Siguán). As a rule, there are more bilinguals in the group with a less prestigious language, since native speakers of a more prestigious language are not motivated to learn a minority language, i.e. the social status of the language is decisive in the conditions of bilingualism.

Bilinguals are usually understood as native speakers of one language who freely switch to another language when communicating. At the same time, both

[2] Spanish and Castilian are used synonymously in relation to the official language of Spain.

[3] Occitan is called Aran in the Aran Valley region and is the native language of the region and the official language of Catalonia (Ley Organica 6/2006).

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languages serve both for official and unofficial communication, and are used in all spheres of activity.

Changing external conditions leads to a change in the type of linguistic situation. Thus, Occitan speakers in the south of France went from bilingualism to diglossia (bilingualism → diglossia) (Grinina 2012), while the linguistic situation in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country can be defined as a movement from diglossia to bilingualism (diglossia → bilingualism).

According to statistics, the level of proficiency in regional or minority languages spoken within their territory is quite high (about 90% of the total population of the autonomous regions), regional languages are the languages of communication both at home and at work (Моисеенко, Евдокимова 2021).

Bilingualism in autonomous regions has become a defining phenomenon. The language situation in each of them is different. For example, Galicia is a unique region where two Romance languages – Spanish and Galician – coexist peacefully, while in Catalonia there is an open competition for language leadership. Some political forces use language diversity as a weapon in political combat. Recent events in the Autonomous Region indicate the tension in the field of language policy caused by separatist sentiments (street fighting with signs in Spanish, changing the names of toponyms in favor of Catalan, etc.). Linguistic conflicts have been aggravated by the political and social reality: the language is mixed with an independentism as a rejection of the hegemonic Spanish culture.

There are several conflicts of linguistic profile in the territory of Spain:

1) the debate on language and identity; 2) the restoration of Spanish as the main language in autonomous regions; 2) disputes over whether co-official languages are secondary languages; 3) the conflict between Spanish speakers and bilinguals. The monolinguals see the constant presence of a second language unnecessary, the bilingual population, who express their rejection of any type of discrimination and/or repression of their language, will fight for the preservation and promotion of their language and culture (Pagani https://), especially after linguistic repression during the Franco regime.

Co-official regional languages that have a stable language status, such as Catalan and Basque, come into conflict with the official – Spanish – language, seeking to gain a leading position in the territory of their autonomy. We are faced with one of the varieties of language conflict: through the language confrontation "co-official language – official language", the struggle for political, economic and ethnic dominance and independence of the autonomy is carried out.

III. Russian Experience of a Bilingual Language Environment on the Example of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania

As an example of the contact languages in the polylingual environment of the Russian Federation, the Ossetian and Russian languages in the territory of the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania are chosen. The interaction of the Ossetian and Russian languages according to the parameters developed in the first part of the article, can be represented as follows:

- the status of the contacting languages: the status of the national and the regional languages;
- language situation in the Republic: diglossia and bilingualism;
- conflict points in language contacts.

The population of the Republic according to Rosstat (2021) is 693,098 people. According to the Russian census of 2010, Ossetians represent the largest part of the Republic – 459,688 (64.5%), Russians – the second largest group of the population – 147,090 (20.6%). The ethnic composition of the Republic is also represented by Ingush, Armenians, Kumyks, Georgians, Turks, Ukrainians, etc.

a) Status of the Russian language

In a polylingual multinational state, such as Russia, the status of the Russian language is fixed (Article 68 of the New version of the Constitution of the Russian Federation): The official language of the Russian Federation throughout its territory is Russian as the language of the state-forming people, which is part of the multinational union of equal peoples of the Russian Federation.

Russian language is:

- the national language of the Russian people (76, 7% of the country's population);
- the native language of a large part of non-Russian peoples;
- the language of interethnic communication within the Russian Federation and the countries of the post-Soviet space.

b) Status of the regional – Ossetian language

According to Article 68 of the new version of the Constitution of the Russian Federation the Russian Federation guarantees to its entire people the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development.

The Republics have the right to establish their own official languages. In state authorities, local self-government bodies, and state institutions of the republics, they are used along with the national language of the Russian Federation (Article 68 of the

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New version of the Constitution of the Russian Federation).

A minority or national minority language is a language that differs from the official language and is used by a smaller group of the population. Minority languages include all ethnic languages of Russia. although the term "minority language", "the language of a minority ethnic group" is not used in Russia, but the term "language of the subject of the Russian Federation". It is considered that the term "minority language" is not quite politically correct. In the former Soviet Union, representatives of national minorities painfully perceived their self-designation "natsmen" (representative of the national minority).

Ossetian language was included by UNESCO in the Atlas of the world's languages in Danger of Dissapearing (Wurm & Heyward 2001) as one of the vulnerable languages. In this regard, the preservation of the Ossetian language as a linguistic and cultural heritage is a priority task.

According to the results of an ethnosociological experiment (Dzutsev 2003) conducted by the V. I. Abayev North Ossetian Institute of Humanitarian and Social the share of Ossetians who speak their native language better than Russian is decreasing.

Statistical studies (Dzakhova et al., 2020) show that 75.4% of the total number of respondents to the question "What language do you consider your native language?" answered Ossetian; 21.3% responded: "Ossetian and Russian" and 3.3% of respondents of Ossetian nationality recognize Russian as their native language.

Table 01: Native language by persons of Ossetian nationality

Native Language(-S)	%
Ossetian	75,4%
Ossetian and Russian	21,3%
Russian	3,3%

The analysis of data by age criterion indicates that the native language is considered Ossetian by respondents aged 50-70 years. That is, the older the respondent, the more likely it is that the Ossetian language is the main one for them. 95 % of respondents indicated that the first language they spoke in childhood was Russian.

Not all of the respondents can reasonably indicate Ossetian as their native language, since such factors as: natural language acquisition from native-speaking parents; performing mental activity in the Ossetian language; permanent presence in the language environment – are not observed, or are partially observed, which does not give the right to consider the Ossetian language as a native language.

The Ossetian language today is not mandatory for Ossetian society: most people do not speak Ossetian, the younger generation mostly uses the Russian language in everyday communication. The same applies to the residents of the capital of Vladikavkaz, who almost always and everywhere use only Russian (Dzakhova et alt. 2020).

The language behavior of Ossetians is not quite the same: 54.6% of respondents communicate in the Ossetian language only "in the family"; 28.1% – "with friends"; 14.2% – "at work/school" and only 12.6% – "in public places and institutions".

Table 02: Functional distribution of the Ossetian and Russian languages

Areas	Ossetian	Russian	Ossetian and Russian Alternating
family communication	61%	13,2%	
official and business communication	21,1%	53,2%	25,7%

(Bekoeva & Tamerjan 2016, p.127).

Ossetians are losing such forms of their language as reading and writing, and the main form of functioning of the Ossetian language is oral speech (Dzutsev 2003).

Table 03: Ossetian and Russian languages in the mass media

(% of respondents)

The Language Of Mass Media	Tv	Press
mostly in Ossetian	4,9%	7,5 %
in Ossetian and Russian	47,1%	37,2%
mostly in Russian	47,5%	53,0%
I don't use the media at all	0,4%	2,3%

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It is obvious that the Ossetian language is not the dominant means of communication and even the needs of everyday communication of the Ossetian population of the Republic are provided only in combination with Russian.

This means that in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania the native language is at risk, since its functional application is very limited: in the economy, politics, science, education, mass media and Internet communication dominates Russian (Kambolov 2007; Bzarov 2014).

It can be recognized that displacement of the Ossetian language from socially significant areas and from state institutions is moving it to the role of a *second language* in the Ossetian ethno linguistic group. But giving the two main languages – Ossetian and Russian – the same status as official languages somewhat mitigates the severity of the situation.

The Constitution of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (Article 15) proclaims Ossetian and Russian as official (state) languages of the Republic and also establishes that Ossetian (Iron and Digor dialects) is the basis of national consciousness of the Ossetian people.

The table below compares the indicators of the linguistic situation in two multilingual regions of Spain and Russia – Catalonia and North Ossetia.

Table 04: Linguistic situation in Catalonia y North Ossetia

Parameters of the Linguistic Situation	Catalonia	North Ossetia
status of the contacting languages: national / regional	Spanish / Catalan official / co-official	Russian / Ossetian official / official
exoglossal relationships	bilingualism	diglossia
linguistic situation	balanced	unbalanced
place of the regional language	Catalan; main vs secondary language	Ossetian; secondary language
conflicts of linguistic nature	1) the debate on language and identity; 2) the restoration of Spanish as the main language in autonomous regions; 2) disputes over whether co-official languages are secondary languages; 3) the conflict between monolinguals and bilinguals	1) the debate on language and identity - - -

IV. Conclusions

The analysis of bilingual environments in the regions of Spain revealed the following parameters for describing the language situation: status of the contacting languages; exoglossal relationships (bilingualism/disglossia); place of the regional language (main vs secondary language); conflicts of linguistic nature.

The study of bilingual environment in North Ossetia shows an unbalanced linguistic situation and the increasing role of the Russian language, which is explained by its prestige and social status.

The authorities of Republic of North Ossetia are faced with the task of preserving and developing the Ossetian language and scientists – with the task of normalization of the Ossetian language and the codification of the literary norm.

The national-cultural imperative of North Ossetia is to create an Ossetian multicultural educational model. The formation of national identity should take place in the three-dimensional space of national, all-Russian and world culture. The population of Ossetia should recognize itself as an integral regional part of the united Russian nation.

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