



# Ethnic Identity and Language Variations of the Russian Germans in the Kirov Region

Olga Vladimirovna Baykova (Corresponding author)

Vyatka State University, Russia

E-mail: olga.v.baykova@mail.ru

Olga Nikolayevna Obukhova

Vyatka State University, Russia

Yilia Valeryevna Berezina

Vyatka State University, Russia

Vladimir Alexandrovich Banin

Vyatka State University, Russia

Andrey Viktorovich Kazakov

Vyatka State University, Russia

Received: 02-06-2016

Accepted: 10-08-2016

Advance Access Published: September 2016

Published: 01-11-2016

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.6p.152

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.6p.152>

## Abstract

Currently, the process of globalization, intense intercultural contacts, changes in social structure, and internationalization of higher education influence inter-ethnic relations, ethnic identity, as well as language changes. These processes can be observed among the Russian-Germans living in the territory of the Kirov region. Their investigation started in 1999 and is currently going on. The relevance of the study is due to the significance of the linguistic interaction at the present stage of the German language development in Russia, where for decades the German language has been developing and changing in linguistic enclaves environment. In this regard, this paper aims to explore ethnic and linguistic identity of German bilinguals living in the environment of a foreign language, different dialect, or different confession in isolation from the main ethnic array. The leading methods in the study were socio-differentiated analysis, as well as comparative and statistical methods used while correlating the dialect systems under review to other German dialectal systems, literary German language, as well as with the Russian language. In the study, we came to the conclusion that the priority layer in the structure of the ethnic identity of Russian Germans in the Kirov region includes the following distinctive features: common territory, language, religion, family life, folklore, crafts, norms of behavior, common historical destiny and common psychological makeup. The language of the German ethnic minority, who live in the territory of the Kirov region, is unique and peculiar. It is characterized, above all, by mixed dialects in a foreign language environment and by a variety of their existing forms of. The paper is of practical value to scholars dealing with the German island dialects.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Germans, German dialects, the language of the Russian Germans, interdialectic interaction, interlingual interaction, distinctive identity markers.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction into the Problem

The project focuses on the problem of cherishing history, culture of small ethnic groups. Recently there has been a sudden flurry of academic interest in the problem of the language and environment interconnection. This problem caught the interest of scientists who worried about the future life of the national minority groups in Russia and the CIS countries and stimulated further research into their history, culture, and language. Studying the interrelations between the linguistic varieties and the dying-out of languages were under investigation at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. The fate of the languages, their current and future being is the top priority task for humans, because the language is the world philosophy and the world knowledge system imprinted in its linguistic structure and rules. In this meaning the language is the world itself, and its dying-out is going to be irreparable loss for to the language environment.

The above described problem concerns the German island dialects in Russia and the CIS countries. The inhabitants of language islands are always the focus of dialect researchers' attention. The importance of the research in this area is

incontestable, as recording the unique world view of the Russian Germans gives an opportunity to save it. But this process is becoming extremely difficult because of gradual dying-out of these dialects.

### *1.2 Literature Review*

The word "German" from olden times has corresponded to the Russian "dumb, speechless". They called so foreigners who did not know the Russian language or had a poor command of it. However, since historically the vast majority of immigrants from Europe turned out to be natives of the German lands, so eventually they began to call "Germans" those people, whose historical homeland was Germany.

The history of German settlers in Russia dates back to the middle of the X century, when Princess Olga (945-964) tried to establish diplomatic relations with Otto the Great (912 - 973). The German colonists were invited to develop factory and plant production, in particular such, which had never existed in Russia.

The German ethnicity in the Vyatka region (the Kirov region) formed in the XX century as a result of several waves of migration - voluntary and compulsory ones.

More or less the mass appearance of the Germans on the territory of the Perm and Vyatka provinces began in the second half of the XVIII century.

The first stage was initiated by the manifestos of Catherine II in 1762 and 1763. When they came into force there began the so called 'agricultural' immigration of Germans to Russia, namely, to the Vyatka Governorate. They were interested in the developing factory industry in the region, which required knowledge and skills. The second stage was connected with the forced removal of war prisoners in the Vyatka Governorate. The fact is that, during the Patriotic War of 1812 and the First World War thousands of war prisoners from France, Saxony, Italy, Poland, Bavaria, Austria and Prussia were sent to Siberia via the Vyatka Governorate. The third stage is associated with the deportation of Russian Germans from the Volga region, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan (Dinges 1925, Dulson 1941, Jedig 1986, Najditch 2001, Baykova 2012, Orekhova and Obukhova 2012, Orechova and Obuchova 2013).

The territory of the Kirov region does not encompass representatives of the German minority as a closed community, united economically, culturally and linguistically. The Russian Germans form here a small ethnic group, embracing according to statistics 1408 people, who live among the multi-ethnic population. The given population has preserved their original characteristics. It is the forced resettlement – deportation, which influenced the process of maintaining the traditional and the emergence of a new culture. Not forming a more or less united community, whose members are in constant contact with each other (language contact including), the German settlers of the Kirov region are carriers of the High German and Low German idiolects. At the same time, according to the data obtained in the laboratory of experimental phonetic and perceptual research of languages, belonging to various typological systems (Vyatka State University of Humanities), the German settlers are proficient in Russian in all its varieties (they write, read, speak) and use it in various situations of everyday life that allows you to watch the "forcing out" of the German language by the Russian language in the region of interest.

The topicality of this aim is chiefly determined by the fact that linguistic and social-political constituents of the languages and their dialect interaction beyond their main area are becoming now a real social problem.

The present study determines the characteristic features for the development and functioning of the Russian Germans language in the Kirov region as a unique linguistic phenomenon in alien dialect and language environment. Particular attention is paid to systematization of language interaction mechanism, when separate ethno-linguistic groups exist in isolation from the main ethnic array.

The empirical basis of the study consists primarily of materials, obtained from dialectological and ethnographic expeditions in six villages of Verkhnekamsky district of the Kirov region, conducted from 1999 to 2011 by the authors of the submitted work together with the staff, working under the author's guidance in the Laboratory of experimental phonetic and perceptual studies of languages, belonging to different typological structures. The resulting database includes voice recordings of 30 informants in the amount of 55 hours, as well as materials in the form of questionnaires, containing socio-linguistic, historical and demographic information about each informant. Audio archive contains linguistic material composed of informants' stories about their biography, texts on any subject, translation of 40 sentences from the standard German language to the dialect according to the questionnaire of a specialist in Germanic dialectology G. Wenker and translation of 200 individual word forms from the standard German language to the dialect according to the questionnaire of V.M. Zhirmunsky.

## **2. Methodological Framework**

To achieve the research objectives the following theoretical and experimental methods have been used: analysis of the literature on the research, the social-differentiated analysis of the material under study, the statistical and comparative-and-contrast analysis while correlating the dialect systems under study with other dialect systems, the system of the Standard German language. The given methods allow to give a more objective and reliable analysis of the phenomena under investigation.

## **3. Description of the research**

### *3.1 Ethnic Identity of the Russian Germans in the Kirov Region*

Beyond any doubt, identity is an interdisciplinary area of research, and its markers (subareas) have been discussed in special literature (Unwerth 1918, Mead 1970, Stumpp 1972, Hutchinson and Smith 1996, Domashnev 2005).

The following are distinctive features of ethnic identity: common territory, language, religion, living conditions, family life, folklore, traditional crafts, norms of behavior, common psychological make-up, common historical destiny. The manifestation of these features in the range of "dominance - recessiveness" correlates with the conditions of ethnic community existence (ethnic group) - political-administrative, socio-cultural, inter-ethnic.

One of the 10 parameters of ethnic identity, the common territory parameter, is not valid under the conditions of an ethnically diverse environment (ethnic Germans do not belong to the Russian indigenous population).

As to the first parameter, common territory, it has always been of minor importance with ethnic German settlers in Russia / the USSR. The ethnic Germans were conveyed to the Kirov Region during the late XVIII-early XX centuries made up a large population section.

Language is one of the most important features of the ethnic group. It reflects the diversity of people's life, their spiritual potential, a unique view of the world. The German community in the Kirov region is linguistically extremely heterogeneous. The respondents of the older age group, who have mastered their mother tongue in family communication, are carriers of the survived German dialects: southern German, including Swabian and Low German. Some respondents of the older and middle age groups, who studied German independently and attended courses, have sufficient language competence. As a rule, the respondents the middle age group can understand the text of average difficulty and know everyday speech clichés, perceive simple statements. The younger generation speaks German as a foreign language. It should be emphasized that the foreign-language environment - and this is the Russian language as the language of everyday communication - has a strong interfering influence at all levels. Syntax becomes simplified (the word order, failure to comply with a closed-in construction), inflected forms get contaminated, Russian lexemes are of high frequency. The prosodic phrase pattern, unlike the German one, becomes more smooth, less rhythmic, speech tempo becomes more slow under the influence of the Russian language.

Religion is also seen as a powerful factor consolidating ethnic community. However, the legacy of the "state" atheism, which has been propagated for decades, has largely destroyed the religious consciousness. The Evangelical Lutheran Church and its activity has preserved in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is not institutionalized in the province. However, familiar from childhood religious rites and traditions of the Easter and Christmas are still being supported in the community of the Russian Germans. Religious everyday family culture has also preserved ethnic peculiarities. Family traditions include the observance of the traditional Protestant Advent (a month before Christmas) holiday home decoration, cooking ritual meals at Christmas and Easter.

Family life also has its own specifics. 95% of our respondents are married, celibacy is extremely rare. Families are ethnically diverse, almost all families have two children, divorces are a rare exception. The educational level of the middle and older generations is rather high (an engineer, teacher, doctor, production engineer).

The respondents in the Kirov region are well acquainted with the German folklore. Our respondents know proverbs, fairy-tales, ethnic songs. The German folk melodies has evolved in Russia from a polyphonic to unison singing, to an open sound, became more melodious.

Crafts. In modern industrial urbanized society blacksmiths, watchmakers, carpenters are not strongly sought-for. These professions are rather a personal hobby.

We believe, rules of conduct, to a certain extent, correlate with the common psychological make-up. Such qualities as diligence, sense of responsibility, efficiency, rationality, capacity for empathy, willingness to help relatives and friends in a difficult life situation regardless of their ethnicity tend to be stable. The Germans honor ancestors, know their family history and record it.

In general, ethnic identity is a volatile, dynamic category. The manifestation of certain distinctive features is caused by many objective variables (political system, ethnic state policy, territorial administration), personal and subjective variables (motivation to preserve the language, culture and traditions). The common historical destiny of the Russian Germans play a very important role in consolidating ethnic community. The Russian Germans have played a significant role in industry, agriculture, science and culture of modern Russia.

### *3.2 Sociolinguistic and linguistic study of verbal behavior of the Russian Germans living in the Kirov region*

#### *3.2.1 Sociolinguistic study of the Russian Germans of the Kirov region*

The study of language contacts has a long-standing tradition. Conspicuous is the dynamic nature of this research line. Thus, problematics of language contacts has initially been studied within the framework of the comparative historical approach primarily on the Indo-European languages. The great interest to the problem of language interaction can largely be explained by the ever-expanding practical application of the research results.

Today the definition of bilingualism as the practice of alternating use of two languages is universally recognized. The link between verbal behavior of bilingual people and social situations of bilingualism is considered to be one of the central problems. The range of issues, studying bilingual situations, include code-switching issues, that is, the transition of the speaker in the speech communication from one language (dialect) to another, depending on communication conditions [Baikova 2012] and borrowings as a result of the code-switching.

According to our research, we identify five sequential stages of verbal behavior of the Russian Germans of the Kirov region (the transition from the German to the Russian language): 1) an active German monolingualism; 2) an active-passive German-Russian bilingualism; 3) an active German-Russian bilingualism; 4) a passive-active German-Russian

bilingualism; 5) active Russian monolingualism [Baikova 2012: 7]. The analysis of questionnaire data revealed that each age group of ethnic Germans can be characterized by a certain stage of bilingualism.

Thus, most of the older age group (31 respondents) has already passed the first two stages of bilingualism: active German monolingualism, active-passive German-Russian bilingualism. Currently, the representatives of this group are characterized by an active German-Russian bilingualism, which means an active use of the German dialect and the Russian language.

Two stages of bilingualism are typical of the middle-aged group (20 respondents): the stage of passive-active German-Russian bilingualism and the stage of active Russian monolingualism. The stage of passive-active German-Russian bilingualism embraces the informants who have mastered the German dialect from their birth in the family, but because of the limited use of the German language lost its applicability and currently only understand the German dialect, are able to read and write at the school curricula level. As for the knowledge of the Russian language, the representatives of this age group of Germans are fluent in the Russian language and apply it in all areas of communication.

The youngest age group (20 respondents) is under active Russian monolingualism. The vast majority of the Russian-Germans in this age group do not know the German language and do not use it to communicate. The representatives of the youngest age group learned or are learning German at school, at the university, at the German courses. In this case, we can talk about Russian-German bilingualism, which should be characterized as an individual, non-contact, artificial, auxiliary type of bilingualism, which means that the German language functions as a foreign language and is already a non-native, second language.

The German-Russian bilingualism is unilateral: the Germans of the Kirov region have learned the Russian language, but Russian inhabitants of these settlements do not speak the German language, as functions of the language systems are different, as well as the area of their distribution, and the number of speakers of these languages. As for the volume of activity areas the minority language is the monofunctional language unit, functionally it is the second code system, but the contacting Russian language, which carries the heaviest social burden in the life of the Russian Germans, is a universal unit, functionally being the first language.

The bilingualism under investigation is characterized as a mass phenomenon, since all the Germans of the Kirov region have a full command of the Russian language. The German-Russian bilingualism can be considered natural, because for some historical reasons the Russian Germans found themselves in the territory of the Kirov region, and were in constant contact with the Russian language, mastered the Russian language in a natural way, in the course of labor activity.

The German-Russian bilingualism of the Russian Germans in the given region is subordinative: it is characteristic of it to produce mixed statements, i.e., the Russian Germans can use depending on the language situation alternately either their own dialect or the Russian language.

Thus, during the sociolinguistic survey of the Russian Germans of the Kirov region we discovered a number of factors that contribute to a high enough degree of linguistic assimilation of the German population in favor of the Russian language. The most important is the fact that there are no purely German settlements in the region under investigation. Despite a relatively large number of Russian Germans, they remain at the level of a national minority, scattered among the multi-ethnic population.

### 3.2.2 Linguistic study of the Russian Germans of the Kirov region

The linguistic aspect of the study is to examine the following two processes: interdialect and cross-language interaction in the speech of Russian Germans of the Kirov region. The study of this interaction has enabled to establish the specifics of implementing the language Russian ethnic Germans at all levels.

#### 3.2.2.1 Interdialectic interaction in the language of the Russian Germans in Kirov region

The starting point in the study is a phonemic (segmental) level. The main difference in the area of consonantism in the dialects under consideration is based, firstly, in spirantization of intervocalic plosive consonants  $b > v$  ( $w$ ),  $g > j$ ,  $g > x$ ,  $\zeta$ , secondly, in the difference of implementing consonant clusters, containing the sound  $sch$ ; and thirdly, in the implementation of the second consonant shift.

In the field of vocalism the opposition of dialects is most consistently carried out, firstly, on the basis of the presence / absence of opening vowels  $i > e$ ,  $u > o$ , secondly, on the basis of the presence / absence of epenthesis between smooth  $r$ ,  $l$  and velar sonant  $ch$ , reduction of unstressed vowels in pretonic syllables.

Along with these basic diachronic processes we obtained data on such variation types as alteration of umlaut, nasal and non-nasal vowels, fracture and the reduction of unstressed vowels. The results of research let us state the mixed character of the dialects under review at the segmental level (Berezina 2009, 2013a).

We discovered general and distinctive features of the considered dialects, which show that language systems have considerable resistance to various kinds of linguistic change, despite long-term contacts with each other and with the environment language. The study results allow to ascertain the mixed nature of the dialects on the segmental level.

The present research was the first to include complex experimental phonetic analysis of suprasegmental structure of the German speech of the bilingual Germans in the Kirov region.

The study of island dialects prosody is based on a hypothesis about the possibility of distinguishing between High and Low German island dialects to implement the intonation parameters, as observed in a number of German dialects. The study rejected this hypothesis. In particular, the average pitch of the main tone frequency indicates only the differences

between male and female voices, statistically significant medium ranges differences between the studied High German and Low German dialects are not established; the speech of the same informants-speakers fully realizes all intonation contours. This fact confirms the hypothesis of a mixed nature of dialects not only on the segmental, but also on the super-segmental level, which allows to build the concept of prosodic interference in these German island dialects.

### 3.2.2.2 Interlingual interaction in the language of the Russian Germans in Kirov region

The study found that during the long-term development in a foreign language environment the viewed German dialects were subjected to intense influence by the Russian language, which leads to noticeable shifts at all levels of their structure.

The analysis of the empirical data has allowed to systematize cross-language and inter-dialectal borrowings on the phonetic (e.g. brigadə «brigada», mašinkə «maschinka», etc.), morphological (use of the borrowed nouns with an article in accordance with gender of the borrowed noun (dr prədsəta: təl, tə' bā: nja); forming plural and singular of the nouns (tə' partiə' - tə' partiən «die Partei - die Parteien»); noun declension (von dəm savot - «von dem Betrieb»), and syntactic (word order in a German sentence corresponds to that of a Russian sentence) viə' hā: m ghəirət ən sozəmskom (my poshenilis' w Sosimskom), iç ha: bə' g (ə) arbəit ən bətri: b krənofsəkom (ja rabotala na sawode kranowchikom) levels.

While studying the interfering influence of the native German on the non-native Russian language, it has been established experimentally that the Russian speech of the German bilinguals is not uniform and varies from "virtually without an accent" to "unnatural" for the ear of Russian monolinguals. In this respect, the observed phenomenon is interpreted in terms of the intermediate system - interlanguage, which does not coincide either with the native German or the non-native Russian language and performing in the mind of the bilingual an adaptive function.

### 3. Conclusion

The results of the study show that the German dialects under review developed in the foreign language environment and discovered an intense impact from both the native German and from the Russian language, which was manifested in a number of interference phenomena, that have arisen as a result of a language contact. Both dialects show the same significant exposure to interfering influences.

Summing up, in the course of field research it was established that ethnicity is a category that changes with regard to time and situation. The ten parameters / markers of identity are dynamic, responding to objective factors (political system, ethnic policy of the state, territorial administration) and individual-oriented factors (empathic attitudes, memories, motivations, family history etc.) With regard to the ethnic Russian Germans the factor of common historical experience is the most crucial ethno-consolidating factor.

The discovered language features in the speech of the Germans - the representatives of "a linguistic island" in the Kirov region - and their classification show the particular functioning of this ethno-linguistic group in isolation from the main ethnic body in another language environment. The Russian Germans of the region under discussion have formed a new language community with a unique substructure, which has no analogues in the historic homeland: this community took a different path of its development due to the specific social and linguistic conditions. The uniqueness of the language of the investigated German ethnic minority is characterized, above all, by mixing dialects in another language environment and by a variety of their forms.

The overall results of the study demonstrate the need for an integrated approach to the study of German island dialects, due to the need to form a clear notion of the various "language juxtaposition" and mechanisms of their interaction.

### Acknowledgement

The article is written with the assistance of the Kirov Region Government and within the grant of the Russian Scientific Fund of Humanities №16-04-18007 "Language and ethnic identity of the Russian Germans in the Kirov Region and in Udmurtia (field research)".

### References

- Baykova, O. (2012). On the Language situation as one of the determining factors of ethnic groups verbal behavior in a foreign language environment (by the example of Russian Germans in Kirov region). *Scientific enquiry in the contemporary world: theoretical basics and innovative approach*. 7. Titusville, Fl., L and L Publishing, USA, 129-131.
- Berezina, Yu. (2009). *The Consonant system of German dialects in the Kirov Region*. Kirov: Loban, 6-7.
- Berezina, Yu. (2013). Historical development and typology of the evolutionary processes in the sphere of consonants (by the example of Russian German dialects in Kirov Region). *A young scientist in the modern science world: new aspects of the scientific search*: monograph. USA, Titusville, Fl. L and L Publishing, 91-99.
- Dinges, G. (1925). On the Issue of Studying Dialects of the Volga Germans (Results, tasks, methods). (Reprinted from Proceedings of Saratov University. Saratov: *Sargublit*, 4, 3.
- Domashnev, A. I. (2005). On the Research of the Russian Germans Language. *Papers on the German Linguistics and Sociolinguistics*. SPb: Nauka, 759-767.

Dulson, A. (1941). The Problem of Dialect Merging on the Volga Germans Language. *Izvestiya of ASUSSR. Branch of Literature and Language*, 3, 82-96.

Hutchinson, J., & Smith, A. D. (1996). *Ethnicity*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Jedig, H. (1986). Die deutschen Mundarten in der Sowjetunion. *Das Wort. Germanisches Jahrbuch DDR - UdSSR*. Zwickau: Gerda Uhlisch, 92-97.

Mead, M. (1970). *Culture and Commitment. A Study of the Generation Gap*. Doubleday. N.Y.

Najditch, L. (2001). On the Issue of the Causes for Dialect Search of V.M. Schirmunski. In *Conference Proceedings on the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V.M. Schirmunski's birth* / publishing editor: corresponding member of RAS N.N. Kazansky.- Spb.: Nauka (pp. 75-83).

Orekhova, N. & Obukhova, O. (2012). Sociolinguistic peculiarities of speech behavior of ethnic Germans residing in Glazov. In *Germans in Russia: view from the regions: Russian scientific Conference with international participation*. Kirov: VyatSHU Pbl. (pp. 154-157).

Orechova, N. & Obuchova, O. (2013). Ethnisch- und soziokulturelle Besonderheiten der deutschen Idiolekte in Glazov (Udmurtien, Russland). In *Budapester Beiträge zur Germanistik* (Bd. 70, S. 163-166). ELTE Germanistisches Institut.

Stumpp, K. (1972). *Die Auswanderung aus Deutschland nach Russland in den Jahren 1763 bis 1862*. Tübingen: Selbstverlag, 1972.

Unwerth, W. (1918). Proben deutsch-russischer Mundarten aus den Wolgakolonien und dem Gouvernement Cherson. *Abhandlungen der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse*. Berlin, 11. 10-94.