Ethno-Linguistic Peculiarities of Semantic Perception of Language Competence of Tatar Bilingual Children

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Abstract: In this article the authors study the phenomenon of interaction between the two systems in the linguistic consciousness of a bilingual. These systems encode the same items and phenomena of social reality. Moreover, they describe the mechanism for the implementation of language interference in the situation of artificial bilingualism, taking into account a number of linguistic and extralinguistic factors. As an example, the researchers take the ethnolinguistic space of Tatarstan and Tyumen Region, because the Tatars are the indigenous people in these areas. The phenomenon of mass regional bilingualism among the Tatar population is considered in the boundaries of psycholinguistic and cognitive approaches. The paper contributes to the examination of such problems as cross-cultural communication, Russian as a foreign language, comparative linguistics with a glance to the peculiarities of national world-view. This may promote such issues as relation between language and thought, language and culture and interaction between sensory and rational components in the categorization of the world.

Key words: Ethno-psy cholinguistic norm - Bilingualism - Linguistic competence - Association reactions - Linguistic culturology

INTRODUCTIONS

The parallel existence of two languages and, in particular, Russian-Tatar bilingualism is a topical question in the conditions of polyethic linguistic fields of Tatarstan and Tyumen Region. The advantage of the Tatar language in the situation of bilingualism is in the fact that it is studied first in these regions because the Tatars are the indigenous people there. The long-term functioning of the Tatar and Russian languages reflects the history of Russian statehood, the replacement of the “Turkic-Tatar” vector by the “Slavic-Russian” one in using language as a means of interethnic communication and reflects itself in polycommunicative and ethnocognitive activity.

That is why researchers speak about the variability of Turkic language personality which is realized in the vector from Turkic Russian-speaking personality to Russian Turkic-speaking personality: “A mutative character of the evolitional development of the languages-contactors provides a smooth transition from the Turkic-speaking language personality to the Russian language personality, where the intermediate link is the Russian-speaking language personality, providing the understanding and intercultural communication between such non-sister languages, as the Tatar // the Russian and the Kazakh // the Russian. The result of such efficient evolutionary development of different types of national language personalities become a Eurasian language personality, inside of whose there is a constant peaceful dialogue of Eastern and Western cultures” [1: 857]. This process covers many different kinds of activity and operations with data. That is why the question of how language influences cognition at large becomes topical. Besides, it is necessary to study interiorized language, language as a cognitive tool and ways of representing knowledge and outward objects in consciousness and also mechanisms and ways of processing this knowledge.

The term “ethnolinguistics” (ethnosemantics, anthropolinguistics) was introduced due to the research of American scientists F. Boas and E. Sapir. They showed the relation between ethnus, culture and language, which entailed long discussions in scientific community [2; 3].
In modern linguistics, the “language competence” is defined as a subjective attribute that is an alloy of knowledge, skills and qualities of language personality that allow this personality to be efficient in speech and thought. As a result, it becomes important to distinguish ethnolinguistic differentiations of bilingual children in Russian-Kazakhstan border area [4]. Previously, we already emphasized the necessity of psycholinguistic diagnostics and linguistic correction because it is connected to a large extent with the attempts of complex work with semantic malfunction of speech at all levels of language system. That is why, we worked out an “ethno-psycholinguistic and corrective approach to learning lexical and grammatical categories by bilingual Tatars” [5: 105]. This approach makes it possible to find out the ethnolinguistic differentiations of bilingual Tatars in communication with the help of one or the other language. The ethno-psycholinguistic and cognitive approach to learning lexical and grammatical categories of Russian language by senior preschool bilingual Tatars allows us to consider language a part of cognition and to analyze language phenomena as a method of thinking that creates knowledge and uses it. This predetermines the comprehension of the essence of language knowledge, the explanation of language phenomena, the analysis of sense and meaning and their perception and processing by the structures of language consciousness.

In contemporary world, the development of cultural, scientific, economic and simply human contacts requires the knowledge of more than two languages. That is why a linguistic tension arises in the communicative space of contacting languages. This is one of the basic parameters for the assessment of the vitality of language culture: «We are now engaged in multiple-vector communicational war in which language status is not an idle question but a question of vitality of a certain lingual culture». [4: 32]. The “spontaneous processing” of word material and speech comprehension in the first stage performed by a child are the result of the inherited ability of neuropsychiologic structures in human brain [6].

The early detection and prevention of speech processing disorder of bilingual children acquires a particular importance, because a child becomes a full member of society very quickly and he gets the ability to produce and understand an infinite number of new but significant sentences in a language he mastered. It is known that initially we perceive the world by means of our native language – a language of mother and father. Native language is a basis for any intellectual development; it favours deep and conscious learning of the Russian language [7]. The Russian-speaking Tatar personality of a child comes into communication as a poly-aspect one; and “this correlates with the strategies and tactics of conversation, the social and psychological roles of communicators and the cultural sense of information included in communication” [8: 63]. Bilingual person can use two languages simultaneously depending on the situation and who he communicates with. Following E.Y. Protasova [9], we state that the successful bilingualism of a child develops only if he can distinctly express any thought at least in one of the languages [10; 11]. But if speech in native language is not formed yet, then the structure of thought collapses and the whole system of speech-thought activity of a bilingual becomes deformed. It is of great theoretical and practical importance to study the interaction between native (Tatar) language and another (not native) language. It helps to see how linguistic and non-linguistic factors influence the development of a certain language and to get to know how one or other sides of language respond the influence of another language system. Interferential processes deal with all levels of linguistic interactions, promote the formation of a specific regional norm of language usage and become a precondition for a poly-national form of language. Moreover, in our opinion, internal speech is a requirement for a full-fledged mechanism of language cognition, because it functions as a conductor for cognitive components in poly-communicative and ethno-cognitive activity. The vitality of Tatar-Russian bilingualism in poly-ethnic areas of Tatarstan and Tyumen Region is connected with settled interethnic and linguistic practice, dense habitation and centuries-old cultural traditions.

In order to discover the peculiarities of how bilingual children perceive the semantic component of language competence, we used a modified version of associative experiment and carried out an investigation of associative connections and formed a semantic vocabulary for bilingual children (with the help of ethnolinguistic method). We used the following methods for the appraisal of results: giving the tasks in two languages and comparing results; correlating the complexity of linguistic material with a glance to ethnolinguistic factor. The test group included senior preschool Tatar bilinguals living densely in Nizhne-Tavdinkiy Area of Tyumen Region in comparison with data of the whole Tatarstan. The preliminary study and analysis of social profiles of children under test showed that all parents of these children belong to Tatar nationality and are fluent in their native language. They use it at home but speak Russian
at work. All children (100%) speak only Tatar at home and there is Tatar communication in educational institutions. In Tatar family, father is responsible for upbringing sons and mother is responsible for girls. Tatar proverb says: “at – arbasyn belmi, ata – kyzyn belmi (“horse doesn’t know its cart and father doesn’t know his daughter”). That is why the associative strategies of speech communication differ depending on the sex of members.

Poly-communicative and ethno-cognitive activity in non-native Russian language for Tatar bilinguals is an active, conscious activity of secondary linguistic personality. This activity is aimed at the formation of the conceptual system of target language in the structure of communicative competence for the materialization of the whole system of individual knowledge belonging to secondary linguistic personality and for acquiring new knowledge by means of learned Russian language.

The associative experiment was carried out using the traditional method: incentive words in two languages were given to a tested person; he was to respond by as many words as possible. The experiment was supplemented with the diagnostic method of O.B. Inshakova for evaluating the maturity of all speech components of senior preschoolers.

Child’s associations reflect the features of his thinking and the level of his intellectual development. The younger is a child, the more “individual-concrete thoughts” are contained in his associations. Children with low intellect have lower speed of association and higher variability of reactions than children with high intellect.

The analysis of correlation between different kinds of verbal associations showed the most significant types of linguistic reactions. For example, subject associates headed the list (25%); syntagmatic associates made up 22%; paradigmatic associates made up 18%; accidental associates were found in 12% of cases. Word-formative, grammatical and phonetic associates had roughly equal quantity (5% each). Some children (8%) refused to fulfill the task demonstrating speech negativism and the absence of desire to cooperate with an adult. Sound associations of bilingual children were often a game with an incentive word, for example: Dog – et (Tat.) – met.

Common association tendencies were that, in ontogenesis, bilingual children formed the associative meaning of a word in direction from formal associations to semantic ones. Syntagmatic associations occur at an earlier age than paradigmatic associations. Syntagmatic associations were mostly stereotypic and dictated by very strong individual linguistic association: Dog (“et”, Tat.) – angry (“yaman” – bad, Tat.); apple (“alma”, Tat.) – tasty (“tamle”, Tat); umbrella – rain (“yangyr” – rain, Tat.). The linguistic and culturological study of associates belonging to Tatar bilingual children is an essential stage of describing the Tatar and Turkic linguistic picture of the world.

As we conceive, the whole set of children’s responds is the reflection of associative and verbal abilities of bilingual children that contains information of different levels: grammatical, pragmatic and cognitive. Besides, we discovered the following things: there are clearness and figurativeness in so called sensory reaction when children use verbal means to describe an image connected with visual, aural and gustatory senses: onion (“pyjyas”) – bitter, garlic. In reactions of children who study at home in their native Tatar language one can notice the influence of the native language on Russian. This is expressed in mixing grammatical forms and answers in Russian.

A bilingual chooses sound equivalents for one or another concrete position on the basis of the phonological system of his native language and the phonological system of non-native language. He can make “mistakes” both in choosing sound equivalents and in combining them into one rhythmic group. Children “recognize” incentive words the following way: answer-translations are based on mixed (subordinate) model in which the main meanings of the word coincide; and the answers semantically connected with an incentive word in Tatar are made by a mixed (subordinate) or a coordinative model (the main meanings of an incentive word and an answer coincide in the latter model). While taking his bearings in language reality, a child thinks that the notions connected by one language are natural for the other language. Besides, one can see that associations are connected with initial word by common semantic features: the direction of activity and quality characteristics. For instance, five-six-year-old children chiefly use syntagmatic connections that are typical for younger age (4 years old) with speech ontogenesis norm, while their peers (Russian monolinguals) chiefly use paradigmatic associates. This indicates that these children have a potential retardation of associative thought and operate with situational data. “Accidental” associates are the evidence for the disrupted speech and thought process, fragmentary syntagma, the secondary decrease of cognitive activity which, in its turn, requires high attention, particularly by teacher and speech therapist.
A part of bilingual children (8%) showed a verbal incapacity and unreadiness for linguistic cooperation with an adult in foreign language. In the course of diagnostics, we noticed that children being aware of the fact that the experimenter speaks Tatar language selectively and situationally gave associations for incentive words in their native Tatar language. This will require a purposeful formation of communicative skills of this category of children. Moreover, we noticed a very long latent period of reaction to an incentive word; the originality of relation between the components of meaning structure; the fixedness of chosen decoding strategy etc.

Thus, we can state that Russian semantic vocabulary is formed quite slowly among Tatar bilingual children. The results showed that a low level of associative connections is revealed among 16% bilingual children who received tasks in their native language. And 84% of bilingual children showed a high level of associative connections. When the same tasks were presented in Russian, the level of success made up only 13%.

The main tendencies in choosing sound associations by children are reflected in the classification of children’s sound associations. The leading role in associative-verbal network of ontogenesis belongs to sound (and phonomorphemic) associates, because a child first of all leans on sound shell in perceiving a word. In this context, the most significant are the words unknown for a child or that he uses rarely. The extrametal sides of child’s psychical activity are characterized by a rhyme that is a kind of sound associate. The basic functions of sound associations in child’s speech are: reference, emotive, factual, meta-linguistic and poetic functions. The fact that none of listed functions is realized independently seems to be important. In the majority of contexts that contain children’s sound associations, one can find the combination of functions carried out by them.

We noticed mistakes made by bilingual children in using different endings of numbers and gender. Besides, we detected specific features that reveal at phonetic level: the cases of devocalization.

After examining the results of the experiment, we made the following conclusions:

- The speech norms of native Tatar language influence the adoption of Russian norms. In its turn, it will require the creation and implementation of psycholinguistic-oriented methods of linguistic correction [11]. These methods should be aimed at the optimization of cognitive and semantic mechanisms that carry out the semantic organization of speech in overcoming speech malfunction among this category of preschoolers;
- Ethno-linguistic differentiation in the variability of language using in the inner vocabulary of a bilingual child shows that «Thus, we observe the formation of the new modern Eurasian language personality on a constructive basis of linguistic and mental polylogue, where the Russian language is no dominant, leaving the space for new languages-communicants of the post-Soviet reality and transforming in the modern intensive communication of the native speakers to the new varying forms of language» [12: 794].

We studied the associative connections in the system of overcoming ethno-linguistic differentiations belonging to general third-level speech malfunction of Tatar bilingual children. The results showed that 84% of bilingual children have the high level of associative connections, while 16% of bilingual children have the low level of associative connections. Therefore, in the normal state and in the conditions of general speech malfunction, in the course of free association, the degree of interference at different language levels reflects “the neuro-psycholinguistic peculiarities of a bilingual child surrounded by another ethnos” [4: 833].
Associative connections are the mechanism that sorts out information coming to the inner world. In the majority of cases, these connections occur accidently, that is we are not aware ourselves that we carry positive and negative charge for one or another phenomenon of the external world. We see, hear, smell or taste something and this evokes some special emotions in us. This inner world is represented in individual myth of a person created by fanciful designs of the interpenetration of linguistic cultures in the inner linguistic and mental space of a bilingual. The nationality of a child creates specific features in forming and adoption of all components of language system.

REFERENCES