Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in the USSR

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1. Understanding Bilingualism

There are three main oppositions in modern works on bilingualism. A: Diglossia-Bilingualism (diglossia as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, bilingualism as a psycholinguistic one—(J. Fishman, 1971); see “individual” and “national” bilingualism in (H. Kloss, 1967). B: Coordinative-Subordinative Bilingualism (H. Weinreich, 1953). C: Natural Bilingualism—Artificial Bilingualism as a result of a special organized education. D: Bilingualism (language+language)—knowing another form of the same language (C.A. Ferguson, 1971). The brilliant analysis of these oppositions is given in the paper presented by Soon-Ham Park (1991).

In addition there is a lot of problems dealing with bilingualism (or diglossia) and solving in different ways. Let us analyse these problems starting with the notion “linguistic community” or LC (see A. Leontiev, 1986).

Practically, what is understood by LC is a homogeneous LC, which is united by the same mother tongue. In reality it is a non-typical case (but such LCs do exist—for example Korean LC). The overwhelming majority of LCs are heterogeneous—more than one mother tongue is used, and diglossia a la Ferguson takes place (or “widespread bilingualism”—R.S. Graham, 1956).

One can find two kinds of heterogeneous LCs:
a) LCs with symmetrical heterogeneity. It is an aggregate of some ethnikoses (ethnikos is every part of an ethnos isolated in space, having peculiarities in culture, language etc. and looking up on itself as a special ethnic unity: e.g. Akadian ethnikos of the French ethnos in Canada, Kamchadals in Kamchatka as a part of Russian ethnos) each having its own mother tongue, but united by a common language (CL). Such CL as a rule doesn’t belong to the mother tongues of this population (English in India) or serves as a mother tongue for a small and marginal ethnos and (as CL) has completely new functions and a new linguistic specificity—(TOK PISIN in Papus—New Guinea which is the mother tongue for 15,000 aborigenes and CL—for 5 million speakers;

b) LCs with asymmetrical heterogeneity: a CL serves as the mother tongue of some ethnikos (Malay in Malaysia, Arab in Magrib and Near East).

There are three criteria for the further classification of LCs.

1. The degree of mass bilingualism spread. Where does bilingualism end and diglossia begins? The absolute quantity of persons speaking CL is non-significant. In a heterogeneous LC diglossia must be typical for only those members of the population who realize (through professional activity, social status etc.) some social functions of the CL. That’s why English constitutes (as other Indian languages do) the Indian LC—although only an insignificant minority of Indians is speaking it. I mean we take into consideration only a part of population for which this CL has practical necessity and would be practically used.

2. Grade of CL knowledge (Level of CL Command). What is meant by “good” or “bad” command of CL? Can language proficiency be really measured? Here the types of communication skills (in Soviet works types of “verbal activities”) should be taken into account: speaking-listening-reading-writing. And one