

# ЛИНГВИСТИКА

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## THE LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHY OF SIBERIAN GERMANS

The article includes some research results of the metalanguage reflection of German dialects of speakers living in Tomsk region, one of the Siberian regions of the Russian Federation.

Research materials were collected through the implementation of field expeditions in rural settlements of Tomsk region, where a significant proportion of the population are Germans. The statements about the language of the informants are analyzed in this article; modeling of their experienced history of the usage of languages is carried out. The model, based on the analysis of the “subjective data”, provides a concept of relevant and irrelevant linguistic phenomena for the perception of bilingual German respondents, which allows following up the development of their language loyalty and language associations diachronically.

**Key words:** *German dialects in Siberia, Russian Germans, language attitude, language biography.*

### 1. Introduction

Today there is a great linguistic interest in the everyday perception of language. The questions “What does a layman think about language?” and “How does he verbalize it?” are raised by modern scientists to look at familiar objects of scientific description with a new perspective and extend and complete the achievements of traditional linguistics (Anders, 2010: 22–23).

The research area for these questions is referred to as naive linguistics. To study a metalanguage concept of naive speakers, methods of questioning, associative experiments, draw-a-map, matched-guise method and other methods of collecting and analyzing field data, known in modern linguistics as the quantitative ones, are used. For example, such methods are extensively used in German projects “The German language space from the perspective of a linguistic layman” (Kiel University), “Exploration and analysis of the current German language” (Institute of the German Language, Mannheim).

The representatives of naive linguistics study ordinary concepts of the language with the use of methods that are based on statistical data processing; the phrase “language attitudes” is the central term.

At the same time, more and more experts point out the necessity to study everyday language understanding by qualitative methods. Taking into account their opinion, the usage of this methodological approach for problem solving of naive linguistics meets the ideas of methodological pluralism (Deminger, 2004: 29) and gives more freedom to the explication of individual perspectives of informants (König, 2014: 16). As known, qualitative methods focus on the interpretation of contexts and their usage allows joining research project achievements of narrative linguistics, text linguistics and pragmatics. Works with everyday language knowledge are described with the use of qualitative methods and the term “language biography” is widely known (Franceschini, 2004; Treichel, 2004; König, 2014).

There is no common meaning of this term in modern scientific discourse, and no definition in specialized dictionaries or lexicon. According to a German scientist D. Tophinke, this term is multi-layered and generally used to show the fact that people are in the evolution towards the language (Tophinke, 2002: 1). On the one hand, language biography is an **individual story** of language learning and usage, experienced by humans. Thus, a human’s life can be seen through the interaction with the language/languages. On the other hand, language biography is also **cognitive reconstruction** of experienced events relating to the language/languages. We speak about human’s memories and cognitive images of the language phenomena. As scientists do not have a direct access to a man’s mental

sphere, language verbalized judgments of naive speakers are used as material of language biographical studies. They may take a form of short statements and extended texts.

In naive linguistics, numerous works are devoted to the peculiarities of the language perception of dialect speakers. Interest for dialects may be explained by the fact that there is the so-called “ideal” concentrate of everyday knowledge of the world, including its languages. At the same time, dialect speakers can speak the literary form of the national language besides their own local dialect, and often (for example, if we speak about dialect “islands”) the languages of the neighboring language communities. In other words, they are of interest to bi- or polylingual scientists who are able to compare different languages through the spectacle of people's knowledge and perception. Moreover, dialects, in general, are disappearing forms of the languages and studies, especially involving new approaches and methods, making invaluable contribution to the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity of the world. Language attitudes research of dialect speakers with the usage of quantitative methods (after the authors' works) belong to the so-called *perceptual dialectology* (Preston, 2010) or *layman dialectology* (Eichinger, 2012: 11).

A common name for scientific projects, consisting of qualitative research of everyday interpretation of dialects, is not found in the professional literature. This is apparently because of the lack of understanding of the term “language biography”, lack of worked out strategies for the studies of this phenomenon and a small number of works devoted to language biographies of dialect speakers.

## 2. Methods and Characteristics of Samples

The article shows some research results, wherein language biography modeling of the elderly age group of German dialect speakers living in Tomsk region of the Russian Federation, is carried out. **The recreated language biography is a model that combines events and developments of relevance to the language that has been experienced by the informants during their lives.** Model subjectiveness is reached by the entirely subjective language data analysis – statements of informants about the language. In other words, the constructed language biography includes only those linguistic phenomena that informants mention. The goal of research is to find out what phenomena of the mother tongue and other languages informants speak or contact during their lives are the most striking and memorable for them. A diachronic perspective of the research, which covers the time period from childhood of dialect speakers (1930s) up to the moment of the interview (2006–2009) allowing insight into how the language/languages perception of informants was changing, and shows the transformation of their language associations over time.

Tomsk region belongs to Russian regions with a significant concentration/share of the ethnic Germans (see Map 1). The Germans were in Tomsk region because of ASSR liquidation of Volga Germans (The Volga Republic) at the order of Joseph Stalin at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War (1941) and the deportation of its population to Western Siberia and Central Asia. One of the regions of Western Siberia, where habitants of the Volga Republic were resettled by force, was Tomsk region. So, from 1945 to 1953 in the northern areas of Tomsk region about 17 000 special settlers arrived. The repressive actions by the Soviet leadership during the years of the War are the most dramatic pages in the history of Russian Germans. The process of violent uprooting, harsh living conditions in the new settlements and mobilization of able-bodied special settlers into the labor army resulted in mass casualties. After the elimination of labor armies at the end of the War and partial rehabilitation of Soviet Germans (1955) who had been sent to Tomsk region, the Germans for the most part did not leave the territory and continued to live and work at factories, collective and state farms (kolkhoz, sovkhoz) on an equal basis with the Russian-speaking population. After the USSR breakup and border openings, a large proportion of Tomsk Germans emigrated to Germany. Despite the active emigration processes in the 90s, nowadays in Tomsk region, the Germans are the fourth most populous (after the Russians, the Tatars and the Ukrainians). Approximately, 8 687 Germans live in Tomsk region according to the 2010 population census.

There are not many dialect speakers now among Tomsk Germans. A greater number of Tomsk Germans have assimilated and they use the Russian language in all spheres of communication (including family) as a means of communication. Mostly the elder generation speaks the German dialect. Tomsk Germans' dialects are mixed, i. e. they contain phonetic and morphological characteristics of different "parent" dialects of modern Germany. A special analysis shows that in oral forms of the German language common in Tomsk region, signs of West Middle German dialects of modern Germany dominate (see more about German dialects in Tomsk region in (Alexandrov and Bogoslovskaja, 2009)).



Map 1. Tomsk region on the map of the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup>

Language material of the research is a corpus of informants statements about language phenomena, which was collected by the authors of the article through field expeditions from 2006 to 2009 in a number of settlements of Tomsk region with a high German population (Alexandrovskoye, Kargasok, Parabel, Kozhevnikovo) (see Map 2). The main method of field data collection was an interview, which can be characterized as "partly structured" (Burdick, 2008: 12). This means that the interviewer used for language data prepared a questionnaire in advance. Its purpose was to motivate the informant to the metalanguage reflection. At the same time communication between the informant and scientists regularly deviated from the planned scenario and flew into informal conversation (little-structured interview), the subject was defined by the dialect speaker. The topics of these conversations were predominantly autobiographical, but the main genre of the texts are memories. Thus, field work material in Tomsk region via the partly-structured interview is similar to the narrative interview, widely used in the works of researchers of language biographies (Franceschini, 2004; Treichel, 2004; König 2014); respondent dialect speakers acted as narrators. Autobiographical details were entwined with statements about the language and language phenomena in their narratives. As respondents are bilingual, i. e. they speak the German dialect and the Russian language at home, the analyzed text corpus includes metalanguage comments in dialect and the Russian language. In some parts of collected statements, alternately the Russian and German languages are used, because the speech of informants is characterized by the phenomenon of "code switching". The vast majority of collected texts is non-deployed statements, consisting of one, two or three sentences.

The Germans of the elderly age group are informants of the given research. At the time of field expeditions, the average age was from 75 to 85. In the whole, 63 informants were interviewed.

<sup>1</sup> The map is taken from the website of the Legislative Duma of Tomsk Oblast (<http://eng.duma.tomsk.ru/page/192/>).



Map 2. Tomsk region

The respondents were born in different villages and towns of the former Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans. In childhood or adulthood they were deported to Tomsk region with their parents. They were there during the War and stayed to live and work in that region of Siberia after the War. They did not leave Tomsk region after the opening of borders of the USSR in the 90s. Taking into account those life periods of interviewed informants in the research, the following periods of the language biography are defined as “Childhood in Volga region”, “The War and post-war years”, “1955 – the end of the 90s”, “Modern period (from the early 2000s)”.

In linguistics modeling, language biography of Russian Germans is the first research of the experienced history of learning and using of languages by the German dialect speakers residing in the territory of the Russian Federation.

Primarily such projects were not realized on the material, majority languages or other small languages spoken in Russia. The results of the proposed research have already been partially described in several publications (Alexandrov, 2011; Alexandrov, 2012).

In this paper, for the first time, the results of the project are presented in conjunction with the theoretical and generalized components of scientific research, namely: the scientific problem is described; the approaches of modern foreign “naïve” linguistics are summarized; the characteristics of language data sources and methods of data collection are given; analysis of linguistic material is carried out; and the created metalanguage model is schematically represented. The research results are presented in English.

Within the framework of this article, language biography modeling of Tomsk Germans during the period, “The War and post-war years” is realized. deportation of the Germans from Volga region is carried out between 1941 and 1955.

## Results and Discussion

Deportation, as known, has radically changed the language situation of the studied ethnic groups: those Germans who resettled in Siberia were under the intense influence of the Russian language. For example, N. Berend connects the beginning of instability phase and discontinuity in the language situation of Russian Germans with the deportation, which continues until now from her point of view (Berend, 1998: 18). In this regard, in collected interviews, which illustrate the forced resettlement, and in War statements about language barrier situations, language conflict and initial experience of the Russian language acquisition are expected. However, in the narration relating to this period of the language biography, not many statements about the language are fixed. The lack of metalanguage comments in the narratives, which thematically affect the period of life stories of the interviewed Germans “objectively” relevant to the language, can be explained by different reasons. On the one hand, a host of tragic experiences of respondents related to the years of Stalinist repression and the War, which displace the memories and impressions of the language nature. Thus, a German linguist K. Brake, who analyzes the memories texts of Russian Germans in his work, called deportation “closed area”, i. e., the events of this autobiographical area are difficult for theming through narrative interviews (Brake, 1998: 436–443). Expeditions in Tomsk region have shown that autobiographical stories illustrating this period are extremely difficult for the practice of field data collection and analysis: informants often avoid this topic or narration about it in the interviews, as they are overfilled by personal emotions. On the other hand, the Germans of the studied age group, came to Siberia in childhood; i. e. at the optimal age for natural or unfocused language acquisition<sup>2</sup>. Probably, the acquisition of the Russian language is not associated with serious challenges and, therefore, is not described in collected interviews as unique autobiographical experience. In favor of this hypothesis is the fact that comments about the problem of the language barrier are fixed in relation, not to the respondents, but to their parents; i. e. representatives of the elder generation (Example 1). Moreover, illustrations of unfocused language acquisition, which was carried out by means of communication of the Germans with Russian-speaking children when they played in the street and at school, are found in the collected texts (Example 2).

(1) *Die Mom hot arch schlecht Ružich gspouche. Die konnte mit ružich Lait tes Ružich net spreche*<sup>3</sup>.

Engl.: *My mother spoke Russian very badly. She could not talk to Russian people in Russian.*

(2) *Mir zint alle drause rumgesprunge und hene gespielt. Die hene die ružich gesunge und ich hun mitgsunge. Ich hun net verstanne, aber ich hun mitgesprouche und hun ach schlechte Werter gelernt.*

Engl.: *And we all ran together in the street [Russian and German children], we were playing. They sung some couplets and I repeated after them. I did not understand, but I repeated, and even learned some bad words [laughs].*

Within this framework, it is necessary to mention the experience of the research of language biographies of Wales bilinguals, who are native Welsh and non-native English speakers. A German scientist B. Treichel concluded that such processes implemented in childhood and adulthood of informants as changing cultural identity (change of the traditional Welsh lifestyle into English) and the accompanying process of linguistic identity transformation (change of the dominant position of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to R. Franceschini at unfocused language acquisition we are talking about the formation of such a competence of the non-native language, which is carried out spontaneously and unconsciously in the context of everyday practical interaction with it (Franceschini, Miecznikowski, 2004: 133).

<sup>3</sup> For registration utterances of informants in the article, no special transcription is used. The given texts are registered in accordance with the rules of letter-sound relation in standard German. The exception is sound ž (missing in standard German). For example, a dialectal word “Ružich” which corresponds to the word “Russisch” in standard German (eng. = Russian). Separate words or even blocks of text, spoken by informants in Russian, marked in the Cyrillic alphabet in accordance with the rules of the Russian language. After each utterance in the dialect there is a translation into English. In square brackets there is accompanying information to the text, which will facilitate understanding for the reader.

native and non-native languages) is weakly themed in the stories collected through narrative interviews (Treichel, 2004: 142). Apparently, a similar phenomenon is observed in the average age group of the interviewed Russian Germans. Nevertheless, in spite of the above written difficulties in collecting language material, based on the interviews, a corpus of statements about the language that are thematically related to the time period 1941–1955 was prepared.

The first contact of the interviewed informants with the Russian language was mentioned in the texts about deportation events. That contact took place during deportation, or after arrival at the place of settlement.

Russian soldiers who accompanied trucks with special settlers and the local Russian population of Siberia were called Russian language speakers. Informants were hearing their speech for the first time (Examples 3, 4).

(3) *Mir sind in grouse Wagon gefahre, wo man Vieh fahrt. Wann mir ankomma sind, waren viel Leit. Die hene viel gesprouche, aber ich hun niks verstanne. Dann hene uns gsagt, dass die gekomma sind und wollte sehe, ob die Deutsche ein Schwanz hene.*

Engl.: *We traveled in large carriages for cattle traffic. When we arrived at the station, there were many people. They were talking about something [in Russian]. I did not understand. Then we were told that they came to see if the Germans have tails.*

(4) *Wenn mir noch Sibirien komme sind, dann hun ich von den Rusen tes Ružich gehert.*

Engl.: *As soon as we came to Siberia, I heard Russian from the Russians.*

It should be noted that according to the professional literature the Russian language was widely disseminated in the ASSR of Volga Germans before the War. For example, N. Berend writes that after the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917 the Russian language in the Volga republic became an instrument of inter-ethnic communication and it changed the status from the contact language to the overlapping one by the beginning of the War. However, a scientist admits that, although in 1937 the Russian language was introduced in Volga schools as a compulsory subject, the level of the Russian language proficiency of Volga Germans was low (Berend, 1998: 13–15). The carried language biographical study shows that respondents first encountered Russian speech during their forced migration from Volga region to Siberia.

The local Russian population of Siberia connected Volga Germans with the Nazis and, therefore, were unfriendly towards them. Remembering the first contact with the Russians and Russian speech, informants often mention a word “fascist”. The word “fascist” is often mentioned as the first word heard in Russian. This lexical item is associated negatively by the Germans (Example 5).

(5) *Mir sind uf die Strase gegange, dann hene die Kinnr auf uns Steine geschmise und die hene gekriže “Faschist”, “Faschist”. Ich hun net verstanne, was die gekriže hen. Dann hun ich den Pap gefrocht, dann hot der mich gesagt, was das ist.*

Engl.: *We were walking along the street, and children started throwing stones and shouting “Fascist!”, “Fascist!” And I did not understand why they shouted. Then I asked my father (...), he explained.*

As known, during the War and postwar years, German settlers had no opportunity to visit educational institutions regularly (due to poverty, lack of shoes and warm clothing, employment in the state and collective farms, etc.), that’s why most of them did not finish high school. According to the collected interviews, informants did not have school education, not only because of discrimination based on their national origin at school, the negative attitude towards them from their Russian-speaking classmates, but also because of the prohibition to use the mother tongue (Examples 6, 7).

(6) *Tie Lehrerin hot gsacht: “In der Schuhl nicht Taitsch spreche, ehr sellt net Deutsch spreche!” Derfe net, nur Ružich, Ružich!*

Engl.: *The teacher ordered: “Don’t speak German at school. You are not allowed to speak German! Not allowed, only Russian, Russian!”*

(7) *Mir sint so ufgewachse! Immer Ružich, Ružich. Wann mir in die Schul komma sind, derften mir des Deutsch net spreche. Des derften mir nicht. Des war arich schwer fir uns.*

Engl.: *We've so grown up! All along is the Russian language. When we went to school, we could not speak German, it was impossible. And it was hard for us.*

The prohibition to use the mother tongue – German dialects, the negative attitude to it of the local Russian-speaking population at school led to the fact that during that historical period the command of the German dialect is considered as the possibility that is preferably not to advertise or even hide (Examples 8, 9).

(8) *Ich hun verstanne, was sie sagt, aber ich tu lieber schweige. Sunst sie sache wieder "Faschist"!*

Engl.: *I understood what she said [a German teacher], but I kept silence. Otherwise, they [classmates] would say again, "Fascist"!*

(9) *Dort hun ich kla bisje die Buchstave gelernt, kla bisje lese. In der Schul war alles uf Ružich, mir hen nur uf Ružich verzählt. Mein Bruder ist in die Schul gange und kein Ružich gesproche. Die hun fir des geschloge. Aller Tach, wenn er komma ist, hen sie gekrieže "Du Faschiste, Du Fritze!"*

Engl.: *There I learned a little, learned the letters, and read a little. At school everything was in Russian, we spoke only in Russian. And how! My brother went to school and did not speak Russian. For this he was beaten. All the days that he came, they shouted: "You're a fascist, you are Fritz!"*

Only in some cases, informants indicated that sometimes they deliberately used their native language in the presence of the Russian speakers. This was done in order to conceal the contents of the conversation from the interlocutors (Example 10).

(10) *Dass die Lehrerin uns net versteht, hen mir uf unsere Art gesproche.*

Engl.: *And in order that the teacher did not understand us, we spoke in our own language [informant laughs]!*

Informants are aware and comment on a sharp decrease of the functional significance of the dialect after migration to Siberia. According to their statements, in the years of the War, i. e., immediately after the forced migration, the German dialect becomes their main means of interfamilial communication (Example 11).

(11) *Des war uf der Wolga so, da hen mir iverall uf unser Art gesproche, in der Schuhl, der Ham. Da hie in Sibirien, in Sibirien nur der Ham.*

Engl.: *It's always just on the Volga, we spoke our native language, both at home and school. Here in Siberia, in Siberia only at home.*

In addition, the analysis of metalanguage statements corpus indicates that beyond the family the Germans used their native language only in intergroup communication, i. e. such communication that excludes the presence of Russian speakers. One of the most frequently mentioned kind of intercommunication during the War and postwar years was communication during German religious community meetings. As known, the ethnic Germans living in Russia, are characterized by their devotion and respect for their religious traditions. In Tomsk region among the German population, there are Catholics, Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, Adventists and Pentecostals. Meetings were secretly carried out at home by a member of the community and it was the place where, according to the participants of meetings, "there was no Russian" and "it was spoken only native language". Devotion and chants were in standard German with dialect connotation, and communication between the participants of the meeting took place in German dialects.

According to the collected texts, informants are aware that participation in meetings of religious communities contributed to the preservation of their native language competence in the foreign language environment (Examples 12, 13).

(12) *In der Kerch hun mir auf Deitsch verzählt, drum kann ich uf unsere Art spreche.*

Engl.: *In the church, we spoke German, so I know our dialect.*

In metalanguage statements of the informants during the time period of 1941–1955, High German was mentioned along with the German dialects and the Russian language. After the War, the interviewed Germans visited schools where High German was taught. It is noteworthy that in metalanguage statements referring to the pre-war period (Childhood in Volga region), a school subject

“German” is not opposed to the mother tongue – the German dialect. It is associated not with the process of studying the “other” version of the German language or the “other” language, but rather mastering the skills of reading and writing in their native language. And in the context concerning their studies at Siberian schools, the subject “German” is often characterized as a “stranger”, or “other unintelligible language” (Examples 13, 14).

(13) *In ružisch Schuhl hun ich trei Klasse geendigt und literaturisch da gehehrt! Nach literaturisch sprouche net.*

Engl.: *At Russian school, I studied for three years and I heard the literary language there. The literary one I could not speak.*

(14) *In Krich derften wir nicht in die Schuhl gehe. Mir hen immer in Kolhoz geschafft. Drum kann ich tes Hochdeitsch net. So uf unsere Art, wie der Hahm, kann ich.*

Engl.: *We did not go to school during the War [informant sighs]. Yeah, everybody worked in kolkhoz, so I cannot understand the literary High German. After our manner, I can like it at home.*

Different attitudes of informants to the school subject “German” in various biographical periods is explained, apparently, by the fact that the German language was taught at schools of Volga region as a mother tongue, and at schools in Siberia (including Tomsk region) as a foreign language. In addition, High German was used in official communication in the Volga Republic, including educational institutions and had dialect connotation (Berend, 1998: 14–15). Standard German with dialect connotation differed from the dialect used by the Germans in everyday life, less than standard German taught at schools in Siberia.

### Conclusion

Thus, the given research shows that collecting of metalanguage data from Russian Germans concerning the period of “War and post-war years” is a difficult task. It is complicated by the specific features of experienced historical events and the young age of informants during the period under review.

Despite the certain complexity, a corpus of Tomsk Germans’ use of the language was prepared, and a “subjective” model of the collective language biography was developed based on its analysis. The information contained in metalanguage statements allows including the following main sections in the model: a list of the used languages, communication spheres of their usage and language associations. The content of these three sections of the model are summarized in Table.

Actual modeling of language biography enables one to educe the most striking phenomena, for the language perception of informants, which took place many years ago. Informants expressed their opinion about the languages they spoke and for which they were contacted during the period under review. Communication areas where these languages were used are also indicated. Informants described the events that contributed to the preservation of their language competence (for example, participation in religious communities) and, conversely, its loss (e. g. stigmatization of German dialects from the Russian-speaking population, etc.). Collected metalanguage statements of informants also give an idea of the state and development of the language competence of the elder generation representatives of the Germans during the studied historical period. So, the interviewed Germans mention that after moving to Siberia, the process of Russian language acquisition was difficult for their parents.

The scope of emotional perception of the languages during the studied historical period is characterized by a negative attitude toward High German, a positive attitude toward the native language (German dialects) that, in spite of the stigmatization, continued to be used in interfamilial and intergroup communication spheres. Attitudes towards the Russian language can be described as neutral. Statements relating to the War and postwar years refer to it as the language of Siberia, the language of the new place of residence after moving from Volga region, the language of the Russian population informants, which covered all spheres of life.



**Language biography of the Germans of Tomsk region**

Period	Mentioned languages	Mentioned communication spheres of languages	Attitudes/Associations
The period of "The War and post-war years"	German dialect	1) interfamilial 2) intergroup	1) taboo language 2) knowledge of the language is necessary to hide, not to advertise
	Standard German	1) school	1) written, literary "foreign", another language
	Russian language	1) communication with Russian convoy during the deportation 2) communication with the local Russian-speaking population	1) the language of Siberia, the language of the new neighbors 2) unintelligible language (especially for parents) 3) least favorite Russian word "fascist"

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### **ЯЗЫКОВАЯ БИОГРАФИЯ НЕМЦЕВ СИБИРИ**

Представлены некоторые результаты исследования метаязыковой рефлексии носителей немецких диалектов, проживающих в Томской области – одном из регионов Российской Федерации.

Материал исследования собран посредством реализации полевых практик в сельские районы Томской области, в которых значительную часть населения составляют немцы. Анализируются высказывания информантов о языке, моделируется пережитая ими история использования языков. Модель, основанная на «субъективных данных», дает представление о релевантных и нерелевантных для восприятия билингвальных немецких диалектоносителей явлениях языка. Она также предоставляет возможность проследить развитие языковой лояльности и языковых ассоциаций данной этнической группы в диахроническом аспекте.

**Ключевые слова:** *немецкие диалекты в Сибири, российские немцы, языковые установки, языковая биография.*

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