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The features of Udmurt-Russian bilingualism

Udmurt-Russian bilingualism is a base of bilingualism in the Udmurt Republic. The republican language law in the Udmurt Republic recognized both Russian and Udmurt as state languages of the republic in 2001. Despite the fact that the languages have equal official status, they are not used in parallel and distributed in public areas.

Main areas of distribution of the Udmurt language is firstly the family and daily life, secondly the Udmurt language is taught only as a subject in kindergartens, schools and universities. Now these figures are reduced, i.e. parents are less likely to enroll their children in the national classes, because they believe that the language is unsound therefore ever fewer children study mother tongue. And thirdly newspapers and magazines are published in this language but their circulation is falling steadily.

Russian language is used in all spheres of society, including administration of the Udmurt Republic, the courts, the highest authorities etc. not to mention schools and family communication. Russian language is gradually replacing the Udmurt language from all the areas of public life.

Main reasons for moving to the Russian language are loss of the Udmurt language prestige, urban processes and lack of appropriate terminology. According to the last two general censuses of the population (1989 and 2002) the number of speakers of the Udmurt language is declining. The only place of the ethnic language persistence is village. For people moving into the city, most often the Russian language becomes the primary language of international communication. But certainly the choice of language, regardless of location, depends on the language environment, the choice of theme and language competence of the speaker.

One of the most pressing issues now in the Udmurt society is the creation of terminology. Terminological Commission, formed in 2006, has developed nearly 600 terms. Attitude to these terms rather skeptical, because people do not clearly understand what is written in Udmurt newspapers and demonstrated in Udmurt television shows. Udmurt speakers, especially the older ones, continue to use Russian terminology in their speech. Generally Udmurt-Russian bilingualism can be characterized as unilateral, i.e. in the Udmurt language Russian words are found, and in the Russian language Udmurt words do not occur.

In spite of this the Udmurt language is one of the most viable of the Finno-Ugric languages in Russia. Among native speakers there are not only adults but also children. Today it is important to create the conditions that will lead children to learning and developing their mother tongue. Many interesting projects will be envisaged in the near future for children and youth for example open courses of the Udmurt language, production of discs with Udmurt tales and songs, organization of conferences and seminars etc. Otherwise all national languages will be pushed out by the Russian language.