

Digitalization: advantage or disadvantage in the issue of preserving the languages of minority ethnic groups (on the example of the Abaza language)

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Abstract. The article presents some reflections on the changes caused by the use of digital technologies in modern Abaza society. An analysis of cultural changes due to the rapid spread of modern communication technologies in the globalized context of modern Abaza society is carried out. The digital revolution provides us with new opportunities for innovation, creativity and development, and increased access to knowledge and information provides previously unknown opportunities for people and communities, opening up new horizons for us. In this regard, the article discusses the benefits of using information technology in the era of mass digitalization of society. Rapid changes in cultural demographics, technology, education and the impact of globalization and multiculturalism call for a reassessment of the processes that tend to isolate modern life from its heritage, i.e. cultural distancing. The essence of the argument is that the preservation of the intangible heritage, namely the language, is associated with the center of the formation of identity and the ethnos as a whole.

1 Introduction

Globalization is creating an entire cultural and commercial ecosystem that is transforming communities and diversifying populations. As communities around the world come together, a truly co-evolutionary dynamic is being created in which bilingualism is increasingly favored [1]. This bilingualism includes the state language, and the second - a foreign language, although the native language should rightfully occupy a leading position. In the context of globalization, high mobility, new opportunities for migration and rapid urbanization, representatives of many minority ethnic groups begin to consider their native language as of little prestige, considering its study and knowledge unpromising. More

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attention is paid to the study of the main (state) language of their country and international languages. These factors lead to the fact that the number of active speakers of minority languages is declining, which naturally leads to further marginalization of the least equipped and the smallest among them [2]. That is why awareness of the need to save endangered languages is growing every day. The issue of preserving languages becomes the basis for holding scientific conferences and discussion platforms. Many scientific articles and collections testify to this interest. With the development of information technology, information about global discussions about endangered languages often appears on the Internet. However, there is some debate about whether endangered languages should be preserved, and if so, what could be the best contribution not only from professional linguists and anthropologists, but also from IT specialists. In this article, the authors outline the reasons why we must take decisive action and why part of decisive action is to extract positive aspects from the process of digitalization of society in the issue of preserving the languages of small ethnic groups [3]. Possessing the necessary skills and tools to function in digital spaces is the key to improving the quality of our lives. Such opportunities should be effectively used by all people, native speakers of all languages.

Since this message will be based on the example of the Abaza language, we will present a brief note about this ethnic group. Abazins (self-name - Abaza) are one of the Abkhaz-Adyge peoples living in Russia, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic. They live compactly in 13 villages in the Abaza, Adyge-Khabl'sky, Malokarachaevsky and Ust-Dzhegutinsky districts. Abaza also live in the Stavropol Territory, Kabardino-Balkaria and in the east of Adygea (84 people). Abazins also live in Abkhazia, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries. They speak the Abaza language, the majority is also in Russian. Believers are Sunni Muslims.

Let us briefly review the reasons why the discipline of cultural anthropology plays such an important role in understanding the digital revolution that is now part of our daily lives. New information technologies and their global spread have radically influenced changes in the global community and at the local level [4]. The current process of globalization has been facilitated and facilitated by the Internet, which has developed at an unprecedented pace.

Cultural differences between groups of people have always been the focus of cultural and social anthropology since it became an academic discipline. This discipline was originally concerned with the study of non-Western, so-called "primitive" cultures, which today also influence our own society. Anthropology is characterized by the multiple, interconnected fields of study that make up the "culture" of a group of human beings. This anthropological concept helps us to understand what is at stake, and consists of a wide range of different areas of knowledge developed by all groups of the population, and the actions and behaviors resulting from them [5]. Such areas of knowledge are organized into a cognitive structure, the content of which varies from group to group.

Society considers these areas of knowledge useful for solving everyday problems, extraordinary events that give meaning to the world around. This cultural pattern is acquired at birth, more or less unconsciously; people make it their own by imitation and example, and it is expressed in the local language. It is not once and for all, but a flexible procedure subject to constant change, a lifelong learning process influenced by personal experience. Thus, culture is necessary to create a sense of belonging and identity for each individual [6].

Anthropology has the tools to analyze cultural change and understand the current process of globalization and the impact of information technology on different societies.

The role of technology in society shows the inextricable relationship that links technology, society and man, revealing the many cultural changes caused by the use of information technology. Technology is not only the machine itself, but the whole set of relationships between people, utensils and areas of knowledge. Another important feature of anthropological theory is that it allows us to define culture as a set of communicative acts. Communication is what allows groups and individuals to represent themselves and interact with the world through norms and values.

2 Research Methodology

Modern sociocultural processes give rise to specific features of intercultural interaction, set new directions for theoretical research and lead to a rethinking of traditional research methods and methodological approaches. In this context, there is a need for a theoretical generalization of the knowledge base acquired in the practice of cultural interaction in order to more accurately identify intercultural differences and specific characteristics of cultures.

It is known that an important role in the preservation of the languages of minority ethnic groups, the maintenance of linguistic diversity, the development and popularization of languages with the help of modern technologies is played by a specialized agency of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which includes attractions in the World Heritage List (UNESCO) [4].

To broaden and enrich the knowledge base and encourage the global academic and scientific community to harness the value of intellectual assets and indigenous linguistic heritage, the Global Research Competition has been launched, inviting researchers from around the world to contribute their research results in seven thematic areas, and namely: sustainable development; linguistic diversity and cultural heritage; social inclusion and gender equality; knowledge, education and science; human rights; technology and humanitarian issues [5]. Many contemporary scholarly works in the humanities highlight key observations and recommendations for future research in indigenous languages, including science and technology. These are areas in which indigenous languages have not yet taken a prominent place. However, digital technologies have great potential to facilitate language documentation, revitalization and promotion if the language is well understood and the necessary resources are created for greater integration into the public domain, in particular for the development of language solutions based on machine learning.

In national politics and diplomacy, the prospects for indigenous languages are limited. However, the collected data show that multilingualism in public life is a powerful tool for promoting peaceful and democratic processes in society.

In the field of education, as shown in many articles, indigenous languages can enhance the perspectives of their users and their communities [6]. Several authors have highlighted the role of immersive educational programs and bilingual inclusive education policies in promoting language revitalization and overcoming cultural assimilation trends.

Research results demonstrate that there is a link between language and traditional knowledge systems, including in relation to health and the environment, as they provide the basis for sustainable development that is appropriate to local conditions, contexts and needs.

In order to fully realize the linguistic rights of indigenous peoples, the capacity of indigenous organizations on issues related to the human rights approach, gender equality and international and national legal frameworks should be further strengthened, and additional financial resources should be used for specific actions [7].

The undeniable fact that most indigenous peoples have an oral culture and traditions highlights the urgent need for documentation, description, and revitalization efforts.

Here are just some of the statistical studies cited by UNESCO:

Nearly 300 articles have been published in the humanities (278 research papers, of which 195 in English, 6 in French and 77 in Spanish).

The top 15 countries by number of scientific papers, with a total of 203 scientific papers (73% of the total), are Mexico (48), United States of America (31), India (25), United Kingdom (15), Brazil (11), Canada (11), Australia (8), Plurinational State of Bolivia (8), Colombia (8), France (8), Pakistan (7), Philippines (7), Peru (6), Germany (5), South Africa (5).

Most of the research papers submitted were on cultural heritage (179) and indigenous education and knowledge (167), followed by humanitarian affairs and peacebuilding (76) and social inclusion and urbanization (78). Other papers were presented in the sections “Science and Health” (46), “Technology and Digital Activity” (33) and “Gender Equality” (24).

As in many small ethnic groups, the Abazins are faced with the problem of losing the use of the language on a regular basis not today [8]. The popularization of social networks, video hosting has led to a partial departure from the native language in favor of the state or international languages. Language in this sense is not an exception, it is the first step “down” the cultural ladder. The basis of any nation is language, it is communication, it is the ability to express, to show oneself as an ethnic group. When all these elements are presented in another language, it turns into a wake-up call, which by default should attract the attention of scientists, researchers, educators, politicians, public figures and ordinary people. From the point of view of the authors, today the Abaza represent themselves more through the Russian language than their native, Abaza.

Today it is difficult to imagine a child or teenager who does not use video hosting as an everyday entertainment. However, the experience of foreign colleagues in teaching children a foreign language has shown that the visual perception of information is very effective: a colorful video, supplemented with special effects, elements of gamification definitely attracts and gains more than one or several thousand views, which indicates the demand for content. The lack of video material on the network in the languages of small ethnic groups, for example, in the Abaza language, is seen by the authors as a disadvantage. Creating educational and entertaining videos in one’s native language can help promote the language online. Many modern researchers talk about the clip-like thinking of modern teenagers, which we do not deny [5-6]. However, the process is running and it is unlikely to be stopped. In our opinion, if the development of digital technologies and the mass digitalization of society are turned towards the creation of video content in the languages of small ethnic groups, this will lead to a reduction in the problems of daily use of the language.

The problem of teaching the Abaza language in secondary school remains open. After eleven years of teaching the Abaza language at school, students do not have even the simplest communicative manipulations. Also, the decision of the authorities to use native languages as an elective course and the sharp reduction in the hours allocated for teaching native languages only exacerbated the existing situation.

The next aspect that definitely needs analysis and discussion concerns the release of interactive manuals aimed at studying the cultural and linguistic foundations of the Abaza ethnic group. Under the interactive manual, the authors understand a comprehensive workbook that provides the student to be creative, develop creative and critical thinking, expand their horizons using resourcefulness and ingenuity [8]. These elements are the

natural state of a child or adolescent, within which there is a desire to be a researcher of their native language and culture. The authors also believe that audio and video materials should be an integral part of any interactive manual that can be posted on any social networking platform. That is why it is necessary to use modern digital tools. The interactive manual should largely consist of tasks for listening, thereby creating a language environment for the student in the case of living in a society in which the native language is used little or not used at all. Having high-quality, attractive, logically designed presentations is a significant advantage for authors.

3 Results and Discussions

One of the main conditions for the success of work in the development of cognitive activity of children is the creation of motivation, positive emotions, while mastering knowledge, to give the child a feeling of pleasure, to interest. It's no secret that the game creates conditions not only for education, but also for self-education, self-development. In no other activity does the child show so much independence, initiative, purposefulness, as in the game. Learn by playing! This idea has long attracted teachers and educators. Many teachers have shown and proved how, through the game, a child can be introduced into the complex world of knowledge, without causing negative emotions [4]. Reliance on the game as the main activity of preschoolers and elementary school students, the inclusion of different types of games in the educational process provide a pronounced positive effect in the development of cognitive processes.

Audiobook as a technological advantage of language preservation

Reading is the main tool for accessing learning. The vast majority of educational materials are produced in printed texts, so students with reading problems are at a complete disadvantage.

Students with visual impairments, attention problems, hyperactivity, or dyslexia face an even greater challenge when their learning materials are mostly text-based [4].

Audiobooks amplify the messages contained in the text material, which allows for a deeper absorption of what is read, which is useful even for students with no learning disabilities.

The authors highlight the following benefits that audiobooks provide for enhancing learning opportunities in and out of the classroom [6]:

1. Audiobooks expand familiarity with words and vocabulary in a friendly way.
2. Audiobooks help students deal with memory problems.
3. Audiobooks are assistive strategies to help learners with dyslexia and visual impairment.
4. Audiobooks help create a sense of self-learning.

Audiobooks open the way for learning to take place in a variety of ways, not just through reading text. They activate the use of other senses in the learning process and bring more dimensions, facilitate the process of socialization, promote empathy and help develop listening skills. Schools are encouraged to evaluate the feasibility of integrating equivalent auditory materials into all written materials.

Some thoughts on the use of online lessons for learning the Abaza language

The study and teaching of endangered languages has many characteristics and needs that differ significantly from the teaching of world languages. Groups whose languages are endangered are trying to reverse the loss of the language; Many new language teaching and learning strategies are emerging to meet the special needs and goals of language revitalization. Indigenous and minority communities around the world are actively working

to restore the knowledge and use of their endangered mother tongues [3]. Even the so-called “extinct” languages are trying to be revived through the use of documentation. The Ubykh language is a vivid confirmation of this. The question of how successful these attempts are, or at least satisfactory, remains open. Depending on the size of the group and the human resources available, there are different possibilities and limitations on the types of programs they can implement.

The authors believe that today there are several main problems affecting the loss of the Abaza language:

- 1) lack of use of modern technologies in the learning process;
- 2) outdated training programs;
- 3) the lack of modern interdisciplinary research in the field of language preservation and development in the era of digitalisation.

Speaking about outdated methods of teaching the Abaza language, an archival, unresolved problem is the lack of an interactive approach, the use of educational gamification methods, the lack of video broadcasts on the Internet that function on an ongoing basis with feedback [5]. In general, this is the lack of the use of modern technologies, outdated teaching methods based on the printed form of teaching aids and textbooks, with the complete absence of digital aids for learning the Abaza language.

Turning to the second aforementioned problem, the lack of a scientific interdisciplinary group, I would like to note that representatives of the Abaza and Abkhaz ethnic groups (Abaza people) have significant scientists who have made an invaluable contribution to the development of the people. However, the problem concerns young scientists. To implement scientific projects for the preservation and popularization of the native language, it is essential to study the problem of language loss through the prism of an interdisciplinary approach. For the success of such projects, the role of not only philologists, philosophers, sociologists, demographers, historians, but also IT specialists (IT methodologists, web designers, testers, game designers, programmers, team leaders (head of the development team), QA engineers, etc.) [7]. The role of IT industry professions today is as important as the role of scientists. It is impossible to imagine a quality product without the intervention and use of modern technologies. The absence of this particular aspect largely blocks the implementation of promising ideas for promoting language learning.

4 Conclusions

The preservation of the language contributes to the preservation of the culture. Unfortunately, in modern Russian society, cultural assimilation leads to the fact that many families of small ethnic groups lose their linguistic ties. When a language is no longer spoken, it risks becoming a dead language. When it comes to considering intensive mother tongue learning, one of the misconceptions is that it can confuse a child early on in learning the state language. It is understandable that parents would have such concerns, but researchers have proven that they are not only wrong, but exactly the opposite is true: bilingual children learn better and faster than monolingual children. We hope that educators, parents and members of the scientific community understand the importance and benefits of supporting a multilingual program, where the native language will be a prerequisite along with knowledge of the state language. In order to prevent future generations from losing ties with their native language, it is necessary to continuously study the native language as part of culture, without which no ethnic group can fully exist. Language groups can coexist only with full equality. It is in this issue that we believe that the role of the development of the blogosphere in the languages of small ethnic groups is also important as the development of modern information technologies and education due

to the large-scale digitalization of society. With the equal use of these elements, the study of native languages can be made exciting, popular, and most importantly effective.

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