

Code-switching in the conditions of Polish-Russian bilingualism in the Polish language island in Siberia (the village of Vershina near Irkutsk)

The phenomenon, when one speakers' speech contains elements in wider or narrower range of two languages is probably as old as the language contact in general. Thus, code-switching (CS) is probably one of the first commonly recognized features of bilingualism and may be identified with it. Linguists have been interested in CS since the beginning of contemporary language contact studies, and tried to define this complex phenomenon in several different ways.

This project is an attempt to characterize in detail CS between two Slavonic languages – Russian and Polish or, to be more precise – between Russian standard variety and Polish dialect from Little Poland (Małopolska). The village of Vershina is a specific community – it was founded by the voluntary settlers from the Russian partition of Poland in 1910, 130km north from Irkutsk. Because of its location approx. 6000km from their fatherland, the Vershinian community was a "language island", i.e. settlement detached from its "language continent" – Poland. The study of the language situation of the descendants of Polish settlers in Siberia will show how the phenomenon of CS differs depending on social (age, sex, education, occupation, attitude to tradition, social position) and linguistic factors (contact of a Western-Slavonic dialect and an Eastern-Slavonic standard variety). One has to notice the specificity of the dialect islands while these minority groups usually do not have the written variety of their language (or the written variety is only vestigial), and the island dialect differs from the norm existing in the country of their origin.

The study is first so broad linguistic project focused on CS in the contact of Slavonic languages. The main result of the project will be the monograph devoted to the problem of CS in the case of the specific insular dialect.

The Polish village in Siberia for several decades has aroused interest of scholars, publicists, journalists, documentary film makers, and recently also celebrities and politicians. However, those interest bore fruit with many myths about the 'enclave of pure Polishness' or 'a place in the middle of Taiga, where everyone speaks Polish'. Thus, an additional effect of the project will be a monograph containing chosen bilingual texts from Vershina, presenting its real cultural and linguistic situation.