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Russian-speaking enclaves in China at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries: Varying degrees of preservation of Russian

Abstract

The article aims to show the degree of preservation of the native language among representatives of various Russian-speaking enclaves in China depending on linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. This is a first attempt to analyze the specifics of the linguistic existence of different Russian-speaking enclaves on the territory of one foreign state – China – for more than a hundred years in a comparative aspect. The focus is made upon the linguistic personalities of Russian immigrants (emigrants) to China who represent several Russian-speaking enclaves, upon the composition of their linguistic competencies and the preservation of their native Russian language. The study applies the method of speech portraiture as central method to identify the degree of vitality of the Russian language in different regions of China existing in seemingly similar conditions. The obtained results show that varying degrees of the native Russian language preservation are manifested through the features of bilingualism of typical representatives of various Russian-speaking enclaves in China who preserved their native tongue in the best possible way. This comparative study of the vitality of the Russian language in different Russian-speaking enclaves of China enabled to draw the conclusions about the main factors to preserve the Russian language under extreme conditions. The results show clear correlation between the number of “guarding” factors and the degree of the native tongue preservation in a foreign-language environment.

Keywords: Russian language abroad, Russian-speaking enclaves in China, vitality of language, linguistic personality, speech portraiture

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