

On the problem of cultural minorities communicative social issues

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Modern ethnographers of speaking ask a question: With the mosaic of cultural indexes and markers, with an increasing social mobility, why do we still face communicative social issues of cultural minorities?

In answer to this question we should proceed from the assumption that a cultural minority is an arbitrary term used to define a minority group of people speaking a language different from that of the majority and hence a group of people possessing different culture. Let us then accept that a cultural minority can be identified with a linguistic minority. Furthermore, in order to specify the binary opposite 'linguistic minority/linguistic majority', we can give a generalized definition: it is a group of people speaking a language predetermined by a specific communicative setting. In other words, it is the awareness of difference, or the awareness of *the self*: a cognitive pattern of world perception acquired at the very early stages of person's socialization. Linguistically speaking, in speech the self is reflected in valued and subconscious strategies of communicative behavior.

In order to understand the notion of the self, we'll have to resort to the notion of *the other* as well as to the ideas of *similarity and difference* that are central to the way in which we achieve a sense of identity (and social belonging). But here our considerations seem to be endless due to the fact that our mind categorizes reality as a set of binary opposites with an inherently unequal relationship between its constituents. There's no need to say that the philosophic law of unity and struggle of opposites simply must be taken for granted. We can thus answer our question by saying that according to this law cultural minorities as well as cultural majorities will always exist.

On these premises the following question arises: while discussing speech efficiency in cross-cultural communication, don't we confuse the notions of cultural identity and social identity? Indeed, as we have said, cultural identity is presumed to be natural, so to say, to be learnt at mother's knees whereas social identity is *not* natural, it is obtained consciously at further stages of socialization.

From this perspective, it appears that social identity and cultural identity mutually presupposing and mutually predetermining each other may enter into a conflict with each other, as Tom G. Lewis and Robert E. Jungman put it, "And yet, adaptable as he is, man has nearly as much difficulty in adjusting to a human culture other than his own as he does to a different physical environment".