

Analysis of the role of language policy in maintaining the national unity in France

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The French Revolution of 1789, along with the collapse of the monarchy, brought about the emergence of new ways of viewing the significance of language in the life of people. The revolution, in particular, brought a new ideology, where language got a new role in achieving the unity of the French nation.

As noted by Schwarzmantel, an ideology presents views on how a society should be organized, and answers such questions as what forms of difference or differentiation between people should be accepted, and which rejected [4]. In the new ideology that emerged in France after the revolution, the perfect society was perceived the one the members of which spoke the same language, and the differences and differentiation among French citizens based on language or ethnic identity were rejected. The linguistic homogeneity of the nation, through the imposition of one language and rejection of others, was believed to be a key to maintaining the national unity. Schiffman wrote that, after the revolution, the national unity in France meant "unity of hearts", which meant "unity of language" [3].

These views greatly shaped the language policies in France during and after the 18th century. The language policies of various French governments have sought to promote the use of only French at the expense of exclusion of regional languages and patois. No surprise that today the numerous regional languages and patois spoken in France have no official status. It should be noted that education can serve as a very powerful instrument for achieving the language policy goals. That is why shortly after the revolution new authorities in France started to promote the French language through schools. In the 19th century, the primary schools in France sought to exclude regional languages and patois from school grounds [1]. To achieve these goals, the use of patois or regional languages, even in the playgrounds, were severely punished [2].

In the mid-20th century the attitudes towards the regional languages and patois in France slightly improved. The Deixonne Law (Loi Deixonne) of 1951 allowed the teaching of the Breton, Basque, Occitan and Catalan languages, and in 1974 this law included the teaching of the Corsican language. Lodge asserts that the emergence of such a favorable situation for the regional languages and patois during this period was related to a realization that they were no longer a serious threat to the linguistic and political unity of the French state [2].

However, currently the French language is still seen as a main factor that ensures the unity and indivisibility of the French nation. This is especially evidenced by the steps that have been taken in language policy matters by the French authorities in the last 25 years. At the same time, any discussions related to the recognition of regional languages and patois in France are still accompanied with expression of fear of a threat that can allegedly be posed by them to the national unity.

This paper seeks to analyze the role that can be played by language policy in the process of nation-building and maintaining the national unity. It also examines whether or not the French language policies can be considered a positive (or negative) model in terms of nation-building, and how these policies affected the rights of the speakers of regional languages and patois in the country.

Источники и литература

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