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## Prospects of Language Preservation in the North

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## **Prospects of Language Preservation in the North**

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After a general discussion of the processes leading to language endangerment and linguistic extinction, the author of this paper describes some specific measures available for promoting ethnic and linguistic survival in the Circumpolar North. Quoting experience from other parts of the world, the author stresses the role of bilingualism as well as biculturalism, which can potentially place small endangered populations in a position intellectually more favourable than that of the dominant monolingual state nationalities.

### **1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND BACKGROUND**

Many languages were falling into disuse and ceased to be spoken throughout the period of history for which we have records of the existence, and often of the nature and form, of languages no longer extant today. Some disappeared without our knowing more than they existed, without having information about their linguistic nature, of others we have scanty to sometimes very extensive records, and in a number of cases, we know very much about them, because they were languages used by communities who had reached a high level of civilization, and were held in high esteem for long periods after they were no longer in daily use by speech communities to serve as media of communication among their members for matters of daily life.

Almost all of the languages of the long past of which we have linguistic information, were languages which had been reduced to writing so that written records remained for posterity to read and analyze, or through the often very laborious painstaking efforts of ingenious scholars, to be deciphered and knowledge of their nature and structure brought back to humanity after sometimes thousands of years of oblivion. The death and disappearance of such languages was mostly a slow, protracted process, and their number was comparatively small.

However, there were, at all times, languages used by speech communities who had not developed a writing system which allowed them to leave analysable written records for us to try to decipher and understand them, and to obtain an impression of what their languages may have been like. We know about their existence, because communities who had left written records and were acquainted with them mentioned them in their writings, and sometimes even wrote down a few words of

their languages for us to ponder about them. Many other such languages have existed, and have vanished without a trace. However, their disappearance is likely to have been a relatively gradual, slow process in most cases, unless precipitated by catastrophic events such as warfare involving militarily or numerically vastly superior foes, leading to genocide, natural catastrophes such as extreme droughts, heavy widespread floods, volcanic eruptions etc.

The at first very slow and gradual, and later increasingly accelerating widening of the knowledge of the existence of more and more previously unknown peoples and languages beyond the previous perimeters of the regions known to the representatives of advanced civilizations during the last thousand years or so, lead to increasing and intensifying contacts between the latter and these newly 'discovered' peoples, and to increasing language contacts. For hundreds of years, these events were largely sporadic and apart from a few exceptions, of relatively minor consequence for these newly contacted peoples who were for the greater part numerically weak and, though often the bearers of complex indigenous cultures, not as sophisticated, culturally aggressive and politically powerful as the representatives of the advanced civilizations with which they were coming into contact.

A turn for the worse took place in the 16th and 17th centuries with the explorations, widening of economic interests and expansionist tendencies of a number of European nations, such as the Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch and others, including the spreading of Russians into Siberia and the Far East. One of the worst consequences of this in some areas was the introduction of new devastating killer diseases into many indigenous areas such as North America and Siberia where for instance smallpox epidemics took a tremendous toll, reducing populations, disrupting societies and as a result, having a far-reaching influence on the linguistic picture. Some speech communities in Siberia for instance, suffered a drastic reduction in their numbers in the wake of smallpox epidemics. The Evens (Lamuts) who are estimated to have been 7,000 in the middle of the 17th century, were only 4,000 at the end of that century, and the number of the Yukagirs fell from about 5,000 at the middle of the 17th century to less than 1,000 at the end of the 18th century [WURM 1996].

However, the reduction of the number of the speakers of languages and the disruption of the societies through introduced epidemic diseases, though affecting the linguistic picture of given areas, were only one of the destructive effects upon the language situations of the contacts of indigenous peoples with bearers of more aggressive cultures and advanced civilizations. The results of the contact and clash of the two cultures and the economic and cultural influences of the dominant culture bearers upon the indigenous culture and their language ecology was even more pervading and destructive in many parts of the world, including Siberia and other areas of the North. The cultural and social settings in which such languages had been functioning before that culture contact, had been first heavily influenced, and eventually replaced, by new and quite different ones as a result of an

overpowering and irresistible cultural and social pressure from outside, with the traditional language unsuited for readily functioning as a vehicle of expression of the new culture.

This situation was exacerbated by usually negative, disdainful and destructive attitudes towards such traditional languages of indigenous populations by carriers of the newly introduced dominant cultures and the speakers of the languages serving as their means of expression. All this had a tendency to adversely affect the attitudes of the speakers of the traditional languages towards their own languages which they started regarding as inferior to that of the bearers of the intrusive dominant culture. Such an effect may be compounded by economic factors: knowledge of the language of the economically stronger bearers of the intrusive dominant culture by members of the economically weaker traditional language speech community tends to lead to economic advantages for the latter which are unobtainable by those who do not have this knowledge. Such economic advantages usually include eligibility for jobs with good monetary rewards allowing access to coveted goods and services - something that gives the impression to the speakers of the traditional languages that their own languages are becoming useless in the changing economic situation, and makes them forget other, social and cultural, values inherent for them in their traditional languages. Such impressions and attitudes make them have less and less regard for their traditional languages and they tend to lead to an increasing use of the language of the dominant cultures by the speakers of the traditional languages, which may eventually lead to the disappearance of the latter.

This scenario can get considerably worse still if in addition to what has been said above, the representatives of the dominant cultures undertake deliberate acts of discouragement of the continued use of the traditional languages, sometimes in the face of their feigning official encouragement of their continued existence. Such actions were, in differing grades of intensity, in progress in the not-so-distant past in much of Aboriginal Australia, in England regarding the Welsh language, but particularly strongly in the former USSR concerning small languages of Siberia and the Soviet Far East, where children were taken away from their families to boarding schools, where the languages of instruction became Russian, and children were often forbidden to speak their mother tongue at school. In addition, in 1957 it was decided to combine the settlements of different ethnic minorities and forcibly relocate them. This led to the total destruction of traditional cultures and values and the loss of the traditional languages in many instances. Though since the collapse of communism in the area of the former USSR, the new situation has led to a strong renewal of ethnic nationalism among many groups, this is not the case among some of the Siberian minority groups—the above policies of the communist administration have proved to be too destructive, so far that Belikov [BELIKOV 1994: 36] can say that “efforts to revive local languages and cultures in Siberia are now doomed to failure. People are ashamed to speak their ethnic languages or to distinguish themselves from Russians”. This is perhaps too pessimistic—it

describes a situation not unlike one existing in parts of Aboriginal Australia forty years ago, but which is very different today!

Events like, or similar to, the ones reviewed briefly above have led to the accelerating death and disappearance of hundreds of languages during the last 200 years, and especially the last 100 years, above all in the Americas and Australia, with hundreds more destined to meet the same fate in the foreseeable future. About half, (i.e., 3,000), of the 6,000 or so languages in the world are now endangered in varying degrees.

Underlying much of the developments and problems briefly reviewed so far is something which, until very recently, has attracted little, if any, attention among linguists and others concerned with the problem of languages in danger of disappearing, and has not been properly understood in its importance.

The background factor in this is that according to one theory about language and the relationship between language and the material and non-material (i.e., spiritual and intangible) world surrounding its speakers, the world consists of many parts with each language providing a different set of labels for the same set of parts. This theory maintains therefore that the differences between languages are only superficial, with all languages fully intertranslatable because they are ultimately the same thing in different guises. This theory enables its adherents to regard the disappearance of any one language with equanimity—as the disappearance of one amongst many of the same kind. Though this theory has many followers, anyone concerned with translation between languages reflecting very different cultures will readily recognize its fallacies.

A second theory argues that most perceptions of the world and parts of the world are brought into being and sustained by languages. Therefore, different languages emphasize and filter various aspects of a multi-faceted reality in a vast number of different ways [MÜHLHÄUSLER 1994: 8]. In the light of this, every language reflects a unique worldview and culture complex mirroring the manner in which a speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world, and has formulated its thinking, its philosophy and understanding of the world around it [WURM 1991: 17]. This theory explains why linguistic diversity is an invaluable asset and resource rather than an obstacle to progress, and why the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable tragic loss to valuable and important human knowledge. There is great concern and excitement with many people in the world over the extinction and disappearance of an animal species—it appears that the extinction and disappearance of a valuable part of one of the most important assets of humanity, i.e., a human language and the thought patterns, word view and philosophy underlying it, deserve at least the same attention and concern over the resulting reduction in linguistic diversity—this is certainly the case with adherents to this second theory, but ought to be recognized more generally.

The above-mentioned little-recognized practical factor underlying the problems connected with, especially indigenous, languages hard pressed by

representatives of dominant cultures in culture-clash situations is the very strongly ingrained belief, especially with many native speakers of English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Italian, that only monolingualism and monoculturalism constitutes the normal and acceptable state for native speakers of their languages to be in. In consequence, speakers of other languages which are, or come, within the political orbit of a nation or region ruled by native speakers of such a language and are to become members or at least associated members of such a nation, are facing a hard either-or choice: either they become full representatives of the culture of such a nation and (or at least pretend to be) monolingual speakers of their language, or they stay out, or—if circumstances put them forcibly within that orbit—they become underprivileged fringe members of the community. It rarely occurs to native speakers of the metropolitan languages mentioned (and also of some other dominant languages) that bi- and multilingualism is very widespread throughout the world and approaches being the norm in many countries or in parts of them (e.g., Switzerland, Finland, much of other parts of Europe, Africa, India, Indonesia, the southwestern Pacific area, the Philippines, Paraguay etc.). In such countries, biculturalism is also widespread.

In this, it may be mentioned that in some areas, e.g., in the New Guinea area and in New Caledonia where indigenous speech communities of small size, each of them speaking a different language, were and are in close contact with each other, egalitarian multilingualism, with all languages having equal standing and prestige, is the norm. This is accompanied by equal respect and tolerance for the different cultures of the different speech communities by everybody [MÜHLHÄUSER, DUTTON, HOVDHAUGEN, WILLIAMS and WURM 1996]—a fitting example for metropolitan literary civilizations to follow! Australia, where a very large proportion of the population is foreign-born, numerous cultural patterns exist peacefully side-by-side, multiculturalism is the official government policy, and numerous European and Asian languages can be heard everywhere in the street, shops and elsewhere with bi- and multilingualism on the increase, has gone some way towards such a situation. So has New Zealand where Maori, the original Polynesian language of the country, has official status, and is now considered to be taught in every school of the country. In Europe, Switzerland is a good example in which even the small, now standardized, Romansch language (about 67,000 speakers) has official status and receives full government support. A similar situation exists in southern Finland for Finnish and Swedish, and there are other recent examples of such positive developments and attitudes.

Surely what has been outlined in the above two paragraphs, indicates that it is possible for minority languages and other small languages, together with at least some elements of their traditional cultures, to continue to exist on the basis of stable bilingualism and biculturalism even after their speakers have acquired a full knowledge and mastery of the dominant, usually metropolitan, language and culture into whose orbit they have inescapably been drawn by historical events. Their own traditional language and culture gives them something of their own to be

proud of, and constitutes a counterbalance against the often paternalistic, disdainful and supercilious attitudes based largely on ignorance and lack of understanding, by some native speakers of the dominant metropolitan language. The continued possession of their traditional language and parts of their old culture is meant to give the speakers of the minority and small languages the feeling and realization that they are in possession of something which the speakers of the dominant language do not have, and which in addition to their bi- and perhaps multilingualism and biculturalism, gives them intellectual and emotional advantages over the usually monolingual and mostly monocultural speakers of the dominant metropolitan language, as set out below.

It must be pointed out in this that, while many people now accept the fact that bi- and multilingualism is a common trait of a large part of humanity, it is less widely known that bi- and multiculturalism is also possible. An individual can be just as readily bicultural, 'at home in two cultures', as being bilingual. Another culture, with its characteristic thought patterns and world views, can be learned just like another language can be learned [WURM 1994]. In groups and nations, bi- and multiculturalism means the peaceful, tolerant and conflict-free co-existence, side-by-side, of individuals belonging to different cultures.

To come back to the intellectual and emotional advantage of bi- or multilingual, and bicultural, individuals over their monolingual counterparts, the following may be mentioned [WURM 1994-1995].

- From a practical point of view, such individuals have access to a much wider volume of information and knowledge than monolinguals, have a larger volume of knowledge (both language-oriented and other) in their minds, understand differing semantic associations better, and being used to switching languages and thought patterns, have more flexible minds;
- They are less rigid in their attitudes and more tolerant of, i.e., less hostile and less on the defensive against, the unknown than monolinguals, more inclined to regard manifestations of other cultures by individuals as acceptable and to be respected, though they may be different from theirs;
- Their thought patterns and world view are more balanced because they are familiar with different, often somewhat contradictory concepts. They have better capabilities than monolingual to learn something entirely new and to fit into novel situations without trauma, and to understand different sides of a problem.

Bi- or multilingualism and biculturalism and understanding and tolerance of other cultures from early childhood onwards is the ideal situation and should be aimed for. It assures, at the same time, the continuation of a language and its associated thought patterns and worldview which may be under subtle or not so subtle pressure from another language and culture whose bearers regard monolingualism and monoculturalism as their ideal and thereby are less tolerant, more single-minded and culturally aggressive.

Stable bilingualism can continue for centuries (as has been pointed out in this

paper), as long as the languages exist side-by-side as equals, and there is no pressure from representatives of one of them in favour of their language. Such a pressure can be resisted by the speakers of the other language through their realization that their own language is not inferior to the other, that they can be fully at home in both languages, and that bi- or multilingualism, not monolingualism, is essentially the norm in much of the world.

## 2. DISINTEGRATION OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN THE NORTH

The peoples of the North in the circumpolar regions have had their full share of the problems touched upon in the previous section. Their cultures have been disintegrating fast in most cases, and their languages and linguistic identities going downhill even faster in many instances than other ethnically relevant features. Until a few years ago, it appeared that only a handful of their languages would have a chance to survive longer than the present youngest generation of adult speakers, which was often quite advanced in age. In the majority of instances, the languages had no more children speakers, as in much of North America and especially in those parts of Siberia where the forced Russification policy through the Russian-language boarding school system had been in operation, and where indigenous language groups had been forcibly uprooted and settled together with Russian speakers. It has to be borne in mind that the ultimate survival of a language depends on the mastery of it by children—if a language has no adequate number of children speakers, it is doomed to extinction when the last adult speaker of it dies. The few circumpolar languages believed to be, a few years ago, able to survive for a good period of time were Yakut, Dolgan and perhaps Nganasan (because of the very strong ethnic self-consciousness of the Nganasans) in Siberia, northern Saami in Scandinavia, Inuit in Greenland, with some of the closely similar forms of Inuit in parts of northern Canada and Alaska such as Inupiaq, at least one of the Yupik Eskimo languages in southern Alaska and the Bering Strait area, and perhaps Koryak in northeastern Siberia.

However, the renewal of ethnic nationalism in the former USSR after the fall of communism has brightened the outlook for some of the languages there which seemed hopelessly doomed before. There have been positive political moves with respect to the least widely spoken languages, the creation of elementary school classes, and there has been a growth in ethnic self-consciousness in a number of cases [KIBRIK 1991]. Also, with the opening of the border between Russia and the USA in the Bering Strait, Siberian Yupik Eskimo has become a language of international communication which has contributed to its revitalization [WURM 1993: 281–282, see also Krauss in the present volume]. Similarly, there have been positive developments with regard to Saami in Scandinavia, in particular concerning northern Saami, especially in Norway [MAGGA 1990: 420–424]. In Canada, tremendous progress has been made, since the start in 1970, in Inuit Eskimo linguistic revitalization, though the relative number of its speakers is

diminishing [DORAIS 1990: 289–290]. According to Dorais, the economic, political and cultural autonomy of the Inuit need to be increased to give them more social independence which he regards as essential for the preservation of their language and identity. In Greenland, the role of the Greenlandic Eskimo language, and its linguistic development, have expanded and increased greatly since the introduction of Home Rule. In Alaska, bilingual and bicultural education began in 1972 and an Alaska Native Language Policy for schools in Alaska was established in 1987–1988, acknowledging that Alaska's indigenous languages are unique and essential elements of Alaska's heritage. This was the first attempt by the educational system to establish a process whereby Alaskan Natives can make decisions concerning their heritage languages, and this may lead to the revitalization of Alaskan native languages [MACLEAN 1990: 174–175]. It may be mentioned that Aleut is now used in the school education, in particular on Atka Island, where the children know it too [BERGSLAND 1990: 181]. On the Russian side of the Aleut language area, Kibrik [KIBRIK 1991: 263] states that it will not be possible to preserve Aleut.

Kibrik [KIBRIK 1990: 262–273] gives a survey of the positive developments, in recent years, in terms of their actual use in school education etc., concerning a number of endangered to highly endangered languages of the Russian north, which he does not put into the groups of languages on the very brink of extinction or describes as 'terminally ill'. In summary, he states the following concerning some of them (Kibrik's population figures which are based on the 1979 census, have been replaced by those from the 1989 census):

**Asiatic Eskimo.** Out of the 1,719 Asiatic Eskimos which are on Russian territory, 887 (Kibrik says 300) still speak the language which originally consisted of two languages, Sireniki which is now close to extinction with two speakers remaining, and the other one consisting of two isolated dialects: Chaplino with about 750 (according to Kibrik about 200) speakers and Naukan with about 100. The language is the Siberian Yupik Eskimo language, which is also spoken on St. Lawrence Island in USA territory by 1,100 persons. On the Russian side, only the older generation has an active command of the language, the middle generation (35–50 years) has a passive knowledge, and the children know only what they have been taught at school (with teaching based on the Chaplino dialect). However, with the renewed contacts between the Chaplino dialect areas on the Russian and USA sides, and especially with the demand for Chaplino-speaking Eskimos as well-paid interpreters for American and Russian visitors and business people on both sides of the border, there has been a rebirth of the language on the Russian side and a great upswing of interest in it, not only among its speakers and semi-speakers who are eager to relearn it properly, but also among the Chaplino Eskimos in general.

**Yukaghir.** The Yukaghirs, at the beginning of the 17th century the dominant people of northeastern Siberia, occupying a vast area and having thousands of speakers of their language, were catastrophically reduced in their numbers through

epidemics, the merging of clans, warfare and assimilation to other groups, and more recently as a result of the Soviet collective farm system. Today, two geographically separate groups of Yukaghirs survive, with a total number of 1,142 people, of which only 375 or so (mostly older than 35–40 years) still speak the language: 250 (Kibrik says 200) the northern or Tundra dialect, and 125 (Kibrik says 50) or so (older than 50 years) the southern or Kolyma dialect. Children and young adults only know some words of the language. Since the mid-eighties, Yukaghir has been taught in two of the major settlements through the fourth and eighth grades. There has been a strong upswing of interest in the language by Yukaghirs since the middle of June 1991, the date of the independence of Yakutia as the Sakha Republic, on whose territory the Yukaghirs live. There is a weekly newspaper in the language, broadcasts in it, and the overall use of the language is increasing, with even some children and young adults learning to use it actively.

**Nivkh.** The Nivkh who number 4,673, used to occupy lower reaches of the Amur River and the northwest and eastern coast of Sakhalin Island. However, in the 1960s and 1970s they have been subjected to much forced resettlement. Today most of them live on Sakhalin Island, while a minority still remains on the Amur. The number of those who still speak the language, the majority of them of the older generation, is 1,089 (Kibrik's estimates suggest 600 or so). In the early 80s, instruction in Nivkh was given in the first and second grades on Sakhalin Island, and concerted efforts aimed at the revival of Nivkh culture and language have been tested recently by the Association of Peoples of the North.

**Nganasan.** The Nganasan who number 1,278 of whom 1,063 still speak their language, live on the Taimyr peninsula in the extreme north of central Siberia. Their ethnic self-consciousness is very strong, and good knowledge of the language adds to the speakers' status. The older and middle generations, and approximately one-third of the children and adults under 30 years have a full command of the language. The language is being introduced into the school curriculum as a subject.

**Northern Selkup.** Northern Selkup, spoken in western Siberia, used to be the *lingua franca* for the neighbouring speakers of Ket, Evenki, Nenets and Khanty, but has now been superseded by Russian. The total number of the Selkup, including speakers of the mutually very different northern and southern dialects, is 3,612 of whom 1,721 still speak the language. However, language retention among the northern Selkup is about 90 per cent versus only 30 per cent or less among the southern Selkup. Northern Selkup is taught at the elementary school level. The older and middle generations have a good command of it, and most children, adolescents and young adults speak the language with some degree of proficiency, though often not with complete mastery.

Quite a few other languages of the North are in positions similar to those described by Kibrik in his sample, others are somewhat to very much better off. However, most of them are threatened to a greater or lesser degree, though quite a few more

could perhaps now be added to the short list of likely survivors. Their chances have increased through rising ethnic self-consciousness as a result of the removal of much of the negative and destructive policies of the Soviet era in the former USSR and the introduction of some positive measures aiming at the preservation of traditional cultures and languages, often initiated by the communities concerned themselves. Measures undertaken in recent years in Scandinavian countries, especially Norway, in Greenland since the introduction of Home Rule, as well as in Canada and Alaska, have greatly contributed to the revival of traditional cultural characteristics, and to the revival and maintenance of traditional languages. As a result of this, the survival of some languages for longer than formerly anticipated seems more likely, such as:

In the former USSR (including those mentioned at the beginning of this section as likely survivors): Yakut, Dolgan, Nganasan, Chukchi, Koryak, Even, perhaps Evenki, perhaps even Yukaghir, Khanti, Eastern Buryat, Siberian Tatar, Tundra Nenets, Komi, Permyak, Udmurt, Mari, Chuvash, Bashkir, Moksha, Erzya (Mordvin), Karelian, Olonetsian.

In China (Manchuria): Hailar Dagur, Eastern Buryat, Solon, Khamnigan Mongol, Khamnigan Evenki.

In Scandinavia: Northern Saami, perhaps also Southern Saami and Inari Saami.

In Greenland, Canada and Alaska: Inuit in Greenland and much of Canada and (as Inupiaq) in northern Alaska; Central Yupik, Siberian Yupik (Chaplino dialect), perhaps even Aleut, and one or several of northern Canadian Amerindian languages such as a form of Cree.

This may look rather ever-optimistic, but judging by what has happened in other parts of the world such as Australia, New Zealand, quite recently in Taiwan, etc., a lot can happen to maintain languages believed doomed to become extinct, if the right circumstances for language preservations and maintenance arise and prevail.

However, in spite of all optimism, the chances for some borderline languages such as Nivkh, Nanai, Mansi and some others do not look good.

### 3. METHODS OF LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN THE NORTH

The question arises now: what are the right circumstances for the preservation and maintenance of at least some of the endangered languages of the North beyond the timespan believed to be left for them a decade or so ago?

First and foremost, it is the awakening and strengthening of the ethnic self-consciousness of the speakers of such languages, their recognition of the intrinsic values of their traditional cultural traits and their language heritage which gives them something additional to what the speakers of the dominant language around them possess, and which they, as the linguistic and cultural minority, must also absorb and possess anyway. Along with this comes the recognition of the

intellectual and emotional values of bilingualism and biculturalism which have been set out in detail at the end of the introductory section above.

Another important factor is active support and encouragement by the speakers of the dominant language which constitute the cultural and linguistic majority, and which produces a positive environment for a minority language to be preserved and maintained. There are of course cases in which minority languages were preserved and maintained in the face of discouraging attitudes of the dominant majority, especially in their use as secret languages which greatly boosted the self-esteem of the speakers of the minority languages, and gave them a feeling of power over the speakers of the majority language—a development which makes such an, often apparently doomed, language a powerful means of group- and self-identification which may cause it to survive for that reason alone. Australian Aboriginal languages believed extinct in the 1950s constitute examples, as does Maori in New Zealand [WURM 1991: 16].

Another important factor is concentration on the children population acquiring and maintaining a knowledge of the minority languages. Some of the small languages in Siberia and the Russian Far East have suffered very severely in this as a result of the Soviet boarding school policies from 1950 to 1980 and beyond, and through the forced resettlement and collective farm policies around that time. Inclusion of teaching the languages to children at school, as is done widely today, is a help, but a more active role of the community in ensuring that the children become proficient speakers of the languages is essential (see below), as is a change of attitudes in some minority communities in the areas concerned, where a negative attitude towards the traditional languages prevails with younger members of the community. Here again, experiences with Australian Aboriginal situations can serve as a model: while 40 or so years ago, negative attitudes towards traditional languages and values prevailed strongly in some areas, much of this has changed radically with the strong awakening of ethnic self-consciousness of Aboriginal populations leading to bilingual education in Aboriginal languages and English, and greater language proficiency by children in Aboriginal languages, sometimes as a result of spontaneous community efforts.

Kibrik [KIBRIK 1991] lists a number of significant factors determining the viability of endangered languages, which are as follows:

- The size of the ethnic group and the number of speakers of the language within the group;
- The degree of proficiency of the speakers which can vary from very low to full mastery;
- The age distribution of the speakers, and the degree of proficiency in the language within the various age groups, i.e., older generation (50 years and older), the middle generation (30–50 years), young adults (20–30 years), adolescents (10–20 years), and children (up to 10 years);
- The ethnic character of marriages, with marriages between members of the same

language community being most favourable for the preservation of a language;

- The upbringing of pre-school-aged children, which should be within a family, especially if the children live together with the older generation of relatives or grandparents;
- The location of the ethnic group, with living in the native homeland being of importance for preserving the language of an ethnic group, whereas resettlement, especially when forced, is one of the most negative factors. In this, a group with a dense population has a better chance of preserving its language than a group of the same size scattered over different regions with the scattered members of the group being without regular language contact with each other;
- Contact of the ethnic group with outside languages: the more contact there is with other cultures and languages, the more unfavourable this could be for the viability of a given ethnic language. If the ethnic group lives scattered in the same area with speakers of a more prestigious language, this could be especially detrimental to the survival chances of the language of the ethnic group, unless special circumstances prevail, such as the use of the language of that ethnic group as a secret language, as a defense mechanism.
- The way of life: ethnic groups that preserve their traditional way of life to a significant extent (e.g., family structure, division of labour, dwellings, economic activities) have a better chance of preserving their languages than others which have adapted to modern ways of life;
- National self-consciousness: this could, as has been pointed out before in this paper, help and assure the continuation of a language that would otherwise be doomed;
- Instruction in the language at school constitutes one of the most helpful deliberate positive influences for the preservation of a language. In recent years there has been an active process of introducing ethnic languages into elementary school programmes as a subject.

Specifically for the USSR and the period after its collapse, Kibrik describes the period from the 1920s to 1940, as a period of the recognition of the unique identity of each ethnicity, with the creation of Roman character writing systems in the 1920s for the majority of the languages. In the 1930s, these were changed to Cyrillic which indicated a subordination of all languages to the primacy of Russian, and an orientation to the general Russification of the population of the USSR. In the 1950s to 1970s and beyond, the idea of a unified Soviet culture arose. Small languages were treated with disregard, and policies aimed at their elimination were instituted. The end of the 1980s was marked by the emergence of national movements, the struggle for self-determination, and the rise in the prestige of national languages. Social movements arose for the preservation of ethnic groups and small languages. In 1990, the Association of Peoples of the North was established calling for the preservation and growth of the aboriginal nationalities of the North, Siberia and the Russian Far East, and for a rise in their national self-consciousness. For some ethnic groups it may already have been too late, but in

many cases, it is hoped, the tendency toward decline may be reversed.

A few other interesting and valuable opinions may be touched upon here briefly:

Skorik [SKORIK 1990: 80–81] says that nothing but less could stem from a desire to overlook in any way the natural role of a people's mother tongue or, worse still, to counterpoise it with Russian. Experience shows that the functions of the mother tongue and Russian are not mutually opposed, but supplement each other in a harmonious combination. It is the proper observation of that combination in the specific circumstances of each ethnic group that ensures its most successful cultural development. The continuously spreading knowledge of Russian does not diminish the beneficial role of the mother tongues in school pupils' lives.

Of particular relevance, are the views expressed by the Finnish linguist and Saami specialist Pekka Sammallahti in an article entitled 'The Teachings of Eskimo: Alaska Native Languages in Transition' which is quoted by Kaplan [KAPLAN 1990: 57]. In speaking about elements for a language policy favouring the maintenance of Alaska's native languages and encouraging their use among the younger generations, Sammallahti states that the continuation of the native languages and cultures and their development rests heavily on decisions made on the aspects of the school, mass media, and administration. In this connection, he points out the following:

- The benefits of bilingualism should be stressed;
- The educational system should encourage language development, seeing the native language as a resource rather than an obstacle, and making it both an object of study and a tool of learning. Bilingual education will serve to bridge the gap between school and home experience by providing for the use of the native language in both contexts;
- Official status should be accorded to local native languages;
- Native organizations should govern the use of mass media in their areas and produce programmes locally.

It is remarkable that Sammallahti's statements coincide with much what has become policy in Australia with regard to Aboriginal languages, with very good results.

The foregoing touches upon a considerable range of matters of great relevance to the preservation, maintenance and development of languages of the North. The question arises now as to what should happen or be done practically in a given case, when a language is in an endangered state: when it has no children speakers, when its remaining speakers, or many of them, tend to become apathetic about prospects of their language being preserved and despair about the chances of stemming the tide of a dominant, usually metropolitan, language which threatens to replace their own language, especially with the younger generation?

It should be recognized in this that, while outside agencies can do a lot in displaying encouraging goodwill, arranging for schooling in which the local

language plays a part as in bilingual education for children, offering useful advice aiming at the preservation and maintenance of endangered languages in general, giving a helping hand in matters of assisting in questions of reading materials, such as primers in the local languages, the ultimate will for the preservation and maintenance of their languages rests with their speakers and the speech communities themselves, especially with some leading personalities who favour such a development among them, and who are community leaders or otherwise persons to whom a good portion of the speakers of the given languages are prepared to listen. The first and foremost task for any outside agency, authority or even person or persons who are concerned with the preservation of an endangered language, is to find such a leading or potentially leading person or persons in the speech community and to encourage them and advising them how to proceed and what to do. If such a person is not obviously present in the speech community in question, a person or persons should be found who may be open to encouragement, with their perhaps former enthusiasm still in a state where it can be rekindled. A person or persons of the kind referred to in this paragraph are the ones who are to play leading roles in what is described in the following.

An endangered language, where such procedures are necessary, is likely to be at the stage of being overwhelmed by a dominant language, with its speakers culturally, politically, economically etc. disadvantaged and oppressed. In such a situation it is important that reasons and circumstances be thought of which would raise the interest of the speakers of that language in preserving and maintaining their language. It could, as the first step, be made clear to them that their local language could and should be used as a secret language unintelligible to the speakers of the dominant language, which would allow them to conduct their activities without being overheard and understood by speakers of the dominant language. In the light of this, they should realize that they have something additional to what the latter have. This usually raises the ethnic self-respect of the speakers of the local languages, contributes to the maintenance of their ethnic identity and allows their otherwise doomed language to survive, as has been the case with several Australian Aboriginal languages in the 1950s.

Next to that, the intellectual and emotional advantages of bilingualism and biculturalism which has been mentioned in some detail at the end of the introductory remarks in this paper, should be made clear to the speakers of the local language, who usually have a command of the dominant language too. This can be done very effectively by pointing out that the local language speakers know quite different words for one object or concept, and two quite different sentences for the same statement, whereas the mostly monolingual speakers of the dominant language know only one for each. This realization tends to considerably raise the local language speakers' self-esteem and boosts their desire and willingness to strive for the preservation and maintenance of their language, as an asset giving them some human advantage over the monolingual dominant language speakers. This procedure has been resorted to quite successfully with Australian Aborigines and

others in the southwest Pacific. A success was enhanced by the fact that those indigenes were and are usually multilingual, and are often astonished at the fact that the otherwise seemingly quite smart representatives of the dominant culture whom they meet are usually only monolingual, or perhaps know only a little often incorrect and rudimentary, pidgin English in addition to their native English (or French), and the indigenes tend to ascribe this fact to some stupidity of the latter in this respect, which sometimes makes them feel smugly superior to them.

As the next step, still remembered but usually no longer much practised, aspects of the traditional culture and activities should be concentrated on and interest in them by the speakers of the endangered language re-awakened. Some of the economic activities such as hunting, fishing, reindeer herding, may be impossible for them to actually take up again even in token form because of changed environmental conditions, especially if the speakers concerned have been resettled away from their traditional homeland. However, they can be re-enacted in playing or other performing situations, like this is much easier with other traditional cultural activities such as feasts, dancing, singing, storytelling, performing mythological events, etc. Such performances of cultural activities and events, including mythological events, are still today parts of many cultures in Australia, the Pacific and Southeast Asia, but also in Siberia (e.g., with the Yakuts). Old members of the speech community who certainly will remember at least some of the details of such past activities, can act as instructors and advisers, and also as leading performers, in such performances which would also renew or increase the often flagging respect for members of the old generation in the eyes of the younger members of the speech community. Such performances would help in providing members of the younger generations with some understanding of the traditional cultural and economic activities of their community. The old members could and should subsequently explain details and the exact meanings and significance of the various facets of the traditional culture as presented in the performances to members of the younger generations to further acquaint them with the various aspects of the traditional cultures. This should preferably be done in the form of a gathering resembling a lecture or seminar in teaching situations, for instance in the evenings when many members of the whole community may be available to attend. The traditional local language should be used in all these performances, and as far as possible also in the explanations which may also have to be supplemented by explanations in the dominant language for the benefit of members of the younger generations whose knowledge of the traditional language may be inadequate or nil.

This whole set of activities would help to refresh the knowledge of the local language, especially in its old traditional form, with members of the speech community who still have a good to passable knowledge of it, and introduce those with a partial or passive knowledge of it to its full traditional form. Also, it would give those speakers who still know much of the language, but have lost contact with the traditional culture and economic activities, access to that part of the vocabulary

of the language which refer to aspects of these traditional culture and activities, and of which they would have only little or no knowledge. For those members of the speech community who have no or only rudimentary knowledge of the local language, the performances and explanations would constitute an introduction to the traditional languages which together with their awakened interest in the traditional culture and activities of their community, may induce them to acquire an active working knowledge of the local language.

A special situation prevails in cases in which members of a speech community, from young adults or a little older upwards, have a relatively good to very good command of their traditional language, but there are no or almost no children speakers, often due to some brutal interference with the community in the recent past, such as the removal of children to boarding schools, or the forced resettlement of the speech community, often in a scattered form, amongst speakers of other languages, as happened in Siberia and the Russian Far East in the latter part of the Soviet era. A situation of this kind is very perilous for the eventual preservation and maintenance of the language, because the language capacity of children determines the survival of the language. One useful method for them to learn the local language or to re-learn it, if their former knowledge of it has been forgotten or more correctly, has receded from their conscious memory and been overlaid with the dominant language (with possibly also some resistance to the use of the local language built into this on the basis of past influences and experiences) is through special playing situations, combined with small rewards.

Such playing situations, in which the traditional local language is to be used exclusively or be only interspersed with brief necessary explanations in the dominant language, are to be designed by the given communities on the basis of their experience with traditional and other playing situations familiar to the children. Grandparents or other old relatives or persons who have a good command of the traditional language should take part in them, and also parents, even if their command of the language is limited (this provides a good opportunity for them to improve their own language knowledge). The language should be used extensively in the playing situations, with the words used restricted to one particular aspect of the games at a time (running, sitting down, selecting from a few objects, colours, sizes and shapes of objects, recognizing animals from pictures etc.). The children should be strongly encouraged to start using the local language words and short sentences, and to overcome their initial resistance to doing so. Very importantly, they should receive small rewards when they do so and start using the language, e.g., in the form of small sweets or other little relishes which they know and like, but do not get regularly otherwise. These rewards should continue as they go on to using the language more and more, and should increase in attractiveness and desirability when the children start using words and sentences from the language to each other, which they should be encouraged to do. Older children who have already succeeded in acquiring some knowledge of the traditional language, should be allowed to participate in the performance (or if available, the

real form) of traditional economic activities such as hunting, fishing, reindeer herding etc. as a reward, with a special claim to the booty, if available in reality or in imitation (e.g., pieces of meat, fish etc.) in performance situation, in return for their increasing knowledge of the language.

Teenagers and young adults who have either lost their original traditional language and culture, or have never had an opportunity to acquire them, but still live within the speech community as or part of it, should be encouraged to try to get acquainted with them and to take part in the performances of the traditional cultural activities mentioned above, and thereby increase their familiarity with the traditional language, again perhaps with some awards offered for this. If children of the speech community learn to speak the language through the method outlined above, the teenagers and young adults should be encouraged to talk with them in the language, preferably in group situations in which older people who are well at home in the language, would take part to further teach, correct and thereby increase the knowledge of the language of all concerned. If real-life traditional economic activities such as hunting, fishing, reindeer herding etc. still take place at least by some members of the community, teenagers and young adults should be encouraged and invited to participate in them and to use the traditional language in these activities as instructed by the—probably usually older—members of the speech community who still engage in such activities and are likely to be still conversant with the traditional languages. Some rewards and advantages for increasing language skills on the part of such teenagers and young adults should again have a role in this.

What concerns talented older teenagers and young adults from Siberia or other parts of the circumpolar North who have been drawn to the culture of the speakers of the dominant metropolitan languages with which they are in contact, some have found good jobs far away from their original areas and have, as Belikov [BELIKOV 1994: 36] points out, lost their ethnic identity. Actually this need not be a complete loss: such people in whom the memory of their childhood years still lingers on, and in whom often vestiges of their earlier knowledge of their traditional language lay hidden with the potential to be re-awakened, should always be encouraged to return to their original region and people to carry out their profession as teachers, doctors etc. among them. They could thereby help these people to improve their health and understanding of hygiene, and they could teach them about the outside world and its culture, acting as ambassadors of it among the people who were originally theirs. To really achieve these aims well, they should make efforts to learn their traditional language or, if they once knew it, to re-learn it. This would enable them to get their messages across to their people very much better and more effectively than would be the case if they used the dominant metropolitan language.

Much damage has been done to the traditional indigenous language situation of the North on the linguistic and sociolinguistic levels, and much of the original language picture and many of the languages themselves are on the way out. However, in the light of changing attitudes of the peoples concerned and of decision

makers, there is hope that a certain amount can still be saved, perhaps more than has been anticipated.

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