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## Preface

It is almost five years since we first discussed, in 1991, the possibility of convening an international symposium on the language problems of the Northern minorities. The Soviet Union was then at a critical turning point, with dissolution impending after a history of seventy years. Two years earlier, the favorable atmosphere of Perestroika had allowed information to reach us about the critical conditions of the Soviet Northern minorities, peoples who should, under the protection of the state, have been enjoying a richer cultural life than their counterparts elsewhere. Their languages, in particular, seemed to be suffering from immediate danger of extinction. Soviet language policy, once well-known and propagated as promoting the equal rights of existence and development for the minority languages, had failed even to salvage them from such fate that has long threatened the existence of other minority languages in the world.

Already in the 1960s', in Europe, as part of the emergence of what were called new ethnic movements among the European minorities, demands for linguistic rights gained a foothold in the general concern of integrating Europe. During the late 70s, and early 80s organizations were founded and projects were launched to improve the linguistic situation of minority peoples in Europe. Notable results were achieved in terms of legal measures and in the teaching of the European Lesser Used Languages. It was only in the latter half of the 80s that minority languages in the other parts of the world became a serious concern among linguists. The new trend culminated in the symbolic appearance of the March 1992 issue of *Language*, devoted to endangered languages, and having a visible consequence in UNESCO's "Endangered Language Project", launched in November 1993. This project has continued its activities in various forms.

Linguistic minorities are, however, far from homogeneous in nature. Apart from their sociolinguistic settings, they differ from each other too much in terms of their historical, cultural, and natural backgrounds to be dealt with in a single framework of discussion. There were, however, grounds for us to focus our attention on the languages of the Northern minorities. They share a number of distinctive factors seemingly decisive in leading their languages to the present crisis, and have very uniform linguistic and extra-linguistic conditions. The major common factors include: a fatally small population scattered over a vast area; a natural subsistence immediately dependent on the northern ecological environment, easily vulnerable to industrialization; exposure to outsiders arriving to exploit the rich natural resources on a massive scale; the rapid disruption of social structure and community relations, as a direct result of the factors mentioned above, and the paucity or nonexistence of literary traditions either of the people or the language itself.

With all these similarities between the Northern minority languages, it seemed

realistic to look for common underlying mechanisms causing their sociolinguistic crisis and to seek possible common conditions for their survival. No less urgent, however, was also our aim to discover and bring together reliable and consistent information on the linguistic situation of the individual Northern minorities, especially those of the former Soviet Union. Until recently this area had been impenetrable for many of us.

The symposium was held at the National Museum of Ethnology, 7-14 November, 1994, in the framework of the Taniguchi Symposium series, which had been running for years with various themes. Most of the 12 participants had long been engaged with specific linguistic themes of northern languages and were deeply acquainted with their sociolinguistic situations. The invited participants were as follows: Viktor D. Atknine (St. Petersburg, Tungusic languages), Nils Ø. Helander (Kautokeino, Sami linguistics), Eugene Helimski (Moscow, Uralic and Siberian languages), Michael Krauss (Anchorage, Alaskan native languages), Tapani Salminen (Helsinki, Samoyed languages), Stephen A. Wurm (Canberra, Siberian Turkic, Pacific and New Guinean languages), Hideo Kirikae (Sapporo, Ainu linguistics), Katsuhiko Tanaka (Tokyo, sociolinguistics), and Toshiro Tsumagari (Sapporo, Tungusic languages). During the full five days' sessions eleven papers were presented, each followed by a discussion chaired by all the participants in turn.

This volume is principally made up of the papers read at the symposium. Most of them underwent some technical revision during editing, for which the editors, Hiroshi Shoji (Osaka, Finno-Ugrian languages) and Juha Janhunen (Helsinki, Siberian and East Asian languages), are fully responsible. In addition to the participants of the symposium, Panu Hallamaa (Helsinki, sociolinguistics) has contributed a paper based on his fieldwork among Alaskan native peoples.

The papers are, according to their contents, roughly arranged into three parts, following the structure of the symposium:

The first part (papers 1-3) makes an inventorial survey of the general state of the Northern minority languages and examines their problems and prospects from pragmatic and theoretical points of view. For further discussion some basic notions related to language maintenance and language policy are also touched upon here.

The second part (4-7) focuses on the sociolinguistic problems of specific areas or language groups. The main concern here is the role of ruling states in bringing large-scale exploitation of natural resources, pollution, majority immigration into minority areas, and deprivation of minority children of their mother tongue through monolingual education. The papers also present concrete proposals for the salvation and documentation of these languages.

The third part (8-11) makes thorough studies, more descriptive in nature, on individual languages or language groups, principally in terms of language change and maintenance both in function and content. Some reports are remarkable in presenting new or detailed information which has not appeared before in the

international literature.

A brief account of content is added at the beginning of each article. The conclusion at the end of this volume deals with the major issues raised during session discussions and the final discussion. Our main intention in debate was not to force ourselves to concrete statements or a declaration, but to take a few steps forward in recognizing the crucial factors affecting the present crisis of minority languages and their means to survive. This part was largely compiled by Janhunen.

We thank the Director General of the National Museum of Ethnology, Dr. Komei Sasaki, all other members of the symposium organizing committee, our colleagues and the administrative staff for their full support and assistance with this symposium. We are especially grateful to the staff of the Senri Foundation, who undertook all our business affairs with care and expertise. Our most hearty gratitude is due to the Taniguchi Foundation, which made this symposium financially possible and gave care to the comfort of the participants during the symposium. Just before the symposium, Shozaburo Taniguchi, a long time supporter of the Taniguchi Symposia, passed away suddenly. Mr. Taniguchi had a keen understanding of international academic collaboration. On behalf of all the participants, we would like to express our deep sense of loss.

Finally, for their cooperation and hospitality during our fieldwork, we thank all our friends and informants among the minority nationalities, for whose sake we offer the present volume.

Osaka and Helsinki  
November 1996

The editors

