

## Factors of Russianization in Siberia and Linguo-Ecological Strategies

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Helimski, Eugene メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.15021/00002950">https://doi.org/10.15021/00002950</a>

## Factors of Russianization in Siberia and Linguo-Ecological Strategies

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While it is well known that most of the indigenous populations of Siberia are rapidly declining under the impact of Russian linguistic and cultural influence, the mechanism underlying this development has not been studied in detail. In order to stop the on-going decline it is necessary to recognize the relationships that exist between the functional spheres of the indigenous languages and the social conditions of their speakers.

### 1. SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL PROLEGOMENA

The continuous decline of minority languages in the North of the Russian Federation, and the dynamics of this process, result from the cumulative action of two main factors. The first one consists in the active penetrative influence of the Russian language, determined by the *influx of Russian-speaking newcomers* (now forming the majority of population in most administrative territories of the North) and the *exposure to modern educational networks and mass media* (which employ, exclusively or overwhelmingly, the Russian language). The second factor lies in the destruction of the traditional "ecological niches" of the minority languages due to *economic and social reconstruction* (this process may, with equal right, be called economic and social Russianization) or, even more often, due to simple destruction of the archaic way of life—with only unemployment or jobs that demand no qualification suggested in exchange to the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic North.

The two factors are intimately related to one another. The levels of linguistic assimilation vs. native language preservation (according to census data, which, however, cannot always be trusted on this point, and according to field experience of many linguists and ethnologists) appear to correlate with both of them. Still, while the first of these factors is at least theoretically removable (this certainly does not imply the insistence on the practical implementation of such "removal"), the second one leads to irreversible consequences. The languages of very small Northern minorities can only exist in their traditional social and cultural environments—or as long as the last individual grown up in such an environment is still alive. In any other environment they turn out to be completely useless.

A brief, but very profound and balanced treatment of the history of Northern

minorities under the Russian/Soviet rule can now be found in [VAHTIN 1993] and will not be repeated here.

The tragic developments of the last decades—the mortifying impact of Sovietization/Russianization on the cultures and languages of Siberian minorities—were preceded by processes that started much earlier, soon after the conquest of Siberia by Russians. Already by the beginning of our century, many ethnic and sub-ethnic groups had either disappeared or reached the verge of extinction. The list of these groups includes Ob-Ugrians (Southern Voguls, Irtysh Ostyaks), Samoyeds (Yurats Nenets, Upper Ob and Chulym Selkups, Kamassians together with Koibals, Mators together with Taigis and Karagasses), Yeniseians (Pumpokols, Arins, Kotts or Assans), Yukagir tribes (Omoks, Chuvans), Eastern and Southern Kamchadals, and others. More than an intentional result of military, cultural, religious, or language policies (or, rather, of their absence), this was an outcome of the agricultural and early industrial colonization of Siberia by Russians, comparable with historically known processes of similar scope also resulting in the linguistic assimilation of earlier populations (such as the Indo-Europeanization of Europe and, much later, of the Americas, the Romanization of the Western Roman Empire, or the Turkicization of the Great Steppe).

Not infrequently, however, the inclusion to the Russian Empire was catalyzing the linguistic assimilation of smaller minorities by their relatively stronger neighbours, rather than resulting in direct Russianization. The retreat of Turkic-speaking groups, hostile to the new rulers, from some areas in Southern Siberia brought them to the territories previously settled by Samoyedic and Yeniseian ethnic groups, so that the Russian impact led to the Turkicization of these groups. In northeastern Siberia, the changed external conditions proved to be more favourable for the reindeer breeders than for their neighbours whose economy was based predominantly on hunting and fishing; the territorial expansion of the Chukchis and Evens resulted in the assimilation of the ethnic groups belonging to the Yukagir language family [GURVICH 1982, VAHTIN 1993: 16] There is at least one example when, in the middle of the 19th century, the humanitarian action of stopping the traditional warfare due to the interference on the part of the Russian administration permitted the Nenets to fasten upon the eastern bank of the Yenisei, which resulted in the rapid assimilation of the Enets population [VASIL'EV 1975, 1979]. The key-word to all these processes is destabilization: the existing balance of ethnic interactions (often centuries-old, cf. [HELMSKIJ 1988]) proved to be quite fragile under the changed circumstances, and the small groups lacked the numerical strength to reestablish it or to create a new balance.

In our century the Russianization trends were further strengthened both by the developments common to the entire modern world and by special politically or ideologically determined endeavours. We may distinguish between *endocentric* (or egocentric) activities of the colonizers, when they just forced the native population to move away—or to become a non-significant minority among the new majority,

and *exocentric* activities, aimed deliberately at transforming the native societies and cultural traditions. These latter were often disguised as a way to raising the social prestige of the indigenous minority (cf. the ill-founded campaigns for the "indigenization" of the administrative staff, etc.). The deep impact of the exocentric activities can be observed now in those regions of Siberia where the linguistic Russianization reached its inert phase: it will probably continue even if—due to some miracle or tragedy—all aliens were to leave the region (the Middle Ob Selkups, Kolyma Yukagirs, Commodore Aleuts, and Kereks—to cite only the most obvious cases; probably also the Negidals, Udehes, Oroches, Oroks, and Itelmens have to be added to this list).

Perhaps not only the demographic and economic circumstances of these processes must be taken into consideration, but also the natural linguistic (communicative) factors that contributed to the assimilative trends. Language contacts lead naturally to **bilingualism**, which, in itself, can be viewed only as a positive phenomenon, enriching the world-view and cultural experience of bilingual persons (see the paper by S.A. Wurm in this volume). Still, the desirable stability of a bilingual situation can only be expected when

(a) on a line with bilingual persons, there remains a permanent "nucleus" of monolinguals—for example, if the knowledge of the neighbours' language or languages is predominantly confined to males, as is often the case with traditional societies; or when

(b) both languages enjoy approximately the same social prestige, so that the bilingualism is bilateral; or, finally, when

(c) the functional domains of the two languages are at least partly opposed (meaning that there are situations where only one of them may be used), so that their relationship can be described as a kind of complementary distribution (reminding of the situation of diglossia).

In the case of bilingualism with Russian as the second language in the northern (and, quite often, not only northern) areas of the Russian Federation none of these prerequisites is usually fulfilled. The permanent character of contacts together with the impact of school education and mass media quickly leads to the almost total disappearance of monolingual individuals. The Russian language always plays the dominant role, and the bilingualism is almost exclusively unilateral. With the destruction of traditional economy and culture there remain no specific functional domains for native languages, and Russian starts to sound quite normal even in family households [HELMISKIJ 1994a].

Under these circumstances the spread of bilingualism turns out to be purely negative and destructive from the viewpoint of linguistic ecology: it only marks a transitory stage, while it results, after one or at best two bilingual generations, in the complete loss of the original language.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGE VIABILITY

The demographic factors that determine the viability of a minority language, its chances for survival in the modern world have been listed in a paper by A.E. Kibrik [KIBRIK 1991], which gives a good framework for a discussion of relevant issues see also [MIHAL'CHENKO 1992]. Most of these factors are related, directly or indirectly, to the processes of Russianization; and the attested or expected influence of all of them should be regarded under the present circumstances as negative for the overwhelming majority of minority languages in the Russian Far North.

A crucial role belongs to the *size of an ethnic group*, and to the number of native speakers within this group. The corresponding figures vary, according to the most recent censuses and evaluations, between 35,000 (resp. 27,000) for Nenets and a mere handful of remaining speakers for many other populations—e.g., for Kerek and Tundra Enets (see the papers by M. Krauss and T. Salminen in this volume). It must be stressed that the quantitative threshold of ethnic and linguistic viability is dangerously rising with the exposure to foreign influences, which becomes so strong in the modern world. While in traditional and more or less isolated societies the numeric strength of ca. one thousand persons could guarantee an uninterrupted maintenance of a group for many centuries and generations (that was, for example, the case with the Nganasans), the problem of survival is now acute even for some nationalities numbering well over 100,000 [LALLUKKA 1990; PUSZTAY 1993], to say nothing about the minorities of the Far North.

The *distribution of speakers according to age groups* serves as a reliable indicator of perspectives for the preservation of a language. It is a common phenomenon that the level of competence in the native language is lower—often much lower—among the younger generation, and all sociolinguistic surveys give uniformly the picture of a pyramidal structure narrowing to its bottom. An upside-down truncated pyramid—that is, the complete absence of native speakers among children, or even among the people below 30 or 40—seems to reflect the hopeless situation with the native languages of the Votes, Southern Selkups, Kolyma Yukagirs, Udehes, Oroks (Uilta), Negidals, and Itelmens [KIBRIK 1991: 81–83].

When considering this factor, we must also take into account the more conservative patterns of behavior and, in particular, the urge to make more use of the native language which is typically observed when people grow older. A concomitant phenomenon may, however, be the rapid degradation (erosion) or structural Russianization of a minority language spoken predominantly or exclusively by bilinguals whose dominant language in younger years was not their mother tongue. A very clear example is given by the oversimplified Kamassian recorded in 1970s from Klavdiya Plotnikova, the last speaker of this Samoyedic idiom, who died in 1989 [KÜNNAP 1976–1990]. Similar developments are observed at least in Udehe [PEREHAL'SKAJA 1991], partly also in Forest Enets (the author's field materials of 1994).

Another important demographic factor consists in the ethnic orientation of **marriages**. It is a commonplace everywhere in the North, that it is not the husband's language, or the wife's language, or the language of the grandparents that becomes dominant (or the only one) in an ethnically mixed family, but the *local idiom of interethnic communication*—today almost always the Russian language. This is true also of the now-frequent marriages between representatives of different Northern minorities. For assessing the prospects of linguistic survival, the proportion of monoethnic families is, consequently, of considerable importance.

Even in the absence of full and exact statistical data, the practical experience of observations is mainly alarming from the viewpoint of linguistic ecology. Having extracted the corresponding information for the Nganasans living in Volochanka (Central Taimyr) and its area from the village registers (1992), we have obtained a picture of astonishingly sharp decline in the number of monoethnic families:

**Table.** The marriage patterns of the Volochanka Nganasans by age groups.

year of birth	before 1932	1932– 1941	1942– 1951	1952– 1961	1962– 1971
total number of individuals:	24	19	30	47	75
in monoethnic marriages:	12	14	17	13	6

The marriage orientation of the younger generation may be called "ethnofugic"—the shares of Nganasans as matrimonial partners are significantly lower than their shares in the entire population of the corresponding age groups. Probably more than anything else, this picture reflects the tragic outcome of the forced isolation of the Nganasans from their traditional life and work patterns, which brought too many of them into a socially deficient position in villages, and which also led to high level of alcohol addiction among both males and females.

### 3. PROBLEMS OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Even in the late 1920s and 1930s, a period which is often referred to as the time when minority languages in the Soviet Union were in an especially favourable position, the native language instruction in the North was only an instrument for achieving the practical and ideological aims of the Leninist national policy. Regardless of (possibly, the best) intentions of those scholars and teachers who were creating the new systems of writing, preparing primers for children and adults, and overcoming enormous difficulties in their efforts to build the school system, the development of native language skills and of national literacies was hardly ever an end in itself. The entire program served the purposes of ideological indoctrination (cf. the typical content of a primer or a school textbook) and of getting the pupils prepared for further instruction in the Russian language. As soon as the knowledge of Russian would permit it (usually after two or three years—for

children who had come to school knowing no Russian at all), the native language classes would be discontinued and no further attempts to develop or at least to maintain the reading and writing skills in the native language would be made. (Among the many now-elderly Selkups, Nenets and representatives of other Northern minorities whom I had an opportunity to interview and who had attended schools during the period under discussion, nobody was practically literate in his native language, though many could read and write Russian fairly well.)

Later—especially since the 1950s—the native language instruction in most regions of the Far North would be completely abolished, whenever the transformed language situation would make the children speak Russian already in the pre-school age. From the viewpoint of minority language preservation, the educational policy that was conducted during the last decades of the Soviet rule (and is very often continued today) was most unfavourable. Not only were the children instructed at kindergartens and taught at schools in Russian, but also the network of boarding schools (*internats*) covering the territories of the Northern minorities isolated the children from their families and almost completely destroyed the native language skills of their early childhood.

It is deplorable that even now, when the official language policy is not aimed at smoothing the linguistic diversity away (as was typical in previous years), the linguo-ecological approach to the problems of minorities tends to be disregarded in favour of uniform strategies aimed at the formal institutionalization of languages. Some very common inadequacies include, among other things:

(a) the attempts to improve the linguistic and cultural situation without accompanying measures of a broader social and economic impact;

(b) the tendency of viewing the expansion of the functional sphere of a language as an indispensable condition for rising its prestige (with the functional spheres of world languages, by common silent content, being taken as models);

(c) the assertion that the formal introduction of national writing systems and alphabets (often even for the smallest sub-ethnic groups) as a self-sufficient task is capable of changing the sociolinguistic position of a minority language (or dialect);

(d) the unilateral emphasis on teaching native languages at schools, rather than learning them in families and during pre-school education;

(e) the obsolete insistence on publishing and using native ABC-books even in the situations when the children come to schools without any, or with only an insufficient, knowledge of the native language;

(f) the general principle of giving the priority to ideological and prestigious, rather than humanistic and practical, objectives.

#### 4. ON THE CULTIVATION OF ORAL LANGUAGE

In the course of the field work among the Nganasans on the Taimyr peninsula I had enough opportunities to observe their language skills and attitudes towards their

mother tongue. Every detail seems to prove that, even without literacy, this ethnic group—or, rather, the representatives of its older generation—does have a highly developed standard literary language as the language of oral tradition and, even more, the stable habits of its cultivation, of taking care of it (what is called *nyelvművelés* in Hungarian). It would hardly be fair to insist that in these respects the Nganasans are unique (at least one evident parallel would be the Homeric tradition in ancient Greece, which was started and continued centuries before the introduction of writing), but they obviously differ from, let me say, the Taz Selkups, the Izhma Komis, or the rural Russians (to mention only those groups among which I have had opportunities for similar observations).

It is testified by abundant evidence from the ethnographic descriptions and from the Nganasans themselves, that the people always attached an exclusive role to the skill and quality of shamanic narrative, to the art of the recital and the qualified reception of epics and legends (these used to be the main occupations during the lingering snow-storms, which means—taking the local climate into consideration—for many weeks every year), to mastering the special language of allegoric poetic improvisation (Nganasan *kaingairsya*). It was most peculiar to come across numerous and systematic manifestations of this linguistic purism. The correctness and stylistic adequacy of speech is under a strict self-control, at least in non-everyday speech situations and among the elderly Nganasans. Exquisite, sometimes slightly ponderous polypredicative constructions, nominal forms enriched with emphatic clitics, and otherwise rarely used verbal forms of oblique moods are given obvious preference, if a narration (for example, one's life story) has been prepared in advance. Abnormal word usage and grammatical mistakes seem to be always noticed, often corrected, and sometimes mocked at (especially if the speaker is supposed, due to his or her age, to belong to the category of language authorities). Many people are inclined to reflect over synonymy and fine points of semantics, and are interested in the internal (etymological) forms of words and especially of proper nouns—even beyond the situation of being interviewed by a field linguist, which inevitably provokes this kind of reflection.

It may seem paradoxical, but I cannot exclude that this native tradition of language cultivation could contribute to the drastically high speed of language degradation among the younger generations of Nganasans, which—since the early 1960s—were brought up in a mixed Dolgan-Nganasan-Russian language environment and educated in Russian-language kindergartens and boarding schools. The loss of the Nganasan language went so fast, that in some families the monolingual Nganasan grandparents just cannot communicate with their Russian-speaking grandchildren without the assistance of the intermediate generation (which is usually bilingual, or, in the worst cases, semilingual—that is, lacking an adequate knowledge of any idiom). However, and despite the evident communicative need—at least that was the case in many families that I know—neither the grandparents nor the parents would display any intention to activate the children's scanty and fragmentary Nganasan language skills, to induce them to



speak Nganasan at least as their second language (with Russian as the first one). Cannot it be a conscious or subconscious manifestation of *purist maximalism*: "Let them better not to speak our language at all, than to butcher it"? (This kind of apprehension appears completely justified: the Nganasan language is so complicated, that, without having grown up in a "pure" linguistic environment, practically nobody learns to speak it well enough. By the way, the Nganasans themselves unanimously, and not without pride, estimate their language as being very difficult in comparison with neighbouring languages, especially Dolgan.)

Anyhow, the perfect elaboration of the Nganasan vocabulary (and, in particular, of its "mental" sphere) and the rich choice of stylistic options contrast with the small size of the population speaking Nganasan (it was hardly ever more than 1,000) and the relatively narrow domain of its functioning. Perhaps somebody may consider these words of appraisal too subjective. There are, however, also the objective signs and consequences of language cultivation among the Nganasans. First of all, it is evidenced by the state and archaicness of Nganasan morphophonemics, which is extremely complicated and contradictory at first sight, but strictly consistent in its complexity and historically motivated in all its would-be "contradictions" (cf., for instance, the system of consonant gradation, and the vowel harmony which reflects the phonetic qualities of early Proto-Nganasan vowels, rather than those of their modern reflexes). Certain morphophonemic rules are disregarded by younger Nganasans (some of whom studied in Leningrad and served as informants for linguists in the 1970s and 1980s), but the forms which are used today by elderly people are in this respect faultless, and correspond irreproachably to the forms recorded 150 years ago by M.A. Castrén.

The example of Nganasan is probably very rare, if not unique, and, besides, it can hardly be labelled as a positive one: the social and economic developments of the last few decades, and especially the genocidal campaign for "the transfer of nomads to the settled mode of life", present a mortal threat to the existence of the Nganasan people together with their culture and their language. The only hope for their, at least partial, preservation is connected with a relatively small group of the last tundra-dwellers (see Appendix I).

Still, this example—on a line with some other considerations—prompts us to question whether the *standard pattern* of creating and developing a literary language (alphabet—school textbooks and education—formation of national elites—popularization through mass media, etc.) is always appropriate, especially if a language belongs to a very small ethnic minority. Cannot it be that the efforts should be directed, rather, on teaching and learning the ethnic oral tradition (in its natural, vivid oral form), on supporting (morally as well as socially and economically) the acknowledged masters of folklore, and on creating optimal conditions for the preservation of the language in its traditional domains? This approach serves as the basis for the author's recommendations concerning the

introduction of (Forest) Enets language classes (see Appendix II).

The arguments in favour of what was called above "the standard pattern" are so well known that they can be omitted here (even if this means running the risk of sounding biased and unilateral). These arguments are mainly connected with the idea of raising the prestige of a language by expanding its functional domain.

I am convinced, however, that any expansion of functional domain should be determined by objective necessities rather than by subjective desires or ambitions. It is very good if an impetus to this development is given by the real needs of a speech community (perhaps the gradual development of Sami political terminology in connection with the activities of the Sami Council and the Sami parliaments may serve as a positive example). Otherwise this process may produce deplorable results. It will be sufficient to recall the typical ideologically indoctrinating editorials (so obligatory in the former Soviet Union) or political and informational columns in native-language republican newspapers (Komi or Mordvinian, Kalmuck or Yakut)—monstrously filled with Russian loanwords and loan translations, as well as alien syntactic constructions. It was characteristic of these texts, that they could be sufficiently well understood—at least as far as their general content was concerned—by a Russian reader who knew nothing about the language in question, but remained largely or completely incomprehensible to those speakers of this language who did not have a good command of Russian. The absurdity of "developing" national languages, of "expanding" the domains of their functioning in this—purely mechanical and fictitious—manner is evident.

A very serious danger consists in that many features from the practice of the so-called "cultural building" in the former Soviet Union, as well as the mentality and the stereotypes formed by this practice, are now going to dominate also the "national rebirth" activities in Russia and possibly also in other successor states. The approaches to the problems of literary languages, in particular, need consideration and reconsideration. The way of modernization, and of sharing all technological and cultural achievements of today's world, remains, and must remain, open to every single individual but, regretfully, this may demand switching to other languages than the native ones. For the smallest ethnic and linguistic minorities the preservation of cultural distinctiveness seems to be in many respects preferable to following the ways of other cultures in the vain hope of getting for themselves their diminished copies.

**Acknowledgement.** The author acknowledges with gratitude the financial support from the Russian Foundation for the Humanities for the research project "The Culture of the Taimyr Peninsula".

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**APPENDIX I****On the conditions of the indigenous population in Central Taimyr and the possibilities for creating a cultural and ecological zone (a reservation for the traditional usage of natural resources) on a part of the territory belonging to the Volochanka Rural Administration**

Final document of a workshop held in Volochanka, Aug. 24–25, 1992; translated from Russian.

The workshop was attended by the representatives of: the Research Institute for Agriculture in the Far North, Norilsk; the Russian State University of the Humanities, Moscow; the Department of the usage of Northern natural resources at the Research Institute of Agricultural Economy for the Non-Chernozem Zone of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg; and the local administration, Volochanka (Taimyr Autonomous District).

The document is based upon the results of scientific research (from the viewpoints of sociology, economy, ecology, ethnology, linguistics). At the same time it summarizes the views and wishes of the local indigenous population—the Nganasans and the Dolgans.

The river basin of Dudypa and the adjoining territories in the central part of the Taimyr Autonomous District are preserved until now as a focal seat of the traditional economy and culture of indigenous Taimyrians. Its preservation is determined by the fact that the majority of the indigenous population of the area, despite considerable difficulties, until now keeps to living in the hunting and fishing sites located in the tundra, which creates opportunities for the preservation of the native language, of culture, of traditional work skills, and for their transmission to the next generation. This is one of very few cultural and economical focal seats of the indigenous population of the peninsula that have been saved until now, and the last one as far as the Nganasan culture and economy are concerned.

At present, the material conditions of the indigenous populations have sharply deteriorated because of the rising prices for air transportation, fuel and technical inventory necessary for the hunting and fishing activities, as well as because of broken economical ties. The very possibility for the people to live further on their hereditary tundra lands is endangered. But the retreat of the last tundra-dwelling families to a village will inevitably trigger their quick social degradation and assimilation, processes that have already affected most of the indigenous settlers in the village of Volochanka. For the Nganasans, these processes will be irreversible, leading to the factual disappearance of the Nganasan people and to the complete loss of the unique Nganasan culture within the next few decades.

There are nonetheless now objective prerequisites for the gradual reorganization of the hunting and fishing economy by way of reconfirming the

statute of the hereditary lands as the legal property of the indigenous population, first of all of the tundra-dwellers, of recreating the family and clan households, of re-establishing the territorial and communal self-administration exercised by the indigenous population, as well as of preserving and developing the traditional ways of using natural resources and of processing their products. To provide all this, there are sufficient natural resources, experienced hunters and fishermen, craftsmen with the knowledge of the traditional techniques, and—what is the main point—there is the desire of the people themselves. What is needed first of all is the financial, organizational and legal support for such reorganization.

The workshop addresses the government of Russia, as well as the national and international institutions defending the interests of indigenous populations, asking them to provide the necessary support.

The studies of local circumstances conducted by the participants of the workshop give a possibility to determine the ways of providing the most efficient support to the indigenous population at a relatively low level of expenses.

1. The area, where the households of tundra-dwellers are located in a compact manner, should obtain the statute of a cultural and ecological zone (a reservation for the traditional usage of natural resources). A special protected regime should be established in this area, where the indigenous population lives on its hereditary lands.

2. The children of the tundra-dwellers should have an opportunity to spend the most part of time with their families, rather than at a boarding school. This must be achieved by creating educational facilities with curtailed learning programs (schooling sessions), and, in the future, by creating a specialized educational system.

3. Under the present circumstances, in order to support the tundra-dwelling families and to prevent their irreversible retreat to villages, they should be given urgent material (humanitarian) assistance in form of means of transportation (motor-boats, motor-sledges) and communication (portable radio stations), of fuel, and of other items of first-rate necessity.

The participants of the workshop consider it expedient to develop and to put into action a program of providing further support to the indigenous population of the protected area, with similar experiences from other northern countries taken into due consideration.

Signed by:

*K.B. Klovov* (St. Petersburg),  
*O.G. Krashevski* (Norilsk),  
*L.E. Saprionov* (Volochnanka, head of local administration),  
*E.A. Helimski* (Moscow).

## APPENDIX II

### On the perspectives for enets language classes

Report to the Council of Experts for the program "National School in Russia"<sup>1)</sup>; excerpts translated from Russian.

Between August 31 and September 13, 1994, I was sent on a mission within the framework of the program "National School in Russia" to the Taimyr Autonomous District, Krasnoyarsk Territory; during the trip I was accompanied by a group of students (Russian State University of the Humanities), who were taking their field practicals and continuing their Nganasan and Enets linguistic studies. [...]

In the course of the work conducted in the district centre, Dudinka, and in the village of Potapovo special attention was paid to the perspectives for Enets language teaching. In my opinion, the situation in this respect waits for actions and measures "beyond the ordinary" within the framework of the program "National School in Russia", and it may be desirable to discuss it in more detail.

The Enets are presently one of the smallest ethnic minorities in Russia. They number today only about 150 persons, and two thirds of this number live in the village of Potapovo, ca. 80 km (100 km by river) from Dudinka (or stay permanently in the reindeer breeding brigades in the vicinity of this village). Until now, the Enets language has remained entirely beyond the domain of school education; no writing system for the language has ever been created and no textbooks have been published. Taking into consideration the extremely small number of the Enets, the chances to create a stabilized writing system and to develop a language of literacy are practically equal to zero.

Nevertheless, we are witnessing an obvious desire of the Enets themselves to provide their children with the conditions for learning their mother tongue not only within the families but also at school. There are also several factors that can be viewed as favourable: the relatively good preservation of native language skills among old and middle-aged people; the knowledge or, more often, the passive understanding of Enets by the school-age children (especially in the families of reindeer breeders); and the concentration of Enets native speakers in a single village where they form a majority of the permanent population. The introduction of Enets to the educational domain would undoubtedly have a positive impact on the social and psychological atmosphere in the village of Potapovo.

Taking up my stand upon the acquaintance with the local conditions, upon numerous interviews with the indigenous population and with the representatives of the district administration in Dudinka, I take the responsibility to recommend the initiation of the Enets language learning in Potapovo in the form of facultative school or club classes. The emphasis should be made on oral practice in everyday speech, on getting children acquainted (through the native language) with the Enets culture and traditional economy: folklore; fishing, hunting and reindeer breeding

terminology, etc.

There is also a perfect potential organizer of such classes—Vitalii Pal'chin, an employee of the club staff in Potapovo (graduate of a club-work professional school), an Enets with a fair knowledge of his mother tongue and with a sincere desire to promote it. He can also count on assistance from older people, the real masters of the language and of the native tradition. Such classes could attract simultaneously children of different ages (besides, it may be assumed that not only the children from Enets families would like to attend them).

The suggested approach—that is, the oral orientation of language lessons makes the creation of an entire series of “standard” school handbooks and textbooks unnecessary (while its preparation would be both hardly feasible, due to the lack of potential authors, and unpractical, due to the very small contingent of potential users). On the other hand, such handbooks and textbooks can in this case be successfully substituted with several audiocassette copies of a short linguaphone course, and with collections of original texts (at different complexity levels) for reading (with the spelling following the Russian writing system with only very few additional symbols). This linguaphone course and text collections can be prepared jointly by Vitalii Pal'chin, Nina Bolina (editor of broadcasting in the indigenous languages<sup>2</sup> Dudinka), and Darya Bolina (research fellow at the Linguistic Research Institute, St. Petersburg).

In principle, the need for having the Enets language classes in Potapovo is acknowledged by the district authorities<sup>3</sup>, but the Enets themselves accuse the district administration (and probably have good reason to do so) of being sluggish in dealing with this problem. The difficulties result both from a non-standard character of the above described situation and from the insufficiency of available resources.

Under these circumstances it looks legitimate to suggest—as an extension of the program “National School of Russia”—to provide direct financial support in order to cover all expenses connected with the introduction of Enets language classes in Potapovo. [...]

16 Sept. 1994

*E. Helimski*

Member of the Council of Experts

## NOTES TO APPENDIX II

- 1 The program, started in June 1994, is aimed at creating “a new generation” of school textbooks and other educational literature for the non-Russian schools of the Russian Federation. It is sponsored by the George Soros Foundation and has organizational support from the Research Institute for National Problems of Education (former Research Institute of National Schools), Moscow.
- 2 The mass media company “Taimyr” broadcasts from fifteen minutes till one hour every week in each of the four indigenous languages of the Autonomous District (Dolgan,

Nenets, Nganasan, Enets). The content of broadcasting has changed much to the better during the last few years, the earlier obligatory ideological stuff and reports on successes in the "socialist competition" being largely replaced with interviews and folklore recitals. These broadcasting programs are quite popular in the rural areas of Taimyr.

- 3 The last few years also saw the introduction of Dolgan, Nenets and Nganasan language learning in a number of village schools of the district (though the scope and especially the efficiency of the classes often leaves much to be desired), leaving the Enets language as the only one that has remained "uncared for".



