

*Multilingual model of society as the only possible way for arctic languages to survive
(a case of Siberian languages after the COVID-19 experience)*



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Outline

- Languages of Siberia
- Linguistic situation in autochthonous communities of Siberia
- Two prejudices concerning minority languages
- Minority languages in the Internet
- Covid-19 and its impact on internet communication and on communication in minority languages

Языки Сибири



Languages of Siberia and the Far East

Uralic languages

Ugric: North Khanty (7200 speakers), East Khanty (1650),

Mansi (North mansi) (834)

Samoyedic: Tundra Nenets (18000), Forest Nenets (under 1500), Tundra Enets (ab.10), Forest Enets (25), Nganasan (93), North Selkup (600), South Selkup (3)

Permic: Komi (Izhma dialect) (ab. 2000)

Altaic languages:

Tungusic: *Evenki* (ab. 3000), *Even* (4900),
Negidal (6), *Nanai* (1300), *Ulchi* (under 100),
Udege (under 100), *Uilta (Orok)* (under 10)

Mongolic: *Buryat* (218557)

Turkic: *Altai* (46000), *Tuvinian* (283000),
Khakas (42604), *Yakut* (441000),
Kumandin (500), *Tuba* (200), *Chelkan* (280),
Teleut (900), *Telengit* (ab. 3000), *Shor*
(2839), *Tofa* (under 20), *Chulym-Turkic*
(under 20), *Siberian Tatar* (ab. 1500)

Yeniseic languages:

Ket (ab. 60)

Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages:

Chukchi (5000), Koryak (1500), Alutor (300);

Itelmen (ab. 10)

Eskaleutic languages:

Siberian Yupik (Chapliski Yupik) (350),

Naukan Yupik (under 100); Aleut (0)

Yukagir languages:

Tundra Yukagir (ab.60), Kolyma Yukagir

(ab.10)

Sino-Tibetan languages:

Taz (Northern Chinese dialect) (under 10 semi-speakers)

Isolate:

Nivkh (198)

Mixed language:

Copper Island Aleut (2)

Linguistic situation in autochthonous local communities

- *Today practically all local communities of Siberian ethnic minorities undergo various stages of language shift. All the autochthonous Siberian minority languages are no more transmitted from parents to children in at least some local groups and many of them in all groups. For 15 languages there are no more than 20 elderly speakers left. It means that without intense work on supporting and revitalizing these languages they might stop being quite soon.*

The situation of language shift is today quite common for autochthonous communities of Siberia.

It cannot be said that the problem of ethnic language disappearance does not worry the communities. The attitude of ethnic community members towards the ethnic language is mostly positive, the majority of parents say they want their children to speak their ancestral language, but even those parents who are able to speak it themselves choose to speak Russian with their children.

Though the ancestral language is regarded as desirable for children by the majority of parents, it is Russian that is considered absolutely obligatory

The good thing is that among the representatives of ethnic minorities of all ages there arises interest to their routes and their ancestral languages as an essential core of these routes.

Two prejudices contributing to language shift in autochthonous local communities: 1

- The prejudice that to learn the language of the majority, which gives access to education, professional career and prosperity, is only possible abandoning the ancestral language is still wide-spread both inside and outside ethnic minority groups, it is wide-spread in different social strata including educational authorities.*

So, the first thing to be done to support autochthonous languages is to overcome this prejudice. Advertising the advantages of multilingualism could be most helpful in the Siberian context.



Two prejudices contributing to language shift in autochthonous local communities: 2

- The second prejudice concerns the possible spheres of language use. It is widely believed that the only environment supporting the use of autochthonous languages of Siberia is traditional way of life and traditional economy. There appear sometimes slogans like “Without reindeer our language will die”. So, if young people don’t want to be involved into the traditional economy, it is supposed that there is no place for the ethnic language in their lives. Apparently, it does not contribute to language preservation.

To overcome this prejudice it should be explained and shown that autochthonous languages can be used in various spheres including the most up to date sphere of the Internet.

The internet as a powerful instrument of minority language support and a sphere for communication in minority languages

Minority language data posed on the internet work wonders, arousing children's interest in ancestral languages.

Many grandchildren would never listen to the stories of their grandparents, incomprehensible for them, but as soon as a video with these stories appears online, the stories begin to interest children and to make them proud of their elder relatives and of their language.



The COVID-19 Internet experience

- *The COVID-19 brought people lots of harm, but people also received valuable experience. Thanks to the COVID-19 peoples' communication moved online. During the pandemic year and a half the internet provided communication between people all over the world.*
- *As a result, the volume of the internet communication in minority languages increased significantly. Language activists from ethnic groups separated by thousands of kilometers joined on various web platforms and started exchanging their ideas and sharing their experiences, online language courses were organized, lots of conferences, which could be easily joined by participants from all over the world.*



Thank you!